



In and Out, Between and Beyond

Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe

Ido Noy | Curator

The exhibition *In and Out, Between and Beyond: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe* that opened in the Max and Iris Stern Gallery at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in June 2021 is among the final fruits of the European Research Council research group *Beyond the Elite: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe*, headed by Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten. It offers a fascinating perspective on how Jews and their Christian neighbors lived their lives in and around medieval cities. Reflecting its textual origins, the exhibition is comprised of sixteen units, at the heart of each of which stands a primary source from a particular literary genre. These sources run the gamut from chronicles and commentaries to books of Jewish law and custom, to poems, tax records, and even magical formulas. In literary terms, the exhibition is a kind of album, an intriguing miscellany of Jewish medieval memory.

The curatorial challenge was a compelling one. How to present polychromatic studies within a single unitary arc? How to translate historical research into today's uber-diverse media? The curatorial process itself began in 2018 accompanied by the ongoing work of the research group, and was guided by three distinct themes: In and Out, Between and Beyond. The choice

of spatially related concepts turned out to be a felicitous one. With it, we could successfully sidestep the two thematic categories that have dominated the Jewish museum since the late nineteenth century: the Jewish life-cycle and the Hebrew calendar. Notably, these traditional themes have the advantage of appearing to capture Jewish life from the womb to the tomb, as the popular expression goes. Such prisms do indeed shed light on select members of the community – but leave many others in the shadows. Importantly too, the traditional twofold categorization privileges peak experiences, setting aside the nitty-gritty of everyday life.

People and societies are part of the landscapes in which they live. For medieval Ashkenazic Jews, the tangible physical homeland in Europe was embedded within a distinct Christian majority. In this space, Christians and Jews engaged in complex relationships that involved, among many other things, violence and trauma. The Crusades, which were primarily aimed at Muslims in the Holy Land, also affected many Jewish communities throughout Europe. Other acts of violence toward Jews were perpetrated following blood libels, as well as host-desecration and well-poisoning accusations, reaching an apex in the mid-fourteenth century, around the Black Death. Hatred and persecution were deeply ingrained in the scholarly collective memory, and for some historians have formed the backbone of their research. An alternative approach, put forward over the past decades, has spotlighted the involvement of European Jews in their surrounding Christian environments, underlining ongoing relationships, partnerships, and affinities.

Both perspectives find strong support in the historical accounts from the period. This exhibition strives to present this complexity: the viewer will encounter polemics and pain alongside many manifestations of daily coexistence. Such historical entanglement serves as the conceptual foundation of *In and Out*, *Between and Beyond*, where medieval Jewish and Christian histories are intricately entwined.

Visitors to the gallery are invited to engage with the exhibition through textual, visual, material, and acoustic means. The display includes 2D and 3D printed models based on medieval artifacts. Alongside the reproductions, the viewer will find original works created especially for the exhibition by contemporary artists – infographics, prints, animation, video-mapping, sound-art, and site-specific installations. The creation of the exhibition was an intensely collaborative effort: after meeting with the research team, each artist was asked to provide his/her own artistic expression regarding the historical subjects.

The overall design of the exhibition was dictated by the space in which it is housed, known as the "Little Gallery" at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The gallery is a rectangular space of about 90 square meters, built mostly of large glass walls. This transparent gallery is always visible to the many pedestrians passing through the Mount Scopus campus on their way between the Central Library and the Maierdsdorf Faculty Club area. While the space has two openings, a main entrance on one side and a back door on the other, the display does not try to force visitors into a linear narrative. Rather, it is divided by pillars into three distinct spaces, reflecting our guiding themes: *In and Out*, *Between and Beyond*. The curatorial logic stemmed from possible associative connections between sources and objects. Thus, we placed the historical sources along the long gallery wall, and the objects in the center and along the glass walls. Visitors may begin by reading the historical sources and continue by viewing the objects, or vice versa. We envision viewers making their own way among the offerings of the exhibition. The path is theirs to forge.

In and Out, Between and Beyond: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe is part of a series of events marking the achievements of a five-year journey in which the *Beyond the Elite: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe* research group set out to search for historical "treasures." Such treasures were indeed discovered – albeit in a form other than silver and gold. Unearthed were cultural assets of knowledge, precious pieces of the as-yet incomplete puzzle of Jewish life of a long-bygone time. It is with profound pleasure that we set these pieces before you.