

A Mystery on the Tombstones: “Women’s Commandments” in Early-Modern Ashkenazi Culture¹

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Abstract

In a cemetery in Alsace, many of the women’s tombstones bear the inscription that the deceased kept the so-called “Women’s Commandments.” The article argues that two reasons may, among other reasons, account for this custom: one is for the sake of the deceased, proclaiming that she has atoned for the sin of Eve, and the other is for the sake of her descendants, affirming that they are not “Bnei ha-Niddah,” descendants of a woman who ignored the Jewish laws regarding menstruation. Please note: this article includes links to high quality large pictures (LP..). If you would like to see them, you must be connected to the internet.

1. The Jewish Cemetery at Rosenwiller

One of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Alsace (presently in the department of Bas-Rhin in eastern France), lies between beautiful agricultural lands and forests near Rosenwiller, a small village² about a twenty-minute drive west of Strasbourg. In its heyday the cemetery served dozens of communities, and is estimated to be the last resting place for about six thousand Jews. Except for the one or two Jewish families who ran the cemetery, there was never a Jewish community in the village of Rosenwiller itself. On the other hand, the adjacent village, less than two kilometers from Rosenwiller, is Rosheim, famous in Jewish history because of one of its former inhabitants, Josel (Joseph) ben Gershon (ca. 1478–1554), the most well known communal representative of medieval German Jewry.

Josel moved to Rosheim ca. 1515, and lived there for the remaining forty years of his life. Was he buried at Rosenwiller? A registry reference to a Jewish cemetery established near Rosheim between 1349 and 1366 does exist, but it is unknown if the reference is to the current burial ground near Rosenwiller. Josel’s resting place remains unknown as well.

It is clear that the Rosenwiller cemetery was in use at least from the middle of the seventeenth century, although no tombstones from its first decades have been found thus far. It is possible that the first “gravestones” were actually made of wood, and therefore did not survive. The burial registry of the cemetery, beginning on 1753, contains records of some five



A sign in Rosheim. Photo: Evyatar Marienberg
[Larger Picture: [LP01](#)]

thousand tombs.³ This registry is currently being translated into French by Avraham Malthête, and will hopefully be available to the public in the near future.



A view of the 18th century area of the cemetery of Rosenwiller, March 2003. Photo: E.M.
[Larger Picture: [LP02](#)]

Today one can find a few remnants of tombstones from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, but most stones on which the writing is extant and decipherable date from the nineteenth century onward. The cemetery is still used, albeit rarely: about one or two people have been buried at Rosenwiller each year during the last few decades. More recently, as of this writing (March 2003), the last grave dates from 2000. In 1988 Robert Weyl published a beautiful book, in

French and German, containing pictures and inscriptions of some fifty graves from this cemetery.⁴ A French organization, Le Cercle de Généalogie Juive, is currently trying to gather funding for a much needed project which will undertake to photograph and decipher all the stones in the old section of this cemetery. It is an urgently needed project, as dozens and dozens of stones are quickly deteriorating with each winter.

The first findings that led to the writing of this article were collected while I was hired by Le Cercle de Généalogie Juive to do an initial survey of the cemetery during the summer of 2002. I continued the survey privately during the spring of 2003, when I was examining several thousand stones, dating from ca. 1700 to 2000.⁵

2. A Surprising Inscription

While exploring the cemetery, I was surprised by some of the inscriptions on women's tombstones. It is well known that deceased Jewish women were and are often praised using formulas taken from the text known as the "*Eshet Hayil*" ("A Woman of Valor"), the last chapter of the book of Proverbs. Since the rise of the Lurianic Kabbalah in Safed in the sixteenth century, this text has been sung in many Jewish households on Friday evening, although originally in order to honor the Divine



"Le cimetière Israélite de Rosenwiller": a Franco-German poster, from Charles Spindler, *Elsaesser Bilderbogen - Images alsaciennes*, Saint-Léonard 1893-1896. With the kind permission of Dr. Michel Rothé, Israel.

[Larger Picture: [LP03](#)]

Presence and the Sabbath, not to praise the homemaker. Some verses from the “*Eshet Hayil*” are also used in the funerary prayers for women. No doubt, as in other cemeteries, this text was used at Rosenwiller, but another formula is also common there. In fact, in some sections of the cemetery this alternative formula is much more prominent than verses from the “*Eshet Hayil*”. This inscription declares that the deceased woman kept the so-called “Three Women’s Commandments:” the commandment of *Halla* (taking out and burning a portion of every prepared dough, as a memory for one type of tithe given to the priests in the time of the Temple), the commandment of Niddah (set of laws regarding the avoidance of sexual relations between spouses during the time the woman is considered to be impure due to menstruation), and the commandment of *Hadlakat Ha-Ner* (lighting Sabbath candles on Friday evening, before sunset).⁶ In some cases these three commandments are enumerated, in other cases they are mentioned by their common abbreviation “*HaNaH*”, or more rarely, “*NaHaH*”.⁷ On many stones no other qualities of the deceased woman are mentioned.

We will examine several stones from different sections of the cemetery. It should be noted that the Hebrew texts inscribed on many of the stones are grammatically “clumsy”, and it was decided to keep this “clumsiness” in the translations.

The earliest stone on which the *HaNaH* inscription was found dates ca. 1710 (dating based on its location in the cemetery, as the date itself is not legible on the stone). The stone affirms:



Here is buried
the respected,
humble, pious, dear
and just woman, in
the laws of *HaNaH*
she was meticulous,
Mrs. Hindel,
daughter of the
community leader....
Abadi (?)...⁸

Hindel's gravestone, found and recovered by Jean-Pierre Kleitz, is located about twenty meters from the cemetery's famous gravestone of "The Martyr of Dachstein" from 1657. The stone is broken and its left side was buried in the ground, perhaps for decades or centuries. Photo: E.M.

[Larger Picture: [LP04](#)]

This early stone is located in the oldest section of the cemetery, in which only about fifty stones are to be found, many of them broken and in poor condition. Moreover, many of the stones from this section were probably stolen and used by villagers for construction.⁹ From those decipherable in the cemetery, this was the only stone that mentions the *HaNaH* commandments.

