

Between Rabbinic and Knightly Masculinities: Constructing Gendered Identities Among Jewish Young Men in Medieval Ashkenaz*

by Eyal Levinson

Abstract

A vivid depiction of a jousting scene in an illuminated Hebrew prayerbook allows a unique pictorial representation of a custom common among Jewish young men in Northwestern Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: jousting-like tournaments at Jewish weddings. The article contextualizes this image more broadly with contemporaneous sources originating in different genres, including rabbinic literature, vernacular documents, illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, frescos that decorated affluent Jewish homes, epitaphs, and archaeological findings, to describe the lives, self-image, and social expectations of medieval Ashkenazic men. Moreover, the article sheds light on the influences of the surrounding culture on medieval rabbinic gender constructs and on the constructions of gendered identities among these young men, and particularly on two indicators of identity: daily conduct and clothing. The article argues that these Jewish young men were navigating two masculinities, and that they internalized complex identities, which enabled them to identify as Jews and at the same time to feel that they were part of mainstream urban culture to some degree.

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Introduction

An illuminated Hebrew prayerbook from Italy, often referred to as the *Forlì Siddur* (1383), contains various marginal illustrations, including one depicting what looks like a jousting scene: two knights, wearing helmets, each holding a shield in one hand and lance in the other, one of the men portrayed falling off from his horse after apparently being struck by the other knight.¹ This image appears underneath a blessing for a newlywed couple. Since jousting competitions were a common entertainment at weddings of the upper echelons, we assume this is one reason why the image appears under a blessing for a newlywed Jewish couple.

¹ British Library, Additional 26968, fol. 339r, Central Italy (Romagna, Forlì), Prayer book (*Forlì Siddur*) for the entire year, Italian rite, 1383.



Fig. 1. Two Knights Jousting. *Forlì Siddur*, British Library, Additional 26968, fol. 339r (Public Domain).

The *Forlì Siddur* originates in northern Italy, just outside the geographical area covered by this study. But its vivid depiction of a jousting scene and its placement underneath a wedding blessing allows a unique pictorial representation of a custom common among Jewish young men in Christian Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: jousting-like tournaments at Jewish weddings. This image poignantly connects knightly conduct and Jewish customs. In this article, I will contextualize it more broadly with contemporaneous sources originating in different genres, including rabbinic literature, vernacular documents, illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, frescos that decorated affluent Jewish homes, epitaphs, and archaeological findings, to describe the lives, self-image, and social expectations of medieval Ashkenazic men.

Such a varied body of sources enables a more nuanced depiction of the social behavior under investigation, the interweaving of rabbinic and knightly masculinities among young Jewish men. While each genre presents its own interpretive challenges, it can also allow the identification of overlaps or emphases. Unfortunately, there are hardly any documents written by Jewish young men.

However, a careful reading of the available sources sheds light on the influences of the surrounding culture on medieval rabbinic gender constructs and on the constructions of gendered identities among these young men, and particularly on two indicators of identity: daily conduct and clothing. Before examining these two indicators, what follows is a brief discussion of the Ashkenazic communities these young men called home.

Gendering Medieval Ashkenazic Historiography

The medieval Jews of northwestern Europe, collectively referred to as Ashkenazic Jews, lived in the geographical area incorporating the Holy Roman Empire, northern France, England (from 1066 until the expulsion of the Jews from the kingdom in 1290), and parts of northern Italy (mainly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). The members of these communities shared important cultural traits, differentiating them from other Jewish communities on the continent, from those in the Iberian Peninsula and those scattered along the European shores of the Mediterranean.² Since the 1990s, social and cultural historians have overturned well-established historiographical conventions which had depicted the medieval Jewish communities of Ashkenaz as culturally isolated from mainstream medieval Christian urban society.³ These new studies instead

² See Tzafir Barzilay, Eyal Levinson, and Elisheva Baumgarten, eds., *Jewish Life in Medieval Northern Europe, 1080-1350: A Sourcebook* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 2022), xiii.

