



Composing *Arugat ha-Bosem*: How Piyyut Commentary Became Associated with Ḥasidei Ashkenaz

ELISABETH HOLLENDER

Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany

E-mail: hollender@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Accepted: 3 September 2019 / Published online: 9 April 2021

Abstract Based on Ivan Marcus’s concept of “open book” and considerations on medieval Ashkenazic concepts of authorship, the present article inquires into the circumstances surrounding the production of *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*, a collection of piyyut commentaries written or compiled by the thirteenth-century scholar Abraham b. Azriel. Unlike all other piyyut commentators, Abraham ben Azriel inscribed his name into his commentary and claims to supersede previous commentaries, asserting authorship and authority. Based on the two different versions preserved in MS Vatican 301 and MS Merzbacher 95 (Frankfurt fol. 16), already in 1939 Ephraim E. Urbach suggested that Abraham b. Azriel might have written more than one edition of his piyyut commentaries. The present reevaluation considers recent scholarship on concepts of authorship and “open genre” as well as new research into piyyut commentary. To facilitate a comparison with Marcus’s definition of “open book,” this article also explores the arrangement and rearrangement of small blocks of texts within a work.

Keywords Abraham b. Azriel · *Arugat ha-Bosem* · Piyyut commentary · German Pietism · Authorship · Medieval Ashkenaz

For several decades medieval texts have been perceived as lacking textual stability. This understanding has informed much of medievalist research and led to discussions on how medieval texts were created and transmitted. Variants, insertions, and omissions have been treated as more than scribal errors or interventions,¹ and—influenced by Roland Barthes’ claim of the “death of the author”—agency in transmission has been credited with shaping the variant recensions.² Jewish Studies distinguishes the transmission of rabbinic texts, considered to be the anonymous product of long processes involving successive groups of rabbinic scholars,³ on the one hand, and medieval texts

¹Daniel Poirion, “Écriture et ré-écriture au moyen âge,” *Littérature* 41 (1981): 109–18.

²Stephen G. Nichols, “Mutual Stability, a Medieval Paradox: The Case of *Le Roman de la Rose*,” *Queeste: Journal of Medieval Literature in the Low Countries* 23 (2016): 71–103.

³An important debate that shaped the understanding of texts and their transmission took place between Peter Schäfer and Chaim Milikowsky, see Peter Schäfer, “Research into Rabbinic Literature: An Attempt to Define the Status Quaestionis,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37, no. 2 (1986): 139–52; Chaim Milikowsky, “The Status Quaestionis of Research in Rabbinic Liter-

composed by known (or anonymous) authors, on the other. Scholars have invested great effort in search of the respective *Urtexts*, while consideration has also been given to the possibility that transmission might account for major variants.⁴ Unlike medieval Christian vernacular literature, where the quest for the author follows from the search for the stable text,⁵ in the study of Jewish culture in the Middle Ages, the Hebrew medieval texts are oftentimes the less prominent entity; they serve as vehicles for gaining knowledge about the author.⁶ To account for major differences between versions while preserving the authority of the author intact, Israel Ta-Shma suggested the term “open book” in describing multiple editions of the same work created by an author who continued to develop, edit, and emend his work even after publishing a version that circulated in manuscript. Owing to certain characteristics of Ashkenazic textual transmission and aggressive intervention by editors and scribes, Ta-Shma had to allow for other actors involved in the variant versions.⁷ In pursuit of the process of production of an Ashkenazic

ature,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39, no. 2 (1988): 201–11; Peter Schäfer, “Once Again the Status Question of Research in Rabbinic Literature: An Answer to Chaim Milikowsky,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40, no.1 (1989): 89–94.

⁴For an excellent example is the quest for Rashi’s original Bible commentary and the role his student/scribe Shemaya may have played in shaping this text, see, e.g., Avraham Grossman, “Marginal Notes and Addenda of R. Shemaiah and the Text of Rashi’s Biblical Commentary” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 60, no. 1 (1991): 67–98; Elazar Touitou, “Does MS Leipzig 1 Reflect the Authentic Version of Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch? (After the Study of A. Grossman)” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 61, no. 1 (1992): 85–115; Elazar Touitou, “MS Leipzig 1 and the Authentic Version of Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 62, no. 2 (1993): 297–303; Avraham Grossman, “MS Leipzig 1 and Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 62, no. 4 (1993): 621–24. For the newest development that reacts to the instability of medieval mystical texts, see Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem, 2013), and the contribution of Daniel Abrams to this collection.

⁵See Stephen G. Nichols, “The Medieval ‘Author’: An Idea Whose Time Hadn’t Come?” in *The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature*, ed. Virginie Green (Basingstoke, UK, 2006), 77–102, 79: “Textual philology requires an author. Without an author, there can be no philology.”

⁶Cf., e.g., the approach in Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz: Their Lives, Leadership and Works (900–1096)* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1981); Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of France: Their Lives, Leadership and Works* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1995); Ivan G. Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim and the Ashkenazic Book in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2018). For a critique of this approach, see the contribution of David Shyovitz to this collection.

⁷Israel M. Ta-Shma, “The ‘Open’ Book in Medieval Hebrew Literature: The Problem of Authorized Editions,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 75, no. 3 (1993): 17–24. This understanding of “open book” is not related to Umberto Eco’s concept of “open book” in which the reader contributes to the meaning of the text; see Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta: Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee* (Milano, 1962). The additional actors in the

work, Ivan Marcus recently redefined the term “open book” as follows:

The meaning I am giving to “open book” in the case of *Sefer Hasidim* and of many other Ashkenazic books refers to an author:

- composing a work in short text units that he sometimes rewrites;
- combining them disjunctively (without linear coherence); and
- producing more than one parallel edition that the author or someone else revises one or more times. The term “open book” here refers to writing parallel editions of a book so that there never was only one original edition from which the others are derived.⁸

In his definition, Marcus emphasizes the role of the “author,” yet also identifies two other important features regarding the composition of texts in Ashkenaz: small units that, following a suggestion by Simcha Emanuel,⁹ he compares to Lego blocks, and parallel editions that do not appear to be derived one from another. Marcus envisions a process of assembling parallel but independent editions that becomes possible, on the level of textual composition, when there is no strong, predefined order to guide the author’s hand, thus giving him *carte blanche* to select those units he wishes to combine. The author who sorts his own collected material—even before Luhmann’s *Zettelkästen*—has the power to shape it into different works or different editions of the same overarching idea.

