

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION AND THE ENCODING OF SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE:
MEDICINE, *HALAKHAH*, AND ALCHEMY IN HAMBURG-ALTONA, 1736

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Jewish law has many long-standing ways of relating to different types of scientific inquiry. Yet what is the fate of this relationship when one of the systems medicine, in this case undergoes a profound transformation in self-understanding? How would the other respond, and how might this influence *halakhah's* self-perception? How would this transformation impact the power dynamic between rabbi and physician? In this initial study of the specific interaction between scientific inquiry and Jewish law, I describe three basic halakhic responses to the medical branch of the scientific revolution in early modern Europe. Analyzing these different approaches within the context of a stormy debate regarding a halakhic question among three great rabbis: R. Yehezkel Katzenelbogen (1667–1749), rabbi of the cities of Hamburg and Altona at the beginning of the eighteenth century, R. Shimshon the Pious (d. 1737), head of a local *kloyz*, and R. Ja'aqov Emden (1698–1776), a formidable scholar and resident of the city. This analysis provides insight into different approaches to the relationship between scientific knowledge, notions of progress and the conception of law, and the correlations between social positions and halakhic jurisprudence. Along the way, the study questions the way the terms 'conservative' and 'innovative' might be used in the historical study of Jewish law.