³ Among these studies are Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996); Jeremy Cohen, "Between Martyrdom and Apostasy Doubt and Self-Definition in Twelfth-Century Ashkenaz," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999): 431-471; Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Judith Baskin, "Women and Sexual Ambivalence in Sefer Hasidim," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 1 (2006): 1-8; Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); David Joshua Malkiel, *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000-1250* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, *On the Margins of a Minority: Leprosy Madness and Disability among the Jews of Medieval Europe* (Detroit: Wayne State

portray a vibrant picture of daily contacts between Jews and Christians, without denying the continuous impact of pogroms, violence, and anti-Judaism. They show that Jews adapted a range of cultural elements from their neighbors, among them stories and legends, manners and clothing, songs and music, esthetics, and gender constructs. Alongside this “inward acculturation,”⁴ as Ivan Marcus refers to this cultural appropriation, rabbinic norms and teachings were inseparable from the daily lives of medieval Jews, and from a very young age Jewish children were educated to internalize them. Gender constructs played an essential role within these norms and boys were expected to familiarize themselves with them. Still, these young men lived in Christian Europe and were also strongly influenced by the hegemonic masculinity ideal, that of the courageous, violent, and chivalrous knight.⁵

Jews Identified with Knights

Already in 1888, Moritz Güdemann briefly discussed Jewish knights, and in 1896 Israel Abrahams mentioned in passing that there were several English Jews that seem to have ranked as knights.⁶ Only recently have scholars such as Ivan Marcus, Joseph Shatzmiller, Sarit Shalev Eyni, Sara Offenberg, and Markus Wenninger begun exploring more thoroughly the influences of chivalric culture on medieval Jews and Jewish participation in this culture.⁷ Some of these studies analyze

University Press, 2014); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah D. Galinsky, introduction to *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-14; Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, ed., *Intricate Interfaith Networks in the Middle Ages: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016); Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, *Jews and Crime in Medieval Europe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020).

⁴ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 12.

⁵ See Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 20-63.

⁶ Moritz Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Deutschland während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: A. Hölder, 1888), 164-167; Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 377.

⁷ Markus Wenninger, “Von jüdischen Rittern und anderen waffentragenden Juden im mittelalterlichen Deutschland,” *Ashkenas* 13 (2003): 37-67; Sarit Shalev Eyni, *Jews among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 85-

written documents while others focus on illustrations of knights in medieval Hebrew manuscripts, but the evidence for chivalric influences on Ashkenazic Jews goes beyond written sources and illustrations to include archaeological findings, epitaphs and frescos. Marcus concluded that “[i]n medieval Germany and France, Jews identified with knights and transformed them into didactic symbols. Medieval Jews sometimes compared themselves to Christian knights, but they were different from all other knights.”⁸ This identification was significant, I argue; it was an integral part of young Jewish men’s daily lives and included the appropriation of knightly masculinity ideals. These young Jewish men, however, were also expected to internalize and act according to rabbinic masculinity. What follows is a preliminary attempt to articulate what this marginalized masculinity comprises, how it was structured, and what it aimed to achieve.

Medieval Rabbinic Masculinity

By the term medieval rabbinic masculinity, I refer to a set of behavioral codes, religious rules, as well as cultural ideals instructing Jewish men on how to conduct their lives from childhood to death, and from the moment they woke up each morning until they retired to bed at night. These instructions, regulations, and ideals are scattered throughout halakhic expositions and responsa literature, Hebrew moral treatises, biblical and Talmudic exegeses, liturgical works, chronologies, and even in Hebrew sources less affiliated with the rabbinic elites, like tales and legends. Drawings and illuminations in Hebrew manuscripts also enhance our understanding of medieval rabbinic masculinity, as do epitaphs

92; Ivan G. Marcus, “Why is this Knight Different? A Jewish Self-Representation in Medieval Europe,” in *Tov Elem: Memory, Community and Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Societies: Essays in Honor of Robert Bonfil*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten, Roni Weinstein and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2011), 138-152; Joseph Shatzmiller, *Cultural Exchange: Jews, Christians, and Art in the Medieval Marketplace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Sara Offenberg, “A Jewish Knight in Shining Armour: Messianic Narrative and Imagination in Ashkenazi Illuminated Manuscripts,” *The University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 4 (2014): 1-14.

