

*Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*  
Special issue, 2/2023

Tentative title: *Jewish Masculinities, 1000-1800*; guest editor Francesca Bregoli (CUNY)

Twenty-seven years after pioneering historian John Tosh asked: “What should historians do with masculinity?,” research on men and masculinity within the broader fields of gender and sexuality studies is flourishing. Medieval and early modern historians are investigating themes as varied as the role of men in the household, concepts of youth and bachelorhood, queer masculinities, changing notions of virility and masculine virtue, masculinity and emotion, the intersection of manhood and labor, medical approaches to masculinity, depictions of the male body, religious and secular masculinities, and more. Within the subfield of medieval and early modern Jewish history, however, studies on maleness and masculinity are few and far between.

When it comes to research on Jews and gender, the investigation of maleness and masculinity has not attracted nearly as much attention as that of Jewish women, although interest has been increasing steadily in the past decade. Importantly, moreover, extant monographs have focused primarily on the modern period, and on either American or European Ashkenazi Judaism, wrestling with the legacy of Max Nordau’s notion of *Muskeljudentum* and anti-Semitic claims of Jewish effeminacy. For the premodern period, the classic statement remains Daniel Boyarin’s *Unheroic Conduct* (1997), which explored the early modern Ashkenazi “Jewish male sissy” in opposition to European standards of masculinity – “a gentle, timid, studious male” whose appealing softness and delicacy had a long Talmudic pedigree – a model, he claimed, undone by Freudian psychoanalysis and Zionism.

If historical interest in the gendered identities of Jewish men in modern Europe and the US is on the rise (Breines 1990; Baader, Gillerman, and Lerner 2012; Imhoff 2017, Corey 2017; Krondorfer 2020), the time seems ripe for a reconsideration of Jewish masculinity in the medieval and early modern periods. This offers the opportunity to broaden not only the chronological scope of inquiries on Jewish masculinities, but the geographical one as well. This special issue of *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* aims to feature research addressing the diversity of the Jewish male experience in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and the colonial world from approximately 1000 to 1800. We will probe again extant notions of normative Jewish masculinity and ask how being Jewish impacted medieval and early modern men. Which models and strategies of masculinity were available to, and desirable for, different categories of Jewish men across the diaspora, in different social, political, and legal contexts? How did they differ from, and how did they resemble, models and strategies available to non-Jews? Considering the relational nature of masculinity, we will also explore its forms and roles within the broader context of ties with other men and with women. Which cultural codes underpinned dominant and deviant Jewish masculinities, and how did they impact systems of power within the Jewish family and community, as well as power relations between Jews and non-Jews? Essays that critically engage with the literature and theory on gender and sexuality are especially welcome, as are those that present sophisticated analyses of new archival findings.

Possible themes include, but are not limited to:

Male roles within the Jewish household

Notions of Jewish fatherhood

Understandings of Jewish youth and bachelorhood

Relations between Jewish masters and male servants/apprentices

The role and nature of masculinity within Jewish confraternities/yeshivot/spaces of Jewish sociability

Roles and functions of masculinity among Jewish merchants

Masculinity in kabbalistic literature

Male potency and impotency in Jewish texts

“Hegemonic” masculinities and "deviant" masculinities

Masculinity and discourses on Jewish civic inclusion/emancipation

Perception and self-perception of male Jewish bodies

The bearded and beardless face

Jewish men and violence

To submit a proposal please send a 300-word abstract and a brief CV to [jewishmasculinities2023@gmail.com](mailto:jewishmasculinities2023@gmail.com) by June 30, 2021. Selected essays (8,000 words, including notes) will be due to the editor by April 30, 2022.