From ca. 1780 we find a significant number of complete stones. Our second example is from the grave of Saraleh of Rosheim. Although the date on the stone is hard to decipher, using the cemetery registry it can be identified as February 28th, 1803:

Here is buried the
respected woman,
housewife, meticulous
in the laws of Niddah,
Hallah and Hadlakah,
properly, Saraleh,
daughter of Rabbi¹⁰
Avraham ... of Rosheim
... (5)563 (?) ...¹¹



The grave of Saraleh of Rosheim. Photo: E.M.
[Larger Picture: [LP05](#)]

Our next example is from the grave of Yettel, a woman who died eleven years later, on November 15th, 1814:

Here is buried the
respected woman in the
laws of Niddah, Hallah
and Hadlakah, Mrs.
Yettel, daughter of Rabbi
Shilo, wife of Ephraim
Osthoffen, died Tuesday,
buried Wednesday, 3rd of
Kislev, (5)575, may her
soul be in the sack of
[those designated to]
life.¹²



The grave of Yettel of Osthoffen. Photo: Jean-
Pierre Kleitz.
[Larger Picture: [LP06](#)]

On the tombstone of Guittel, a woman from the community of Schweinheim who died January 4th, 1815, just a few weeks after Yettel of Osthoffen, one can read a very similar statement, but this time using the *HaNaH* abbreviation:

Here is buried the respected woman Guittel, daughter of our master Zalman Segal, wife of our master Leib from Schweinheim, she kept the laws of *HaNaH*, she died and was buried Wednesday, the 22nd of Tevet (5)575, may her soul be in the sack of [those designated to] life.¹³

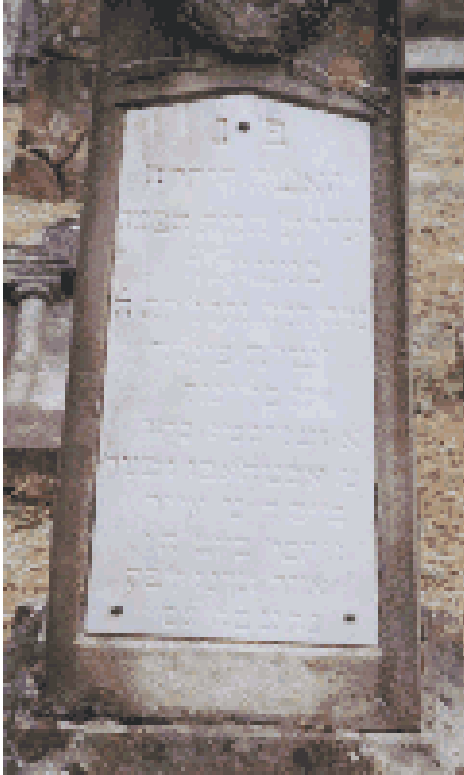
A very interesting inscription is found on a grave of a woman who died on June 22nd, 1837. It is the only stone I have found which describes the *HaNaH* commandments at length:



The grave of Breinel of Kolbsheim. Photo: E.M.
[Larger Picture: [LP07](#)]

Here is buried a woman, Mrs. Breinel, the wife of the respected Yehudah, known as Leib from Kolbsheim, her hands were open for the poor, the candle of Sabbath she lit on time, the bloods of her *Niddah* she properly distanced, from the kneaded dough she separated *Hallah*, she is the wise woman, on Thursday, the 19th of Sivan, (5)597, may her soul be in the sack of [those designated to] life, Amen.¹⁴

These last three examples are very representative of the period of ca.1810 to ca. 1840. Several dozen stones from this period mention the *HaNaH* commandments. This is even more striking for the period of ca.1820 to ca.1835, in which at least half of the women's stones bear such an inscription. This attestation becomes very rare in the second half of the nineteenth century. I could find it on only two stones: one from 1861, and the last one, the most recent, is located on a grave of a woman who was buried April 23rd, 1896. This is what the inscription says:



The grave of Blumel of Osthoffen. Photo: E.M.

[Larger Picture: [LP08](#)]

Here is buried a dear woman, a housewife, she wanted the commandment of the Lord, Niddah, Hallah and Hadlakah, the Lord will reward her acts, Mrs. Blumel wife of Seligmann Kahn¹⁵ from Osthoffen, died Wednesday, 9th of Iyyar, buried Thursday, 10th of Iyyar, (5)656, may her soul be in the sack of [those designated to] life, Amen Selah.¹⁶

With this stone, the practice of mentioning the *HaNaH* commandments ends at Rosenwiller. Was this practice unique to Rosenwiller? We will try to give a very preliminary answer to this question in the following pages.¹⁷

3. The *HaNaH* Inscription in other Jewish Cemeteries

When I checked with leading scholars of Jewish cemeteries if they had noticed similar inscriptions, the answer was negative. Investigating all Jewish cemeteries, even in a restricted area, is a difficult and extremely time-consuming task for a single scholar. I intend to continue with this research, but for the moment, I have checked only two other cemeteries in the same area of the Rhine. In the old cemetery of Frankfurt (established 1828), after a more or less exhaustive examination of this vast cemetery, I could not find any mention of the *HaNaH* commandments. In the beautiful cemetery of Worms, after a thorough examination of apparently all stones (ca. 1000), I could find only one stone with this motif. Interestingly, it is from the exact same period as the oldest inscription found in Rosenwiller, and uses a similar expression “in the laws of *HaNaH* (she) was meticulous”. The deceased, Yetcha (?), wife of Feibish, was buried in the cemetery of Worms on November 8th, 1710:



The grave of Yetcha, daughter of Asher, at Worms. Photo: E.M.
 [Larger Picture: [LP09](#)]

...The elder Yetcha, the wife of the learned Rabbi Feibish Oppenheim (?)... This stone will be a reminder that here was buried the respected and dear woman, in the laws of *HaNaH* (she) was meticulous, her prayer she did with a humble spirit, she is Mrs. Yechta, daughter of Asher Lemri (?) of blessed memory, (she) died in the evening of Tuesday and was buried the next day, Wednesday, the 26th of Heshvan, may her soul be in the sack of [those designated to] life, with all the other pious in the Garden of Eden, Amen.
 18

Why was it important for some Jews to mention the observance of these laws at the time of death? Why was it so common in Rosenwiller? Why was it so rare in Worms? Was this just a formula for describing a pious woman, or were there additional reasons for this custom? Was it perhaps a simple sign of affection? Was this done for the deceased's sake, for her descendants' sake, for her husband's benefit, or perhaps for all of the above? In the following pages I will try to suggest some possible answers to these questions, without pretending to give a full explanation to this interesting matter, or to answer all questions.

4. Death in Childbirth

A well-known passage of the Mishnah, edited, although probably not written down, in the beginning of the third century, connects women's death during childbirth to the lack of vigilance regarding the above three commandments:

For three sins women die at childbirth: because they are not meticulous in the observance of Niddah, Hallah, and lighting the [Sabbath] candle.¹⁹

One should remember that until modern times the mortality rate during labor or as a result of post-partum infection was extremely high.²⁰ The mortality rate declined sharply in the western world only since the middle of the twentieth century. In most

underdeveloped countries today, one out of every seven women dies due to causes related to childbirth.²¹ There is no reason to assume that in earlier centuries the risk was lower.²² In such a context, the text of the Mishnah holds much more power than a modern western reader may first think.

