APPENDIX

THE POLISH JEWISH RENAISSANCE:
A SOURCE-BOOK
From Isserles (Responsa 5)

...The letter of my excellent lord and teacher has reached me. It is more precious than pearls, covered with sapphires. I rejoice and exult in it, seeing that the Lord has fulfilled my heart's desires. For all my life I yearned for the table of rabbis, to gaze at their flasks and draw from their waters, and now the Lord has graced me with the table which is before my lord, which I enjoy as one who enjoys the radiance of the Shekhinah. As my lord's words are more difficult than the previous, I cannot refute them point by point but only raise doubts about them, perhaps as the limits of the understander and the profundity of the subject keep me from understanding them fully...

The gentleman and scholar wrote to me as follows: "You wrote, 'Would that I might know the tubercle that the gentleman has found in my words! Surely the casual conversation of one such as yourself is worth delving into. When you say "tubercle," which is hard as stone, this means that it lacks the moisture of Torah. But maybe I can demonstrate that it is rather a sac of clear water. Even though it be hard as a rock, perhaps I shall succeed, by striking it with the rod in my hand, to extract its waters.' If you are Moses the Teacher, where is your knowledge and wisdom? Not only do your words contradict the Geonim, they contradict themselves!"

Your words seem ill-suited, for I congratulated you more than myself, calling you the great teacher. You say that my words contradict the Geonim and themselves? Am I greater than Solomon, of whom the gemara says, "O

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1 The image of the tubercle in the lung, and all the following imagery, is based on the discussion in BT Hullin 46a–48b on which signs of disease in a lung render the animal unkosher.

2 The previous stages of the dialogue can be reconstructed on the basis of this report as follows:

 Isserles: [some discussion of the laws of lung lesions, tinri, etc.]
 Luria: "Your words (about tubercles) contain a tubercle themselves."
 Isserles: "Would that I might know the tubercle you have found in my words! Surely it lacks the moisture of Torah. But maybe I can demonstrate it is rather a sac of clear water. Even though it be hard as a rock, perhaps by striking it I can extract its waters."
 Luria: "If you are Moses the teacher, where is your wisdom? Not only do your words contradict the Geonim, they contradict themselves! (etc. etc.)"
 Isserles: [Responsa 5]