The author, it seems, survived Barthes’ proclamation of his death,¹⁰ but philology has to be reinvented since the quest for the work (opera), be it an *Urtext* or the variants created by transmission, is futile for the works that Marcus associates with his definition. Since he searched for works consisting of small units, easily shifted and relocated within the text, most of his

Ashkenazic formation of texts would function as “model author.” For this concept, see Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MA, 1995).

⁸Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim*, 5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 7, 127 n. 25. The comparison is apt because it refers not only to the stability and instability of the product, but also includes the fact that the multifunctionality of the blocks is limited only by their shape. Hanna Liss, “Copyright im Mittelalter? Die esoterischen Schriften R. El’azar von Worms zwischen Traditions- und Autorenliteratur,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 21 (1994): 81–108, 87, suggests the simile of a kaleidoscope in which the fragments do not have a defined place in the text and can be reshaped in ever new formations.

¹⁰Virginie Green, “What Happened to Medievalists After the Death of the Author?” in *idem*, *The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature* (Basingstoke, UK, 2006), 205–44. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana, IL, 2003), 6–7, stated this as principle: “Text editing conjures up the desire of embodying the text in question, which can transform itself into the desire of also embodying the author of the text.” See also the contribution of David Shyovitz to this volume.

examples are normative texts, and only a few examples are exegetical, a type of text that, in any case, is often bound to the text it seeks to explain.¹¹

One of the few exegetical works that Marcus mentions is *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*, a collection of piyyut commentaries written by Abraham b. Azriel.¹² The following inquiry into the possible conditions of its production examines the complicated relationship between a group of textual witnesses usually referred to by the title of a work (*Arugat ha-Bosem*) and the person addressed as its author (Abraham b. Azriel).

Abraham b. Azriel was born in Bohemia and studied under Eliezer b. Isaac of Bohemia in Prague and Barukh b. Isaac in Regensburg. Apparently, while in Regensburg he also studied with Judah he-Ḥasid to whom he refers as רי"ח בש"ם ניהוח, *RiaḤ be-SḤem niḥoaḥ* (literally meaning “sweet fragrance” based on the acronym of Judah’s name, רַיְהוּדָה חַסִּיד בֶּן שְׂמוּאֵל), and whose oral teachings he quotes several times in his work. He did not, however, quote from *Sefer Ḥasidim*, to which it appears he did not have access. He did have access to *Sefer ha-Kavod*, ascribed to Judah he-Ḥasid, which he cites numerous times, apparently from a copy that also contained interpretations of Eleazar of Worms. In fact, the many references to Eleazar b. Judah in *Arugat ha-Bosem* indicate that Abraham b. Azriel studied under him and considered him to be one of his primary teachers, but it is not clear when and where he studied with the Western Ashkenazic sage. Unlike all other piyyut commentators, Abraham ben Azriel inscribed his name into his commentary and claims to supersede previous commentaries, asserting authorship and authority. His relationship to both Judah he-Ḥasid and Eleazar b. Judah and his attitude towards authorship make *Arugat ha-Bosem* an excellent example with which to study the reception of Judah’s understanding of authorship and authority.¹³

In the 1939 introduction to the first volume of his monumental edition of *Arugat ha-Bosem*, Ephraim E. Urbach suggested that Abraham b. Azriel might have written more than one edition of his piyyut commentaries, basing

¹¹Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim*, 78–86. Clearly, commentaries compiled from different sources are also composed from rearranged short blocks, but compilers were often anonymous and did not claim authorship. The notable example is Ḥizkiya b. Mano’ah, who proudly lists the many sources he compiled in his Torah commentary; see Haym Dov Chavel, ed., *Ḥizkuni: Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Ḥizkiah bar Mano’ah* (Jerusalem, 1981) and Sara Japhet, “Perush ha-Ḥizkuni la-Torah: Demuto shel Ḥibbur u-Matarato,” in *Sefer ha-Yovel le-Rav Mordekhai Breuer: Collected Essays in Jewish Studies*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem, 1992), 91–111.

¹²Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim*, 82. In note 40 (p. 156) Marcus offers brief descriptions of the presentation of texts in the two manuscripts and points to Urbach’s more complete description of the manuscripts.

¹³See Ephraim E. Urbach, ed., *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem Auctore R. Abraham b. R. ‘Azriel* [in Hebrew], 4 vols., (Jerusalem, 1939–1963), 4:113–16.