Were these ideas known outside the circles of the students of Talmudic literature? From about the tenth century on (the Gaonic period), the second chapter of the tractate *Shabbat* of the Mishnah, including the above-mentioned text, has been included in the Friday evening service.²³ The text is written in relatively easy Hebrew, with a limited vocabulary. Its inclusion in the liturgy made this Mishnaic text familiar even to non-learned Jews. Was this text known to women? For those women who recited the complete Friday evening service, the text was probably as familiar to them as it was for men. Was it also known to less literate women? It is hard to answer this question, but one can hardly imagine that men who were reading this text every week would have kept its fearful notions directed at women to themselves.²⁴

Returning to our initial question, one may postulate that in cases in which a woman died in childbirth, such an inscription was engraved on her tombstone in order to decree, in front of the community, that this tragic death did not happen due to negligence in observing the three commandments. One may even consider this as a silent protest against Heaven for taking the life of an innocent woman. This hypothesis was checked in Rosenwiller. In fact, a rumor among some experts on the cemetery said that women who died during childbirth were buried near the aisle. Examination of both registry and stones could not confirm this. I could find only one stone, from 1882, on which it is said that the woman died in childbirth.²⁵ This stone is found in fact near the aisle, but it does not mention the *HaNaH* motif.²⁶ At the same time, one can not find any pattern for the location of stones on which the inscription appears, except in the dates. As mentioned previously, in some periods, at least half of the women are said to have kept these laws. It is certainly impossible to ascertain that they all died in childbirth. The hypothesis for a correlation between such inscriptions and death during childbirth therefore seems to be wrong.

5. The Sin of Eve

When the Palestinian Talmud, completed around the end of the fifth century, discusses the Mishnah text we have read, the question raised is not why death during childbirth is the appropriate punishment for a less-than-perfect observance of the three commandments, but why these three commandments were given to women to begin with. The Talmud's answer is that the three commandments function as some kind of a purgatory act, or at least as a reminder of a terrible crime committed by the first woman:

Adam was the Blood of the World... and Eve caused his death, this is why the commandment of Niddah was given to the woman... Adam was a pure Hallah of the World... and Eve caused his death, this is why the commandment of Hallah was given to the woman... Adam was the Candle of the World ... and

Eve caused his death, this is why the commandment of the candle was given to the woman...²⁷

The idea of a link between Eve's sin and the three commandments also appears in other compendia of Talmudic literature,²⁸ and is quoted repeatedly in medieval works.²⁹ Jews who could read Hebrew could have found this linkage in innumerable works. But what about those people, and particularly the women, who were looking for religious enlightenment in (Alsatian) Yiddish, the common Jewish language used in the early modern period in Alsace? Do we know if they were aware of this idea?

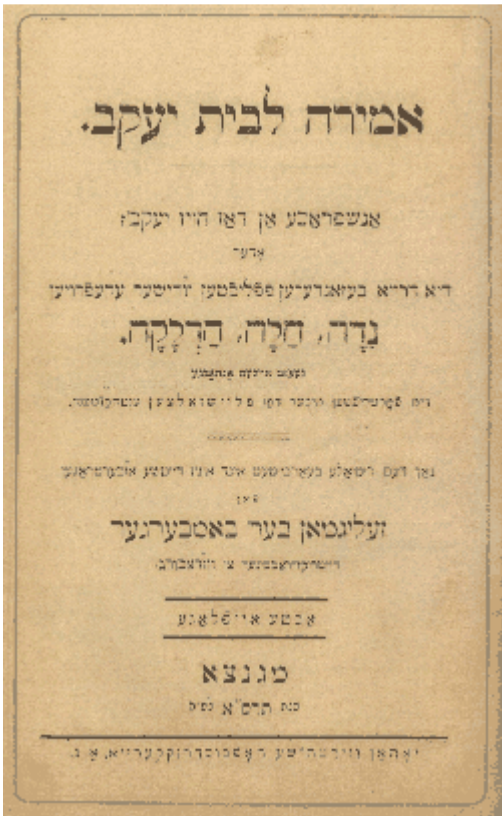
In 1577, Benjamin Aaron Solnik, a rabbi from Krakow, published a book in Yiddish for women entitled *The Book of the Commandments of Women* (*Ayn shoeh froen bukhlein* or *Sefer mitsvas ha-nashim*). The book became very popular. In a section devoted to the commandment of Niddah, Solnik explains the reason for the existence of the menstrual cycle. Using the idea from the Palestinian Talmud and Midrashim in a radical way, he compares all women to murderers:

...Therefore the woman must also...suffer torment and misfortune. And therefore she must have her period every month, and must fast once or twice [a month], so that she will always remember her sin and remain in a constant state of repentance. Just as a murderer continuously does, who must all his days fast once or twice a month, so that he will think about repentance, and regret his sin, so must the woman do as well. Every month she immerses herself in the ritual bath, so that she will remember her sins, and be pious. ...Therefore, it is fitting for her to recite the prayers for a repentant sinner...³⁰

The misogynist attitude in this text is staggering, even if compared to other works from the same cultural context.³¹ The only "positive" or redemptive notion Solnik can say about women later in his text is the possibility of women bringing about the end of death by observing the commandment of Niddah with care.³²

Another book, the *Tze'edah u-Re'edah*, which had a great influence on women in the Ashkenazi early-modern world, was published around the same time. This exegetic work, written in Yiddish by Yaakov Ben Yitzchak Ashkenazi of Yanov,³³ parallels the annual cycle of the Torah reading in the Synagogue.³⁴ It was re-printed innumerable times.³⁵ Although not originally designed exclusively for women, reading from it rapidly became an essential part of the pious woman's Sabbath schedule. It was consequently nicknamed "The Women's Torah." When we check to see how the author explains the existence of the three commandments, we find that he also uses the idea that women received the obligations because they are responsible for introducing death to humanity:

God gave women the commandment of *niddah*, for they spilled the blood of man [and can thereby rectify this wrong]; the commandment of *challah*, for they caused Adam to be separated from the world, and therefore they separate *challah* from the dough; and the commandment of candle lighting, for they extinguished the light of Adam's soul.³⁶



“*Amira le-vet Yaakov*” (“Saying to the House of Jacob” [i.e. Women]), a Yiddish book published in 1858 by Seligmann Baer Bamberger (1807-1878). The book contains imprimaturs from major rabbis, for example Jacob ben Aharon Ettlinger (1798-1871) and Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888). This page is from a later edition published in Mainz in 1901. The words “Niddah, Hallah, Hadlakah” are featured prominently.

