Is There Such a Thing as Jewish Literature?

Writing, literacy and text have always stood at the heart of Jewish identity. But in the modern period, as many Jews lost contact with the texts that defined their tradition, Jewish writing emerged as a paradox: a practice that seems characteristically Jewish while not necessarily dealing with Jewish subject matter or speaking a Jewish language. Is there something that unites Jewish writing across the boundaries of language and genre? Is textuality alone a sufficient basis for Jewish identity? And if so, why is “Jewish literature” a different kind of definition than other, historically negative terms like “Jewish music” or “Jewish science”?

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