his theory on evidence of the two different versions preserved in MS Vatican 301 and MS Merzbacher 95 (Frankfurt fol. 16).¹⁴ He developed this idea further in the fourth volume of the edition that served as his introduction to the corpus, which was published in 1963.¹⁵ Urbach noted the differences in the length and accuracy of quotes from rabbinic texts in the two versions, as well as the number of commentaries on verses and midrashim introduced as proof texts. While acknowledging that these could be due to additions and deletions by scribes, Urbach claimed that the differences in the system of cross-references are the result of conscious editing and rewriting by Abraham b. Azriel himself. MS Vatican has many cross-references to commentaries on other piyyutim, both before and after the current commentary. MS Merzbacher, by contrast, has hardly any cross-references to explanations that occur after the current commentary and only a few to piyyut commentaries that occur before the insertion point of the cross-reference. According to Urbach, this systematic difference could not have been created by later scribes. Moreover, while in MS Vatican there are many cross-references to commentaries on piyyutim that follow in the manuscript, and the comments exist in the later place referenced, these comments occur in MS Merzbacher only in the first occasion, i.e., where the reference is found in MS Vatican, but are missing in the place to which MS Vatican references. Therefore, Urbach concluded, MS Merzbacher represents an earlier edition, and MS Vatican a later, enlarged edition, of the “authored” text.¹⁶ In other words, after having “published” the first edition, Abraham b. Azriel added new sources, commentaries, and additional references to his commentary, indicating their character as secondary explanations. In instances where he found to have repeated himself, he deleted the commentary in one place and placed a cross-reference to

¹⁴See *ibid.*, 1:13* n. 1. The Vatican manuscript was known and mentioned in several bibliographical works, but the first publication that treats this piyyut commentary from the manuscript source was Abraham Berliner, “Aus den Bibliotheken Italiens I,” *Magazin für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* 1 (1874): 2–3, 5, followed by Joseph Perles, “Das Buch Arûgath habbosem des Abraham b. Azriel,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 26 (1877): 360–73, who discovered the Merzbacher manuscript and mentioned the stylistic difference of the commentary on the *selihot*. David Kaufmann also wrote extensively about the text: “Aus Abraham b. Asriels ‘Arugat ha-Bosem,’” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 31 (1882): 316–24; 360–70 (Fortsetzung); 410–22 (Schluss); 564–66 (Nachträge); *idem*, “Aus der vatikanischen Handschrift von Abraham ben Asriel’s Machsorcommentar,” *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 13 (1886): 129–60, but interest waned somewhat until the publication of Ephraim E. Urbach’s article, “‘Arugat ha-Bosem of R. Abraham b. Azriel’ [in Hebrew],” *Tarbiz* 10 (1938): 30–55. For corrections and addenda to the critical edition, see also Ephraim E. Urbach, “Milu’im ve-Tikkunim le-Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem 3 ve-4,” *Kiryat Sefer* 41 (1966): 17–18.

¹⁵Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:128–38.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 4:131–32.

the location where he considered the commentary to fit best or where his version of the commentary was more complete.¹⁷

The process as analyzed and described by Urbach is similar to the “open book” as defined by Ta-Shma. However, in the case of *Arugat ha-Bosem* two factors complicate the situation: first, the open genre of piyyut commentary that was an important source for Abraham b. Azriel, and second, piyyut commentaries related to *Arugat ha-Bosem*, such as the commentary in the Nuremberg Mahzor. While Urbach did take note of both these factors in his 1963 introduction, a reevaluation is necessary that will take account of recent scholarship concerning concepts of authorship and “open genre” and new research into piyyut commentary. Additionally, to facilitate a comparison with Marcus’ definition of “open book,” the issue of the arrangement and rearrangement of small blocks of texts within a work, a feature of Marcus’ concept, will also be explored.

Piyyut Commentary as Open Genre

Piyyut commentary was a very popular genre in medieval Ashkenaz during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries.¹⁸ A few explanations of piyyutic phrases and lines have been transmitted that can be attributed to early scholars such as the Provençal Rabbi Menahem b. Helbo (uncle of the more famous eleventh-century Rabbi Joseph Kara) and Meir b. Isaac, but the beginning of written piyyut commentary as a productive genre actually took place in Rashi’s academy in Troyes and is associated mainly with Joseph Kara and Shemaya.¹⁹ In addition to these two, it is clear that other scholars and students present at the academy took notes when Rashi explained piyyutim, resulting in several complete commentaries.²⁰ Transmission in this

¹⁷Ibid., 4:132. Since Urbach’s analysis, several fragments have been identified that contain parts of *Arugat ha-Bosem* and that confirm that different editions existed, even for passages that have been transmitted only in MS Vatican. One example was published by Simcha Emanuel, “Supplement to *Arugat ha-Bosem*, the Piyyut Commentary of Abraham ben Azriel” [in Hebrew], *Kobez al Yad* 25 (2017): 385-91. Emanuel was able to identify eight leaves from the same copy of *Arugat ha-Bosem* and suggests that two other fragments could have belonged to another copy, but both copies were used in binding fragments in Vienna. This is additional evidence for the Eastern Ashkenazic character of the collection.

¹⁸Elisabeth Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum of Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Manuscript* (Leiden, 2005), lists more than 12,000 individual commentaries from Ashkenaz and Šarfāt, transmitted in almost two hundred different manuscripts. On the genre and its compilatory nature, see eadem, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Berlin, 2008).

¹⁹Grossman, *Early Sages of France*, 256 and n 7.

²⁰See, for example, the case described in Elisabeth Hollender, “Commentary on a ‘Lost’ Piyyut: Considering the Transmission of Teachings and Texts in Rashi’s Bet Midrash,” in

phase was mainly anonymous, even though commentators often attributed individual explanations to their teachers or other well-known scholars.²¹ This anonymity likely contributed to the openness of the texts that were copied and edited freely.²² The small textual units, which in Joseph Kara's piyyut commentaries were usually paraphrases, lexical explanations, and reworked quotations from midrashim,²³ result in a structure that allowed for insertions and deletions by later copyists and editors at many points in the text.²⁴ Neither the first commentators nor the later compilers and editors claimed that the texts they produced were "closed" works, nor did they claim authorship, largely preferring to remain anonymous. Instead, different versions of very similar commentaries existed, in which mostly anonymous editors and compilers not only chose what to include and what to exclude, but also reacted to, criticized, and rectified explanations in the commentaries they transmitted. In the thirteenth century, some compilers mentioned their names when adding their own voice and exegesis to the commentaries; others remained anonymous but identified themselves as the students of particular, named scholars.²⁵ However, this did not change the general character of piyyut commentary as an anonymous, open genre. Even when copied into independent

Raschi und sein Erbe, ed. Daniel Krochmalnik, Hanna Liss, and Ronen Reichmann (Heidelberg, 2007), 47–63.