[Larger Picture: [LP10](#)]

... I have yet to discover a *tkhine* that links the three women’s *mizvot* to Eve’s sin... Only a small number of *tkhines* for *niddah*, pregnancy, and childbirth raise the topic of Eve’s sin... However, rather than assuming with the *Sefer mitsvas ha-nashim* that all women are complicit in Eve’s sin and must suffer for it, those few *tkhines* that mention Eve portray the relationship between Eve’s sin and later women’s suffering in menstruation and childbirth as problematic. Further, Eve’s sin is never described as murder, but rather, disobedience to God.⁴⁰

How many Ashkenazi men and women knew that according to important Jewish sources the three women’s commandments are related to the Eve’s sin? I would speculate that a significant part of Jewish society knew of this connection, with particular regard to

It should be noted that during the early modern period many books about the “Women’s commandments” were published in Europe, mostly in Yiddish. This fact, and the fact that these books did have an audience, might explain part of the phraseology on the stones.

In addition to former works, Yiddish prayers for women (*tkhines*, “supplications”), remain one of the most important sources for research concerning women’s piety and religious concepts in early modern Europe.³⁷ This is true even though some of these prayers were actually written by men, hiding behind women’s pseudonyms.³⁸ Concerning our subject, one can find the same idea in certain *thkinnes*, although in a somewhat different light, with a concealed note of protest. Although the woman who recites these prayers accepts the fact that her menstrual period and difficulties in childbirth are punishment for Eve’s sin, she hints at the possibility that this punishment may be too harsh, and that if she were in Eve’s place, she would not commit the same sin.³⁹ Not surprisingly, there is no accusation of murder like the one we have seen in Solnik’s work in these prayers. Chava Weissler, an important authority in the field, comments:

menstruation. As a powerful concept that “explained” a major aspect of women’s lives, I assume it was known to many.

By proclaiming on the stones that the woman kept the three commandments, she was declared innocent of sin. Although she was associated by her very gender with those guilty of bringing death upon humanity, the deceased was declared a pious individual. By observing the three commandments she atoned for Eve’s sin. As a result, she had truly the right to be among those resurrected at the end of time.

Having suggested this explanation for the inscriptions, we will explore some other possibilities.

6. The *Ben ha-Niddah* Factor

Does the level of observance of these laws by a deceased woman affect the life of her surviving husband or of her descendants? Regarding the laws of Niddah, the answer seems positive. As for the husband, the reason is simple: claiming that the woman kept the laws of Niddah suggests that her partner was equally pious. But it seems that emphasizing this fact might have been even more important for her descendants. In order to understand why, we should explore the concept of the “Ben ha-Niddah” (“Son of the Menstruant”).

According to Jewish law, a woman who did not immerse herself in a ritual bath after her last menstrual period is considered impure, and called Niddah. If she has intercourse and gives birth, the offspring might be treated as *Ben* (or *Bat*) *ha-Niddah*, literally, the son (or daughter) of the Niddah. According to several pre-modern authorities, even during the actual menstrual bleeding a woman was considered fertile. It was also believed that the child born of this conception was prone to be afflicted with various diseases.⁴¹ Moreover, a woman remains in the halakhic category of Niddah until she goes to the ritual bath. If she goes on time, around the eleventh or twelve day of the cycle, the Niddah period is on average three times longer than the actual bleeding period. The term *Ben ha-Niddah* does not appear in classic Talmudic literature, although the possibility of such a child does:

Rabbi Simeon ha-Timni acknowledges the fact that if one cohabited with his wife while she was *Niddah*, although such relations are punishable by the *Karet*,⁴² the newborn is not *Mamzer*, because *Mamzer* comes only from [relations with] kin.⁴³

Abbaye said: “All agree that if one cohabited with a menstruant... the child [born from this union] is not a *Mamzer*.”⁴⁴

A *Mamzer* (commonly translated as “bastard”), a child who is the result of certain kinds of forbidden relations, is not allowed to marry “normal”, “kosher” Jews. In theory, the same applies to his/her descendants for ten generations. According to these two paragraphs, Simeon ha-Timni, a Palestinian sage from the second century, as well as Abbaye, a Babylonian sage from the third and fourth centuries, declared that a child born to a menstruate is not to be considered a *Mamzer*.

The term *Ben ha-Niddah* itself seems to appear for the first time in *Massekhet Kallah* (“Tractate of the Bride”), one of the so-called “Minor Tractates”, printed at the end of TB *Nezikin*. Various theories were suggested regarding the date and origin of this

text. The question whether it is from the Talmudic period (third to sixth century C.E.), or perhaps from the Gaonic Period (seventh to tenth century C.E.) has yet to be determined.⁴⁵ In one of the paragraphs of this text, a correlation is made between a behavior which is considered immoral, and being born to a woman who was menstruating. The term *Ben ha-Niddah* appears:

Rabbi Yehudah says: “The bold-faced to Hell, the shamefaced, to the Garden of Eden”. Bold-faced - Rabbi Eliezer says: “[This characteristic is that of a] *Mamzer*”; Rabbi Yehushua Says: “[Of a] *Ben ha-Niddah*”; Rabbi Akiva says: “[Of one who is both] *Mamzer* and *Ben ha-Niddah*”. The elders were once sitting by the gate when two young lads passed by. One covered his head and the other uncovered his head. Of him who uncovered his head Rabbi Eliezer said: “*Mamzer*”. Rabbi Joshua said: “*Ben ha-Niddah*”. Rabbi Akiva said: “[He is both] *Mamzer* and *Ben ha-Niddah*”. Rabbi Akiva was asked: “What induced you to contradict the opinion of your colleagues?” He replied: “I will prove it concerning him”. He went to the lad’s mother and found her sitting in the market selling beans. He said to her: “My daughter, if you will answer the question I will put to you, I will bring you to the life of the world to come!” She said to him: “Swear it to me!” Rabbi Akiva took the oath with his lips but annulled it in his heart. He said to her: “What is the status of your son?” She replied: “When I entered the bridal chamber I was *Niddah* and my husband kept away from me. But my best man had intercourse with me and this son was born to me.” Consequently the child is both a *Mamzer* and the son of a *Niddah*. At that moment, it was said: “Blessed be the God of Israel Who Revealed His Secret to Rabbi Akiva Son of Joseph!”⁴⁶

This story is interesting, intriguing, and troubling, all at the same time. For us, it is of interest only because of the stigma it ascribes to the *Ben ha-Niddah*.

