

Aviya Doron

Hebrew University, Israel

Into the Market and Back Again: Jews, Trust and the Medieval Marketplace*

Abstract: The marketplace was the central hub for economic activity in the medieval city. Among its important functions was the provision of an open, visible space within which transactions were subject to official and communal oversight, thus according them legitimacy. This article examines the validating space created by the marketplace with respect to Jewish-Christian economic interactions. The reliance on spatial divides in Jewish-Christian economic exchange is explored by examining the local variations of the Jewish trade privilege, which allowed Jews in the German Empire to receive compensation for stolen items found in their possession. While the public space of the city initially provided Jews with protection regarding this privilege, later in the 13th century the privilege could not be applied once goods were exposed outside of Jews' homes. The changing attitudes and approaches toward Jewish economic activity are traced by contextualizing local legislation from the German Empire during the 13th century with contemporaneous responsa literature.

Key words: Jewish-Christian relations, credit, *Sachsenspiegel*, Jewish trade privilege, German Empire.

Introduction

... the Jews of Cologne are accustomed to going to Mainz to the market (*shuk*) to buy wine and grain and merchandise and likewise the Jews of Mainz go to the fair (*yerid*) in Cologne. And [as] the caravans there are many, it is not necessary to say "in front of me it was written and signed."¹

In his reply to a query about the permissibility of a Gentile delivering divorce papers to a distant recipient, R. Eliezer ben Yoel HaLevi referred to the practice of travelling between trading centers along the Rhine River to exchange

* Research for this article was supported by the European Research Council (ERC) project "Beyond the Elite: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe," led by Elisheva Baumgarten, under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program (grant agreement no. 681507); also, the Leo Baeck Fellowship Programme, Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes and the Aron Menczer Fund, Center for Austrian Studies, Hebrew University. I thank the members of the ERC group, as well as Rowan Dorin, Paola Tartakoff and Micha Perry for reading drafts of this paper and offering valuable and constructive feedback.

1 R. Eliezer b. Yoel Halevi (Ra'aviah, ~1140–1220, Rhineland), *Teshuvot Uve'urei Sugyot* (Hebrew; Bnei Brak: D. Deblisky, 2000) 27–37 (§922).