²¹ Joseph Kara quoted his uncle Menahem b. Ḥelbo, Shemaya attributed explanations to Rashi, whom he addressed as "my teacher" (rabbi), and many later compilers included the names of their sources when they added explanations they had heard to the basis of the commentary. In a few manuscripts, even whole commentaries were attributed to individual scholars.

²² However, also biblical commentaries by Joseph Kara were used as the basis for compilations; see Sara Japhet, "The Nature and Distribution of Medieval Compilatory Commentaries in the Light of Rabbi Joseph Kara's Commentary on the Book of Job," in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany, 1993), 97–130.

²³ Avraham Grossman, "Exile and Redemption in the Thought of R. Joseph Kara" [in Hebrew], in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson Jubilee Volume*, ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Robert Bonfil, and Joseph R. Hacker (Jerusalem, 1989), 269–301; idem, "Praises of Rabbi Elazar b. Qilir in R. Joseph Kara's Commentary on Piyyutim" [in Hebrew], in *Knesset Ezra: Literature and Life in the Synagogue; Studies Presented to Ezra Fleischer*, ed. Shulamit Elizur (Jerusalem, 1994), 293–308; idem, *Early Sages of France*, 327–29.

²⁴ For examples of compiled exegetical texts and their analysis, see Japhet, "The Nature and Distribution of Medieval Compilatory Commentaries," and Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 185–87.

²⁵ Among them Aaron b. Hayyim ha-Kohen, who compiled and edited the commentary in MS Oxford 1206 in 1228; see Avraham Grossman, "Perush ha-Piyyutim le-R. Aharon bar Ḥayyim ha-Kohen," in *Be-orah madda': Essays on Jewish Culture in Honor of Aharon Mirsky*, ed. Zvi Malachi (Lod, 1986), 451–68, and Asher b. Isaac ha-Levi from Osnabrück (?), who compiled MS Budapest Kaufmann 399.

manuscripts instead of onto the margins of a mahzor manuscript,²⁶ these commentaries were not “works” (opera): they had no title, named no author, showed no attempt at textual integrity, and were not quoted as a *ḥibbur* or *sefer*.²⁷ This changed, however, with the “publication” of Abraham b. Azriel’s *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*. Considered to be the most famous work of piyyut commentary, it was the only such text to have a title and an author, the only text quoted as a *sefer*, and the only one that was subsequently published in a single critical edition based on two manuscripts.

Arugat ha-Bosem and the Open Genre of Piyyut Commentary

It is evident that Abraham b. Azriel considered his enterprise as a work (opera), giving it a title and wanting to be remembered as its author, as can be seen in the short introduction transmitted in MS Vatican: “I will bless him, who teaches intelligence to man, [to the] son of Rabbi Azrieli. I was helped by the master of heavens in my editing of this delight (חפץ) which is called in Israel by the name ‘Flowerbed of Fragrance’.”²⁸ That the name and the conception of the text as “a work” were accepted by the audience is evinced by the fact that it was quoted as *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem* by Hayyim b. Isaac *Or Zarua* (Responsa, § 185).²⁹

Although this attitude was an innovation in the genre of piyyut commentary, Abraham b. Azriel was part of an extensive tradition of piyyut commentators and based large parts of his work on previously existing piyyut commentaries, selecting from among explanations that he liked and adding both linguistic explanations and exegesis of the texts that were considered to be the sources of the piyyutim (hypotexts). He acknowledged this in his introduction, where he wrote:

²⁶Except for individual glosses written on the margins of liturgical manuscripts and interlinear glosses, neither of which necessarily reflect the commentary traditions, the different physical forms of transmissions, i.e., full marginal commentaries or independent texts filling the whole page, did not influence the style of commentary. From this, we may also conclude that most marginal commentaries were not copied by the *ḥazanim* who used the liturgical manuscripts.

²⁷The same holds true for earlier liturgical works known today as “works,” such as *Mahzor Vitry*, *Sefer ha-Orah*, etc.

²⁸אברך המלמד אדם דעת, ברבי עזריאלי, נעזרתי בערכי חפץ זה הנקרא שמו בישראל ערוגת הבושם בשמים ראש, Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1:1. The Merzbacher manuscript is deficient in the beginning; it cannot be determined whether it did include an introduction or not. The fact that Abraham b. Azriel did preface his commentary with an introduction is a strong indication of his self-awareness as author. The few introductions to commentaries before him addressed questions of interpretation, such as Rashi’s introductory paragraph to his commentary on Song of Songs. Previous piyyut commentators had identified themselves in auctorial notes in their commentaries but did not compose introductions.

²⁹See Berliner, “Aus den Bibliotheken Italiens I,” 2.