Several sources attest to the fact that medieval and early-modern Jews used the term *Ben ha-Niddah* as an insult against the God of their neighbors, Jesus of Nazareth. This is attested in the Chronicles of the persecutions of 1096:

The virgins and the brides and bridegrooms looked through the windows and cried out loudly and said: “Look and see, God, what we do for the sanctification of your great Name, rather than abandon your divinity for a crucified one, a trampled and wretched and abominable offshoot in his generation, a *Mamzer*, a *Ben ha-Niddah*, and a son of lust”.⁴⁷

This example is but one of several Jewish polemic texts in which this derogatory expression is used to describe Jesus.⁴⁸ Jews also used this term as an insult among

themselves. An interesting medieval example is documented by Yehiel of Paris, an important thirteenth-century rabbi:

An anathema should not be declared against one who calls his fellow 'Mamzer', 'Ben ha-Niddah' or 'Slave', but only against one who says it in the vernacular, 'fils à pute'.⁴⁹

In the fourteenth century, we find another interesting example of a court decision against the use of such an insult, in which the offender is punished more harshly if the parents of the insulted are already dead and cannot defend themselves.⁵⁰

In all of these cases, the expression *Ben ha-Niddah* was considered a harsh insult because, among other things, it questioned the "purity" of the offended's lineage. For many medieval Jews, scholars and non-scholars alike, despite the Talmudic distinction between *Mamzer* and *Ben ha-Niddah*, the two terms were amalgamated. The meaning of *Ben ha-Niddah*, real or not, was considered equal to, or at least extremely close to the meaning of *Mamzer*. Isaac Abohav⁵¹ and even Rashi noted that children born to a woman who did not keep the laws of Niddah are *Mamzerim*. In the *Likkutei ha-Pardes*, a book scholars feel portrays Rashi's teachings, we find a paragraph, showing a dispute over the precise day from which the counting of the seven "clean days" (after the end of the menstrual bleeding and before the ritual bath), should begin:

And there were people that were in disagreement with our master Salomon ben Isaac. They said that the woman should start counting the seven clean days on the day the bleeding stops. Our master Salomon told them 'If you do so, your children are *Mamzerim* according to the Torah, and it is said (Deuteronomy 23: 3) "A *Mamzer* shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord".⁵²

I do believe that this statement by Rashi was not only for polemical purposes and that he truly held such an opinion. Nevertheless, even if one may argue that he did not think in these terms, such a comment bridged the two categories for his audience.⁵³ If a son born to a Niddah is *Mamzer*, a Jew could not marry him. But even if he is not a "full" *Mamzer*, should he then be a first choice candidate for marriage? Such a question is raised on many occasions in the Halakhic literature. One of the most interesting examples from the early modern period is found in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. In a responsum by Moses ben Mordecai Galante, a codicator from Safed, he attacks severely those who suggest that one should avoid marrying a *Ben ha-Niddah*.⁵⁴ One cannot dismiss the feeling that such an attack could only be made in a social climate which fostered this notion.⁵⁵

I would like to suggest, very cautiously, that the fear, whether conscious or not, that family members might ever be accused of being descendants of a Niddah played a role in the origin of the custom of mentioning the observance of the three women's commandments on the tombstones. If anyone ever raised any doubt about the purity of the family, the stone was a witness in front of God and the public: the deceased kept the laws of Niddah, her descendants are of a pure, "Kosher" lineage.

7. Conclusion and Addendum

Our study of the various sources, without barely having exhausted this subject matter, can point out several possible reasons why a husband or children of a deceased woman may have wanted it known that the deceased meticulously observed the “Commandments of Women.” This is not to say that these are the only possible explanations for including such wording on the stones,⁵⁶ but that they had at least contributed to the prevalence of this custom.

As mentioned earlier, the idea for this article came from an unexpected discovery by the author of such inscriptions in the cemetery of Rosenwiller in Alsace. At the start of the research it was assumed that the inscriptions are by no means unique, and that similar inscriptions could be found in many Ashkenazi cemeteries. Further investigation undermined this assumption.⁵⁷ Several famous experts on European Jewish cemeteries, having been asked whether they had seen similar inscriptions, responded that they had not. Some even stated that they were “astounded” by this finding. An extremely limited study conducted by the author of two other cemeteries found only one such inscription. Does it appear in other European, or non-European Jewish cemeteries? If so, how frequently? If not, what additional “local” reasons may have inspired those Alsatian Jews to use it? It is possible that the cessation of the use of this formula in the second half of the nineteenth century is related to the post-emancipation secularization that gradually influenced even the traditional rural communities of Alsace.⁵⁸ However, the peak of the use of this motif around 1830 is still unexplained.⁵⁹ For the moment, many of my preliminary questions remain unsolved. If this article encourages others to gather related information from the thousands, or perhaps millions, of Jewish tombstones that lay scattered around the world, perhaps one day we will be able to provide more answers.



A section of the cemetery at Rosenwiller, March 2003. Photo: E.M.
[Larger Picture: [LP11](#)]

¹ The core of this article was written while I was with my wife, Dr. Liane Alitowski, Scholars-in-Residence at Paideia Institute for Jewish Studies in Stockholm. I would like to thank here the different members of this institute for their hospitality. I would like also to thank the anonymous and the less anonymous readers of drafts of this article, including my student, Lorant Szabo, whose comments were most helpful and appreciated. The article's omissions and limitations are obviously my own. Jean-Pierre Kleitz, an expert on Alsatian Jewish genealogy and cemeteries, was extremely helpful, and I would like to offer to him my deepest gratitude. Like always, my wife, Liane Alitowski, helped with the English, and I thank her as well.

² Rosenwiller's location: 48°30 N / 7°26 E [Map of the Area: [LP12](#)].

³ One should note that stones' numbers, lines and rows in the registry are sometime different from the information found on the stones. I will therefore specify each time which system is followed.

⁴ Robert Weyl, *Le Cimetière Juif De Rosenwiller* (Strasbourg: Salde, 1988). Much of the historic information given here comes from the introduction of this book.

⁵ For another recent research based on tombstones see Rachel L Greenblatt, "The Shapes of Memory: Evidence in Stone from the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 47 (2002), 43-67. I thank Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten for drawing my attention to this article.

⁶ It should be noted that carving candles on women's tombstones is a common Jewish practice. For elaborate examples of carved stones in Jewish cemeteries see Gershon D. Hundert, David Noevich Goberman, Robert Pinsky, *Carved Memories: Heritage in Stone from the Russian Jewish Pale* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1999).

⁷ In Jewish literature the abbreviation "HaVaH" ("Eve") sometimes appears. The "V" stands for *Veset*, a term that may be translated as "fixed [menstrual] cycle." I did not find it on stones.

⁸ פ"ט האשה החשובה הצנועה והחסידה היקרה והישרה במצות חנה היא היתה נזרה מרת הינדל בת האלוף " "הקציין..... עבאדי....."

⁹ This "recycling" of stones is not necessarily related to anti-Jewish feelings. Stones from Christian cemeteries in the area apparently sometimes ended up the same way.

¹⁰ The term "Rabbi" or "Rab" here, and in other stones, might also be translated as simply "Mr."

¹¹ פ"ט האשה חשובה עקרת הבית ומדקדק (!) במצות נדה חלה והדלקה כראוי שרלה בת ר' אברהם " "מרוסהיים... תקס"ג (?)". In the registry, the stone is described as in line 15, rank 9.

¹² פ"ט האשה החשובה במצות נדה וחלה והדלקה מ' יטל בת ר' שילה אשת אפרים אוססהפין נ' ביום ג' נקבר' ביום " "ד' ג' כסלו.....תקע"ה תנצב"ה". The stone is numbered on its back with the number 1180. In the registry it is recorded in section III, row 21.

¹³ פ"ט האשה חשובה גיטל בת כמ"ר זלמן סגל אשת כמ"ר ליב משינסה' (?) מצוות חנה שמרה נפט' ונ' יום ד' " " ("כב' טבת תקע"ה תנצב"ה". In the registry the stone is recorded in section III, row 21.

¹⁴ פ"ט אשה מ' בריינעל אש' כ' יהודה המכונה ליב מקאלפאסהיים ידיה פתוחה לעניים נר שבת הדליקה לעזמה דמי " " "נדתה הרחיקה כראוי לישת עיסתה הפרישא (!) חלה היא האשה החכמה ביום ה' י"ט סיון תקצ"ז תנצב"ה אמן". The stone is numbered on its back with the number 1927. In the registry the stone is recorded in section III, row 36.

¹⁵ I use Kahn and not Cohen (or Kohen) following the registry. In Hebrew, these two names can be written in the same way.

¹⁶ פ"נ האשה היקרה עקרת הבית חפצה במצות ה' נדה חלה והדלקה ה' ישלם פעלה מ' בלימל א' זעליגמן כהן " "מאסטהאפן נפט' ביום ד' ט' אייר ונקבר' ביום ה' י' אייר תרנ"ו לפ"ק נתצב"ה א' ס'". In the registry, this stone, numbered 355, is recorded in section IV, probably in row 5. The name of the deceased in the registry is Florette, clearly corresponding to the Yiddish name Blumel.

¹⁷ After almost completing this research I have noticed that Robert Weyl mentioned this practice in a short paragraph in his book *Le Cimetière Juif de Rosenwiller* (the book, surprisingly, has no page numbers!), and therefore preceded me in this discovery. Weyl did not try to explain the practice or to identify the periods in which it was most common.

¹⁸ ...הזקינה יטכה אשת החבר ר' פייביש אופנהיי... האבן הלז תהא לאזכרה שפה נטמנה ונקברה האשה חשובה " "והיקרה במצות חנה היתה נזרה תפלתה עשתה ברוח נשברה הה מרת יטכה בת אשר לעמרי ז"ל נפטרת לעת "ערב ביום ג' ונקברת למחרתו ביום ד' כ"ו חשון תע"א לפ"ק נתצב"ה עשצבג"ע אמן".

¹⁹ Mishnah *Shabbat* 2, 7: " על שלש עבירות נשים מיתות בשעת לידתן על שאינן זהירות בנידה ובחלה ובהדלקת " "הנר". The spelling and the reference follow the Kaufmann manuscript. In most printed editions the reference is Mishnah *Shabbat* 2, 6.

²⁰ See at length in Loudon, Irvine, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

²¹ In underdeveloped countries, a high death rate is still unfortunately the norm. In such countries, not only is the risk per labor high, but the number of labors an average woman experiences in her lifetime is high as well, partially due to the lack of efficient contraceptive methods. The statistics from developed and underdeveloped countries speak for themselves. In 1990, in Canada, the risk of death related to labor was 6 out of every 100,000 births of a live baby (in that year, 25 women died. The risk for a woman to die in relation to labor during her lifetime was 1/7,700). In the United States, the risk was double: 12/100,000 (480 and 1/3,500 accordingly). In Israel, the risk was 7/100,000 (5 and 1/4,000 accordingly). In Norway, the risk was 5/100,000 (5 and 1/7300 accordingly). In comparison to these developed countries, in Syria the risk was 180/100,000 (950 and 1/75 accordingly), and in (pre-Taliban) Afghanistan it was 1,700/100,000 (13,000 and 1/7 (!) accordingly). Data from the Revised 1990 Estimates of Maternal Mortality, April 1996. UNICEF and the W.H.O. 12 March 2003. <<http://www.who.int/whosis/maternal/mortality/revmm.pdf>>.

²² The fact that the Bible tells us that Rachel, one of the six matriarchs (or one of the traditional four, if we do not count Bilah and Zilpah, the handmaids), died in labor, seems almost “reasonable”, in light of the above information.

²³ See also *Shulhan Arukh* and *Mappah, Orah Hayyim* 210:2. The substitution of this text with the *Kegavna De'inun* section from the Zohar is a part of the Sephardic-Hasidic rite (“Nussah ha-Ari”) and is not relevant to the communities we are discussing. Note also that this section is not included in the same place in the prayer in all rites.

²⁴ For an interesting modern feminist reading of this text see Yiskah Rosenfeld, “Taking Back Our Rites: Lighting Candles, Baking Challah, and the Laws of Married Sex,” *Lilith* 26:2 (2001): 22-24.

²⁵ The stone is found near the aisle, next to the small building used for the preparation of the corpse before the funeral. On its back it is numbered 3395.

²⁶ It can be certainly argued that the *HaNaH* motif is absent in this period from all stones, so this lack does not prove anything. Nevertheless, as I said, this stone is the only stone I have found to mention death at labor.

²⁷ PT *Shabbat* 2, 6 (5b): “... וגרמה לו חוה מיתה לפיכך מסרו מצות נדה לאשה ... אדם הראשון דמו של עולם ... וגרמה לו חוה מיתה לפיכך מסרו מצות חלה לאשה ... אדם הראשון חלה טהורה לעולם היה ... וגרמה לו חוה מיתה לפיכך מסרו מצות הנר לאשה ... עולם היה ...”