And this garden which is sealed but not locked, this is its quality and its type: because with this the Elevated One broke [the wall of the garden] and disclosed the wisdom that was hidden from many for those who understand, listed and closed, old words, sweeter than honeydew, beautiful and precious, some of them cold [water] for tired ones, bound to the language of every man. And from among them is [taken] what I wrote in my own language, sometimes I extended, sometimes I shortened, so that the reader can hurry through them.³⁰

This dependence on earlier commentaries is less visible in his commentaries on *yošerot*, since he includes many commentaries on piyyutim from the Eastern Ashkenazic rites that were not commented on in the earlier collections of commentaries. On the other hand, the commentaries on the *qinot* and *seliḥot* are closely related to the Northern French tradition of piyyut commentary attributed to Joseph Kara. These commentaries are short and mostly lack the long linguistic insertions and exegesis of the piyyut sources that characterize Abraham b. Azriel's commentaries on *yošerot*, and they also contain many French glosses. Based on the difference, Avraham Grossman has argued that this section is not part of Abraham b. Azriel's composition and was added by a later scribe.³¹ According to Urbach, the style of the section nevertheless shows the "voice" of Abraham b. Azriel, including some glosses in *lashon Kena'an* (Old Czech) and references to his teacher Eleazar and to Eleazar from Bohemia.³² Whether by Abraham b. Azriel or by a later, anonymous compiler, it is apparent that these commentaries were produced in a manner similar to that of other editors and compilers of piyyut commentaries—namely the deletion of unwanted commentary elements and the insertion of some elements taken from the compiler's own studies.³³ As Urbach noted, the relation between MS Vatican and MS Merzbacher in the commentary on the *seliḥot* is different from that in the other parts of the work. Here, the differences are not those of a longer versus a shorter edition, as is the case

³⁰See Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1:1.

³¹He also shows that part of this section is based on commentaries by Joseph Kara, while the other part is based on commentaries by Shemaya. See Grossman, *The Early Sages of France*, 328–29, 385–86, n. 112.

³²Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:135 Also Maya Fruchtman, *Unique Grammatical Approach in Medieval Commentary of Piyyutim: Linguistic Studies in Sefer Arugath ha-Bošem* [in Hebrew] (Beer Sheva, 1999), considers the commentaries on the *seliḥot* to be part of Abraham b. Azriel's work.

³³The most obvious example is Aaron b. Hayyim ha-Kohen, the editor/scribe of MS Oxford 1206, who inserted his own point of view, including refutations of explanations he found in his *Vorlage*, but kept the frame of the older commentary intact. On the characteristics of his compilation, see Grossman, "Perush ha-Piyyutim le-R. Aharon bar Ḥayyim ha-Kohen."

in the commentaries on the *yošerot*. Instead, according to Urbach, the versions could be considered drafts of parallel commentaries, as if Abraham b. Azriel had prepared an individualized copy from a traditional *Vorlage* with only minor changes.³⁴

While the incorporation of earlier commentaries into his own compilation is no different from what other editors and compilers did, it takes on a new meaning when Abraham b. Azriel turned his compilation into a book that bears his name, breaking with the traditional anonymity of the genre. It should be noted that the resulting commentaries clearly—and perhaps proudly—show their Eastern Ashkenazic origin, using Czech vernacular and references to Eastern Ashkenazic scholars, including Judah he-Ḥasid, to transplant the genre from its Western Ashkenazic origins to the new Eastern Ashkenazic centers in Regensburg and Prague.

Piyyut Commentaries Related to *Arugat ha-Bosem*

The collection of piyyut commentaries most similar to *Arugat ha-Bosem* is the marginal commentary in the Nuremberg Mahzor. This illuminated manuscript, probably copied in Regensburg in 1331, contains an extremely rich Eastern Ashkenazic rite and commentaries on more than five hundred piyyutim.³⁵ Even before Urbach, Bernhard Ziemlich, in his comprehensive description of the manuscript, compared these commentaries to the Merzbacher manuscript of *Arugat ha-Bosem*.³⁶ Following Perles's description of MS Merzbacher,³⁷ Ziemlich differentiated between its two distinct sections. He listed thirty-five commentaries that appear both in the first part of *Arugat ha-Bosem* and in the Nuremberg Mahzor, two of which he then excluded for various reasons.³⁸ Regarding the other thirty-three commentaries contained in MS Merzbacher, Ziemlich stated that the Nuremberg Mah-

³⁴Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:135. Following Grossman's argument for a later addition, one can only explain the differences between the two manuscripts by assuming that the addition was made to the manuscripts' *Vorlage* and that the two copyists exercised different editorial freedom in this section.

³⁵Dr. David Jeselsohn, the owner of the magnificent Nuremberg Mahzor, has initiated a new collection of studies that will contain a full description of the rite and the piyyutim by Yonah and Avraham Fraenkel. For a Hebrew version see their *Prayer and Piyyut in Mahzor Nuremberg*, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/manuscript/Documents/fraenkel_j_a.pdf). The following discussion summarizes parts of my contribution to this yet unpublished volume.

³⁶Bernhard Ziemlich, *Das Machsor Nürnberg: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des Ritus und der Commentarliteratur des Deutschen Machsor* (Berlin, 1886), 47–76.

³⁷Perles, "Das Buch Arûgath habosem des Abraham b. Azriel," 362.

³⁸He stated that they are very short or only the beginning of the commentary is identical; in the latter case the version in the Nuremberg Mahzor is longer than that in *Arugat ha-Bosem*.

zor often skipped lengthy passages from *Arugat ha-Bosem*, namely the halakhic and grammatical excursus, quotations, references to names, and many of the Bohemian glosses.³⁹ Furthermore, in many cases, the Nuremberg Mahzor's commentary added supplementary material to passages from *Arugat ha-Bosem*. Ziemlich inferred that these parallels should be characterized as abbreviations of *Arugat ha-Bosem*. Another proof he cited are the two different commentaries on the *ofan: yehav lashon* by Judah ha-Levi transmitted in MS Merzbacher, the shorter of which is parallel to the commentary in the Nuremberg Mahzor.⁴⁰ He also identified eleven parallel *seliḥot* commentaries and rated these as bearing a closer resemblance to *Arugat ha-Bosem* than the other shared commentaries on piyyutim, which he explained by returning to the idea of an abridged version of the *seliḥot* commentary in MS Merzbacher.⁴¹

It is possible, however, to read the evidence from the Nuremberg Mahzor differently. In the case of the *seliḥot* commentary, we may assume—with Urbach—that the texts in the *Arugat ha-Bosem* manuscripts are slightly edited versions of some tradition of piyyut commentary. This tradition could have (independently) served as the *Vorlage* for the editor of the Nuremberg Mahzor. Its use, therefore, does not in itself indicate the direct influence of Abraham b. Azriel's work on the Nuremberg Mahzor.⁴² The situation becomes more complicated in the case of the commentaries on the *yoṣerot*. Regarding several commentaries, the best explanation is that the *Vorlage* for the Nuremberg Mahzor was an early, shorter edition of *Arugat ha-Bosem*, lacking many of the long grammatical and exegetical passages so typical of the printed edition of the work. In most of those cases, more similarities exist with the edition in MS Merzbacher than with that in MS Vatican.