²⁸ See for example *Tanhuma (Buber)*, Noah 1 and Mezora 17.

²⁹ See Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, *Or Zaru'a* (Zhitomir : 1862), I, Laws of Friday evening, 11 ; *Sefer Kolbo*, [published by David Avraham] (Jerusalem: 1990), 36 (Vol. II, 207) ; Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, *Orhot Hayyim: Shabbat*, eds. Shalom Y. Klein and Yehudah Klein (Jerusalem: 1995), *Peirush bame madlikin*, 256; David ben Joseph Abudarham, *Abudarham Ha-Shalem*, with notes by S. A. Wertheimer (Jerusalem: 1958), Service of Friday night, 156-157. For an analysis of possible correlations between this idea in Jewish and Christian sources, see Evyatar Marienberg, *Niddah. Lorsque les juifs conceptualisent la menstruation* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), 43-72.

³⁰ Benjamin Aaron Solnik, *Sefer mitsvas ha-nashim* [Yiddish] (Basel: 1602), 4a. Translation taken from Chava Weissler, “Mizvot Built into the Body: Thkines for Niddah, Pregnancy, and Childbirth”, in *People of the Body, Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 104. A slightly different version of Weissler’s article appears also in her book *Voices of the Matriarchs* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). See also Agnes Romer Segal, “The Books of Commandments of Women in Yiddish in the 16th Century” [Hebrew] (M.A. diss., Hebrew University, 1979); *id.*, “Yiddish Works on Women’s Commandments in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Studies in Yiddish Literature and Folklore* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986), 37-59.

³¹ Solnik is also the author of a collection of Responsa, *Ma’s’at Binyamin*, but I could not find any hint of his negative opinion towards women, as reflected in this text, in his Responsa.

³² On this see Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, 216 note 16.

³³ 1550-1628(?). Yaakov Ben Yitzchak Ashkenazi was probably originally from Janow, near Lublin. He died in Prague.

³⁴ The first edition of the book was printed in Hanau in 1622. It is plausible that the book was printed earlier in Basel in 1590. See Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* VII (New York:

Hebrew Union College Press - Ktav, 1975), 129-139, as well as the different introductions in the translations mentioned below.

³⁵ Jean Baumgarten speaks about more than 210 editions; others estimate that the number is close to 300. See Baumgarten's introduction to his French translation. The book exists in many modern translations. In Hebrew: 1. *Ze'edah U-Re'edah*, Genesis, trans. Israel M. Hurwitz (New York : Dropsie College, Bash Publications, 1985), 2. *Tze'edah U-Re'edah*, Genesis (partial), trans. Moshe Menachem Kozak (Jerusalem : 1974). In English: 1. *Tzeedah U-Reedah*, Exodus, trans. Norman C. Gore (New York : Vantage Press, 1965); 2. *Tz'edah Ur'edah*, 2 vol., trans. Miriam Stark Zakon (New York : Mesorah Publications, 1983). In French: *Le commentaire sur la Torah, Tzeedah Ureedah*, traduction du yidich par Jean Baumgarten (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1987).

³⁶ *Ze'edah u-Re'edah*, Gen 2, 23, trans. Miriam Stark Zakon, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 36. See also Lev 12, 7, vol. 2, p. 590.

³⁷ The short presentation of Chava Weissler, *Traditional Yiddish Literature: A source for the Study of Women's Religious Lives*, [February 1987] The Jacob Pat Memorial Lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA can serve as an excellent introduction to the subject.

³⁸ Chava Weissler, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women," in *Jewish Spirituality, from the sixteenth-century revival to the present*, ed. Arthur Green, vol. 2 (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 260-261.

³⁹ Chava Weissler, "The Traditional Piety," 261-262.

⁴⁰ Chava Weissler, "Mizvot Built into the Body," 106-107.

⁴¹ In the Jewish world see for example, *Leviticus Rabbah* (Margalit), 15, 5; *Tanhuma* (Warsaw), *Metsora* 1.

⁴² The *Karet* is generally understood in the Jewish tradition to be a premature death, by "the Hands of Heaven". See TB *Moed-Katan* 28a; TJ *Bikkurim* 2.1 (64c); *Semahot* 3, 8. See also Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi (1200-1263), *Sha'arei Teshuvah* III, 124. Regarding the medieval controversies about the exact definition of the *Karet* see Israel Moses Ta-Shma, "Karet", *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (CD-ROM); Hanna Kasher, "On the Meanings of the Biblical Punishment of Karet (Excision) and the Midrashic 'He Has No Share in the World to Come' according to Maimonides," [Hebrew] *Sidra* 14 (1998): 39-58. The opinion that the *Karet* is a divine punishment was not shared by all Jews. See for example, Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities* III, 12.1, or the twelfth-century Karaite author Judah ben Elijah Hadassi in his *Eshkol ha-Kofer*, Eupatoria 1836, 266-267.

⁴³ Tosefta (Lieberman) *Yevamot* 6, 9: "מודה ר' שמעון התימני בהבא על אשתו נדה שאע"פ שהן בהכרת שאין". See also Mishnah *Yevamot* 4, 13.

⁴⁴ TB *Yevamot* 49a-b: "אמר אבי" הכל מודים בבא על הנדה... שאין הולד ממזר".

⁴⁵ A recent study reaffirms the Talmudic origin of this text, dating it around the fourth or fifth centuries. See the first footnote of David Brodsky, "Of Sacred Wives and Profane Sex: A Study in Massekhet Kallah," in *Damaged Bodies: Gendering Identities in Religious Discourse*, eds. Julia Leslie and Sian Hawthorne (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, forthcoming). I believe that the fact that the *Massekhet Kallah* includes the expression *Ben ha-Niddah* (which is not to be found in the classic Talmudic literature), might challenge Brodsky's affirmation. Brodsky is currently completing a doctoral dissertation at New York University about *Massekhet Kallah*.

⁴⁶ *Kallah* (Soncino Translation, with modifications) 1, 16: "רבי יהודה אומר עז פנים לגהנם, ובוש פנים לגן. עז פנים, רבי אליעזר אומר ממזר, רבי יהושע אומר בן הנדה, רבי עקיבא אומר ממזר, ובן הנדה. פעם אחת היו עזן עזן זקנים יושבין בשער, ועברו לפניהם שני תינוקות: אחד כסה את ראשו, ואחד גילה את ראשו זה שגילה את ראשו, רבי אליעזר אומר: ממזר. רבי יהושע אומר: בן הנדה. רבי עקיבא אומר: ממזר, ובן הנדה. אמרו לו לרבי עקיבא: היאך מלאך ליבך לעבור על דברי חבריך, אמר להן זה אני אקיימנו, הלך אצל אמו של תינוק וראה שהיתה יושבת ומוכרת קיטנית בשוק, אמר לה, בתי, אם את אומרת לי דבר שאני שואלך, אני מביאך לחיי העולם הבא, אמרה לו הישבע לי, היה רבי עקיבא נשבע בשפתיו ומבטל בלבו, אמר לה בניך זה מה טיבו, אמרו לו כשנכנסתי לחופה נדה הייתי, ופירש ממני בעלי, ובא עלי שושביני, והיה לי בן זה, נמצא התינוק ממזר ובן הנדה. אמרו גדול היה רבי עקיבא שהוביש את רבו. רבותיו, באותה שעה אמרו ברוך ה' אלוהי ישראל שגילה סודו לרבי עקיבא בן יוסף. See also *Kallah Rabbati* 2.

⁴⁷ Abraham Meir Habermann, *Edicts of Germany and France* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: 1971), 101: "והבתולות וכלות וחתנים הביטו בעד החלונים וצעקו בקול גדול ואמרו: הביטה וראה, אלהינו, מה אנו עושים על". "קידוש שמך הגדול, בלי להמיר אלהותך בתלוי נצלב נצר נסאב ונתעב ומשוך בדורו, ממזר ובן הנידה ובן הזימה".

This citation is from the anonymous chronicle from Mainz, probably composed before 1106. This dating follows Lena Roos, "God Wants It! - The Ideology of Martyrdom of the Hebrew Chronicles of the First Crusade in the Light of Its Jewish and Christian Background," Ph.D. diss, Uppsala University, 2003. The quotation follows, with some minor changes, the translation of Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley: 1987), 237.

⁴⁸ For an example in the *Toledot Yeshu*. See Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen quellen* (Berlin: Calvary, 1902), 39. See another interesting example, Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia on the Jewish Messiah and Jesus," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 52-53 and 59 note 36.

⁴⁹ Yehiel of Paris, *Ritual Decision of Rabbenu Yehiel of Paris and of the Rabbis of France* [Hebrew], ed. Eliyahou Dov Pinès (Jerusalem: 1980), art. 12, 17: "חרם עבריינות אינו בקורא לחבירו: "ממזר ולא בן הנדה ולא עבד כי אם האומרו בלשון לעז פי"ץ אפוט".

⁵⁰ See in Menahem of Merseburg, *Nimmukei Menahem* (1834 edition), 'Din ha-messaper'.

⁵¹ Isaac Abohab [Spain, fourteenth century] *Menorat ha-Ma'or*, eds. Yehuda Paris Horev and Moshe H. Katzenellenbogen (Jerusalem: 1961), Ner III, 6.5.4. : "ואם חס ושלום, עבר ובא עליה בימי : "נדתה או בימי לבונה הולד ממזר ונאמ' לא יבא ממזר בקהל יי' גם דור עשירי לא יבא לו וגו'. אמרו חכמים בכמה עניינים נקרא האדם ממזר. ואילו הן 'ממזרים ואינן ממזרים אם לא באו עליה כל אילו המומים ולא נולדו ממנה בנים אינן ממזרים מן התורה. ואילו הן בני נידה... בני גרושה... בני אנוסה... ואם לא באו עליה על אותן האמורים אינם ממזרים." On this work see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, citing *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*: "Isaac (Aboab)'s fame rests upon his *Menorat ha-Ma'or*, ('Candlestick of Light'), one of the most popular works of religious edification among the Jews in the Middle Ages. Written 'for the ignorant and the learned, the foolish and the wise, the young and the old, for men and for women', the work has had over 70 editions and printings (1st ed. Constantinople, 1514) and has been translated into Spanish, Ladino, Yiddish, and German... The book became a handbook for preachers and served for public reading in synagogues when no preacher was available."

⁵² Rashi [1040-1105], *Ms. Paris BnF Heb 369/4* [Italy, 1533, IMHM F20240], f. 242v : "וכבר היו אנשים שחלקו על רבינו שלמה ב"ר יצחק נ"ע בכך שהיו אומרים מיום שפוסקת בו סופרתו למניין שבעה נקיים. והשיב להם רבינו שלמה אם כן כאשר אמרתם לי בניכם ממזרים... והשיב להם רבינו... דאם כן בניהם ממזרים מן התורה ונאמ' לא יבא ממזר בקהל יי' גם דור עשירי לא יבא לו וגו'. אמרו חכמים בכמה עניינים נקרא האדם ממזר. ואילו הן 'ממזרים ואינן ממזרים אם לא באו עליה כל אילו המומים ולא נולדו ממנה בנים אינן ממזרים מן התורה. ואילו הן בני נידה... בני גרושה... בני אנוסה... ואם לא באו עליה על אותן האמורים אינם ממזרים." The text of the *Likkutei ha-Pardes* was printed by Bomberg in 1521, probably using this manuscript. The version printed in Amsterdam 1715, p. 4a, is almost identical. The same text exists in *Ms. Bri. Lib. Add. 27129* [Italy, 16th century], f. 134r.).

⁵³ On the use of rhetoric and *reductio ad absurdum* in responsa literature see the short comment of Haym Soloveitchik, *The Use of Responsa As Historical Source: A Methodological Introduction* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1990), 64.

⁵⁴ Moses ben Mordecai Galante, *Responsa*, Venice 1608, art. 105.

⁵⁵ The *Ben ha-Niddah* label is still a powerful concept which still influences marriageability in the Ultra-Orthodox world. See for example in various responsa of Moses Feinstein (1895-1986), *Iggerot Moshe*, Even ha-Ezer, 4.14; Even ha-Ezer, 4.23; Yoreh-De'ah, 4.17.19.

⁵⁶ One may suggest that the whole custom originated with the stone-carver. However, since the custom continued for almost two hundred years, and appeared in at least two widely separated locations (Rosenwiller and Worms), this theory seems less plausible.

⁵⁷ Experts on some other Alsatian Jewish cemeteries said they had not encountered such inscriptions, but my experience shows that only a thorough and focused search can ascertain whether they were used. I would like to thank Henri Hochner for his assistance on this point.

⁵⁸ On this, see the very important article of Paula E. Hyman, "Village Jews and Jewish Modernity: The Case of Alsace in the Nineteenth Century," in *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, ed. Ronald Dotterer, Deborah Dash Moore, Steven M. Cohen (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 13-26.

⁵⁹ I would like to thank Prof. Freddy Raphael from Strasbourg for his kind reply to my inquiry regarding this issue.