There is, however, also a group of commentaries in the Nuremberg Mahzor not closely related to *Arugat ha-Bosem*, whose features identify them as belonging to a Ḥasidei Ashkenaz tradition. They contain many references to Eleazar of Worms,⁴³ use Bohemian glosses, reference Midrash Psalms under

³⁹Ziemlich, *Das Machsor Nürnberg*, 51–52. Ziemlich compared the Nuremberg Mahzor to Berliner's notes of MS Vatican 301: eight of the commentaries that he considers to be parallel are not contained in MS Merzbacher.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 52–53.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 53–55. This was obviously owed to the search for an *Urtext* and need not be discussed further.

⁴²Ziemlich wants to identify Abraham b. Azriel as author based on two phrases in one commentary and one Bohemian gloss in another commentary, where the parallel in MS Merzbacher has only the Old French gloss; see *ibid.*, 54. This is not enough to assume a direct influence.

⁴³The references to him mention both oral teachings and written works, including piyyut commentaries and other compositions, such as a *Sefer ha-Kavod* attributed to him.

the name of *Shoher Tov*, and refer to other, less common rabbinic works as well as medieval works such as *Tosafot*, *Sefer Terumah*, and *Sefer Zerubavel*. These commentaries show greater interest in *gematriyot* and other numerical explanations than earlier commentaries and refer more often to *Sefer Yeširah* and *Sefer Hekhalot*. These features, unknown in earlier piyyut commentary, suggest an attribution to the second or third generation of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, anonymous students of Eleazar of Worms, who were probably Eastern Ashkenazic contemporaries of Abraham b. Azriel.⁴⁴

Similar commentaries can be found in a number of other manuscripts. While they quote the tenth century Iberian Menahem b. Saruq's *Maḥberet* (a text already known to and used by Rashi in his piyyutim and biblical commentaries) and occasionally discuss the correct vocalization of a word, these commentaries do not exhibit the same interest in linguistic questions that characterized Abraham b. Azriel's work. Like most other editors and compilers of piyyut commentary, their compilers chose to remain anonymous, and they did not arrange their commentaries into a book. This makes Abraham b. Azriel's decision to compose a titled book published under his own name even more noteworthy. It also raises the question of the sources he may have used and edited to include almost contemporary commentaries in his composition. In addition to the many piyyut commentaries from Western Ashkenaz in existence by the end of the twelfth century, were there also commentaries by Eastern Ashkenazic authors or even by the first generation of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz that he could have used? If so, in what form would they have existed?⁴⁵

Small Blocks and Textual Order

The topic of materials for his composition from preexisting sources takes us back to the small units (the Lego metaphor) defined by Marcus as central to

⁴⁴That the Nuremberg Mahzor transmits commentaries from this tradition on piyyutim to which the principal other commentary, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, shows neither parallels nor even similarity, demonstrates that these commentaries are not based on an earlier and less developed edition of *Arugat ha-Bosem*. For examples, see the abovementioned forthcoming chapter on the commentaries in the Nuremberg Mahzor.

⁴⁵Most of the evidence that Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:83–100, quotes for Samuel he-Ḥasid and Judah he-Ḥasid relates to prayer commentary rather than piyyut commentary. The prayer commentary attributed to Eleazar b. Judah was published by Moshe Hershler and Judah Alter Hershler, eds., *Perushei Siddur ha-Tefila la-Roqeah: Perush ha-Tefila ve-Sodoteiah le-khol Yamot ha-Shana le-Rabbenu Eleazar bar Yehuda me-Germaiza*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1992). A survey of commentaries explicitly attributed to Eleazar of Worms in manuscripts shows no traces of the style that characterizes the later Ḥasidei Ashkenaz commentaries and *Arugat ha-Bosem*.

the composition of the Ashkenazic book. In the case of piyyut commentary, it is possible to define the commentaries on individual piyyutim as units in and of themselves, but it is obvious that they were in fact compiled from yet smaller elements.⁴⁶ Commentary elements are not as independent as other textual units in Ashkenazic books. Textual units such as normative statements and narratives, for example, were sorted by soft criteria of content, shared keywords, or ideas. Commentary elements, on the other hand, had to be arranged according to the order of the texts they explain.⁴⁷ For anybody but the initial commentator, the first step in compiling a commentary therefore would be to decide whether to include an element from the *Vorlage* at the proper place. This would be followed by inserting additional material, depending on the preferences of the compiler and his intended audience.⁴⁸ While it is possible, on a general level, to describe the preferences of a compiler based on his choices in the first step, it is the second step that turns him into an identifiable commentator shaping his own text.

Abraham b. Azriel and the other, anonymous students of Eleazar of Worms who composed piyyut commentaries invested considerable effort in this second step, bringing additional material that was not essential for the understanding of the words of the piyyutim (such as normative digressions, exegetical inserts on the quoted sources, *gematriyot*, etc.). Explaining piyyutim was apparently no longer their main function in these texts. Instead, commentaries became vehicles for discussing issues only alluded to in the piyyutim but significant for the educational agenda of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz. Topics vary from the importance of donning tefillin to discussions of Torah portions for special Sabbaths and *Rosh Ḥodesh* as well as moralistic matters such as the evil inclination.⁴⁹ Not all the commentaries that can be attributed to the

⁴⁶See the definition of possible commentary elements in Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary*, 59–171. On the order of commentaries in *Arugat ha-Bosem*, see below.

⁴⁷Joseph Kara introduced a “normal” order for different commentary elements on the same lemma, namely a paraphrase followed by lexical explanations and reworked quotations from midrashim; see Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary*, 37. Urbach pointed out a similar preference in *Arugat ha-Bosem*; see Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:134–35.

⁴⁸In the case of *Arugat ha-Bosem* this would be the exegetical units on proof texts quoted in the commentary, grammatical explanations, Old Czech vernacular explanations, etc.

⁴⁹Public worship and its correct implementation was a major topic for Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, as seen in the sections on prayer in *Sefer Ḥasidim*. See also Talya Fishman, “Rhineland Pietist Approaches to Prayer and the Textualization of Rabbinic Culture in Medieval Northern Europe,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (2004): 313–31. Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981), 98–101. On the importance of the concept of evil inclination, see *ibid.*, 30–32. Usually, the connection between the piyyut and the insertions is discernible, such as a discussion of the norms and reasons of tefillin in the commentary on *yedid ‘elion*, an *ahava* (i.e., a piyyut) for *Ahava rabba* in the blessings of the *Shema*, by Judah ha-Levi, used in Eastern Ashkenaz for parashat *‘eqev* (Urbach, *Arugat*

traditions of Hasidei Ashkenaz generate this exegetical surplus, but the proportion is sufficiently high to consider this a defining feature that emerged in their circles. These commentaries open up the textual order established by the text commented on, introducing additional topics, new lines of exegesis or thought, or any other material that draws attention away from the original explanatory purpose of the commentary.

A similar disregard of previously established order occurs in *Arugat ha-Bosem* on the level of the larger units—the commentaries on individual piyyutim. Piyyut commentary usually follows the order of the liturgy and liturgical calendar, even in manuscripts that contain only commentaries. Since fewer commentaries exist on piyyutim for life cycle events such as *Shabbat Hatan* and *Shabbat Brit Mila*,⁵⁰ their position in the manuscripts is less fixed, but most piyyutim are commented on in the liturgically appropriate position. Minor variations of order exist in the case of *hosha'anut*, *qinot*, and *seliḥot*, since these were subject to local traditions that varied. *Arugat ha-Bosem* follows an entirely different principle, and instead consists of a few large blocks (sections). The first block may be described as commentary on the piyyutim of the siddur, in that it contains commentaries on piyyutim for minor festivals and special Sabbaths. Here, *Arugat ha-Bosem* follows a calendar that starts after Passover, in itself an unusual choice for liturgical manuscripts, which usually start with the special Sabbaths before Passover or with Rosh Hashanah.⁵¹ This section skips most of the established piyyutim for the festivals, commenting mainly on piyyutim not contained in standard Western Ashkenazic mahzor manuscripts. It also groups the commentaries for any given day according to their poetic genres, e.g., *ofanim* or *zulatot*.⁵²

ha-Bosem, 2:36–89). They also connect to the biblical reading of the day when a piyyut is recited, which is especially obvious in the commentary on the *meora* beginning *Shney zetim*, *ibid.*, 2:89–94, which does not connect to Hanukkah as the more prominent liturgical setting but refers to the second use of this piyyut in Eastern Ashkenaz, on *Shabbat Beha'alotekha*.

⁵⁰Only sixteen piyyutim for *Shabbat Hatan* have been commented on, with a total of less than eighty known commentaries. Given the number of piyyutim for this occasion and the number of known piyyut commentaries from Ashkenaz (more than 12,000), this is very few. Only seven Ashkenazic piyyutim for *Shabbat Brit Mila* have been commented, for a total of twenty-three commentaries.

⁵¹Manuscripts of piyyut commentary often start with Hanukkah, followed by the special Sabbaths before Passover, including Purim.

⁵²This type of arrangement is attested in a few collections of piyyutim, such as those attached to *Mahzor Vitry* manuscripts (e.g., Haim Brody, *Kuntras ha-Pijutim nach der Machsor-Vitry-Handschrift* (*Brit. Mus. Add. 27200 u. 27201*) [Berlin, 1894]). If the section followed a *Vorlage*, this would have been an Eastern Ashkenazic manuscript, but only a few such collections have survived, among them MS JTS 8972. *Arugat ha-Bosem* starts with one full *yozer* composition for the first Sabbath after Passover, compiled from piyyutim by different poets, and then a collection of *zulatot*, followed by some *geulot*. This is followed by two compiled composi-

In MS Vatican the commentaries on piyyutim for the Ninth of Av come first; the commentaries on *seliḥot* follow. In the manuscript a few commentaries on other piyyutim, such as *ma'aravot* for Passover and a *zulat* for Hanukkah, are situated in different places between the *seliḥot*, the last one being a group of piyyutim from a *qedushta* for Yom Kippur. None of these commentaries is introduced by the scribe as being misplaced because it was forgotten in the proper place in the manuscript. By comparison, MS Merzbacher is defective in the beginning; it lacks the section on the Ninth of Av, and its section on the *seliḥot* is less often interrupted by “displaced” commentaries.⁵³ These moments of disorder certainly confirm Urbach’s claim that the section of *seliḥot* commentaries in the two manuscripts are less related to each other, and possibly are even two different drafts. It also shows that at the time these texts were being copied and cited under the name of *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*, the work did not have a defined gestalt and could be recreated by combining elements of a certain type, much like unnamed, open piyyut commentaries.

“Open Genre” versus Opera

Two final differences between *Arugat ha-Bosem* and other collections of piyyut commentary still must be considered: the presentation of the compilation as an authored work with a title and the two different editions that reflect at least one reworking or recompilation of the collection by Abraham b. Azriel himself. If the version present in MS Vatican was consciously produced as a “second edition,” Abraham b. Azriel would likely have considered

tions for the Sabbath after Pentecost, two *yošerot* for *Shabbat Naḥamu*, and several parts of compositions for this day. After that there follow piyyutim for parashat ‘*ekev*, *Shabbat Shuva*, for Sukkot, *Shabbat Bereshit*, a piyyut for parashat *va-vera*, Hanukkah, “*Shabbat Hafsaqa*,” *Shabbat Rosh Hodesh*, *Shabbat Hatan*, and *Shabbat Brit Mila*, before moving on to the piyyutim for the Ninth of Av. For the differences between MS Vatican and MS Merzbacher, see Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:129–31. It should be noted that, as pointed out by Simcha Emanuel, “Supplement to *Arugat HaBosem*,” 385, the *ahava* for the first Sabbath after Passover by Josef Shabbetai b. Isaac, אלהי ימי ושנותי כלו (number 6 in MS Vatican) precedes number 3 of that manuscript, the anonymous *ahava* בה סגולה חפצי בה (number 3 in MS Vatican) in the binding fragments in Vienna, Erzbischöfliches Diözesanarchiv, Kirnberger Bibliothek der Wiener Domprobstei C-8. This demonstrates that the order of piyyutim was not completely fixed in copies of *Arugat ha-Bosem*.

⁵³It is tempting to compare the larger sections in *Arugat ha-Bosem* to the thematic blocks in *Sefer Hasidim* and the commentaries on individual piyyutim to the individual small units, be they normative or narrative. However, the sections in *Arugat ha-Bosem* are defined by an outside order, namely liturgy, whereas those in *Sefer Hasidim* seem to be defined mainly by topic. The similarity lies in the approach to constructing a compiled text from larger units built from smaller blocks, with omission and insertion possible on both levels.

it a work (opera) that could be improved upon. However, Marcus's previously quoted definition of "open book" makes it possible to reconstruct a different order of events in the case of *Arugat ha-Bosem*. Given the similar but anonymous commentaries in the Nuremberg Mahzor and the missing beginning of MS Merzbacher—which allows for the possibility that an earlier version of Abraham b. Azriel's piyyut commentaries did not have an introduction that claims authorship and provides the title—it is possible that Abraham b. Azriel did not set out to compose a work (opera) when he first compiled and edited piyyut commentaries. It might have been the process of reworking his own compilation of commentaries that made him realize that his piyyut commentaries, enriched with the teachings of Judah he-Hasid and Eleazar of Worms, as well as the teachings of others, could stake a claim for greater authority than previous compiled commentaries.

In his introduction, he claims that he decided to produce *Arugat ha-Bosem* because many wrong and confused piyyut commentaries existed, referring probably not only to written commentaries but also to what he considered faulty understandings of liturgical texts. Discussing a rabbinic exegesis of Songs 2:4 that claims God loves even the ramblings of those who study Torah, he posits that only those who do not know better can earn God's love by rambling in their study of Torah, while those who do know how to study need to be diligent. Therefore, those who know how to interpret should do so in an orderly fashion, while those who do not know should refer to the interpretations of those who do.⁵⁴ A systematic approach to piyyut commentary, evidenced in the many carefully inserted cross-references that present piyyut commentary as more than the explanation of difficult words and phrases, positioned *Arugat ha-Bosem* as edifying, educational literature rather than transmitted exegetical and normative knowledge. Such a work could claim a new type of authority, one that was associated with an author and merited a title.

In his claim to authorship, Abraham b. Azriel does not follow Eleazar of Worms, who demanded that "every man needs to note his name in his book" and suggested that the title of the book should contain a *gematriya* of the author's name.⁵⁵ Instead he chose a title for his work that is semantically close to the name of Eleazar of Worms's most famous normative work, *ha-Roqe'ah* (the perfumer).⁵⁶ Since the short introduction in MS Vatican of *Arugat ha-Bosem* is the only passage that allows us a glimpse into Abraham b.

⁵⁴Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1:1.

⁵⁵Cf. beginning of *Sefer ha-Roqe'ah*. Instead, Abraham b. Azriel alluded to his name in this introduction (*Avarekhekha ha-melammed*), although *Sefer Hasidim* praised those who did not claim authorship in their books (SHP § 1052); see Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1:1; Berliner, "Aus den Bibliotheken Italiens I," 2.

⁵⁶Eleazar of Worms is often quoted in *Arugat ha-Bosem* and might have provided the inspiration to produce a titled work. In the introduction Abraham b. Azriel explains why he chose

Azriel's arguments for a semi-closed work of piyyut commentary, a detailed comparison with the conscious claim of authority that Daniel Abrams claims for Eleazar of Worms in committing esoteric knowledge to writing and the reasons for doing so is not possible.⁵⁷ We can, however, place Abraham b. Azriel, together with Eleazar of Worms, Isaac b. Moses *Or Zarua'*, and other scholars of the thirteenth century, as scholars who claimed authority through authorship.

Acknowledgments The publication of this volume was supported by the "Beyond the Elite: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe" research project (PI Elisheva Baumgarten), funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant 681507).

Funding Note Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

the image of the bed of flowers and spices and invites the reader to enjoy the fragrance. He applies the image several times, including the comparison of writing and editing with plowing and sowing. He was neither the first nor the last author to choose this image. However, it is not likely that he knew the Hebrew translation (titled *Arugat ha-Bosem*) of Moses Ibn Ezra's *Al-Ḥadiqah fi Ma'ani al-Mujaz wal-Ḥaqiqah*.

⁵⁷Cf. the article by Daniel Abrams in this volume.