⁸ Marcus, “Why Is This Knight,” 152.

found in medieval Jewish cemeteries (discussed later in this essay).⁹ This Jewish masculinity is based on medieval interpretations of biblical commandments, such as “A woman must not put on man’s apparel, nor shall a man wear woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord your God” (Deut. 22:5). In Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages this biblical commandment enabled rabbis to argue that Jewish men must not wear women’s clothing nor their jewelry, must avoid shaving body hair, and even refrain from looking in a mirror.¹⁰ Some halakhic authorities went as far as interpreting this biblical commandment as ground to forbid men from teaching Torah to their daughters.¹¹ The interpretations of this commandment included prohibitions regarding women’s behavior, and especially on women carrying weapons. Yael, who killed Sisera with a peg and a hammer—rather than with a sword—was depicted as an exemplary woman who adhered to biblical law.¹² Additional important sources for studying this medieval rabbinic masculinity are contemporaneous readings of biblical stories, legends, and idioms; central among them are the creation stories, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the Davidic tales, as well as stories from Late Antiquity about famous rabbis and warriors.¹³

⁹ See for example the drawings of the Seder table showing the paterfamilias or baal ha-bayit seated in his special chair while conducting the ritual: London, British Library, Additional 26968, fol. 119v; Paris, BNF, Hébreu 1388, fol. 4v; Paris, BNF, Hébreu 1333, fol. 20v. See also illustrations of circumcision, like the one in the Rothchild Miscellany located at the Israel Museum, IM Ms. 180/51, fol. 246v. Another is an illustration of men studying Torah: London, British Library, Add. Ms. 14762, fol. 7v.

¹⁰ Isaac b. Moses, *Or Zarua*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Hirschenson (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 2010), 607 § 151; Moses of Coucy, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol ha-Shalem*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 2003), 50 § 45.

¹¹ Judah son of Samuel he-Hasid, *Sefer Gematriyot - Parferaot al ha-Torah*, vol. 2, ed. Jacob Israel Stal (Jerusalem: Makhon Hararei Kedem, 2005), 712 § 2.

¹² *Sefer Hadar Zekenim on the Five Books of The Torah* (Bnei Brak: Ha-Makhon le-Hafatzat Perushei Baalei ha-Tosafot al ha-Torah, 1944), 412. On the perceptions of Yael in medieval Ashkenaz see Elisheva Baumgarten, *Biblical Women and Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), chap. 3.

¹³ For a recent study centering on how the Davidic stories contributed to formulating medieval masculinities see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Thou Art the Man: The Masculinity of David in the Christian and Jewish Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). Legends about late-antique famous rabbis that were popular in the Middle Ages can be found in Eli Yassif, *Ninety-Nine Tales: The Jerusalem Manuscript Cycle of Legends in Medieval Jewish Folklore* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2013) [Hebrew].

The characterizations of the “ideal Jewish man” according to Ashkenazic rabbis appear in what I call their “masculinity discourse,” a discourse representing and defining their gendered worldviews. Discourse, as defined by Michel Foucault, connects knowledge with power and control founded on allegedly “universal truths,” and defined as such by the experts themselves who formulate and perpetuate such discourse.¹⁴ Thus discourse can be understood as an intricate system of power relations operating in society in a wide range of manifestations. In this sense, discourse is used to clarify what is considered as a “correct” or “normative” behavior—what is allowed and what is forbidden—eliciting a range of responses from absolute acceptance to a challenge of its premises, to total rejection and disobedience.

The masculinity discourse of Ashkenazic rabbis reflects institutionalized ways of thinking—overt or covert—common mainly among members of the rabbinic hegemony but exerting its influences on the entire community, on how people thought and behaved, on how bodies were shaped, and regulating behavior of community members through ethical codes among other means.¹⁵ The purpose of this discourse was to educate boys and men, as well as girls and women, to comply with rabbinic gendered norms, which among other things stress the superiority of males over females, emphasize the religious duty to procreate, assign specific gender roles, delimit women’s activities to domestic spaces, and encourage the education of boys over girls.¹⁶ This masculine discourse consisted of a set of

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 17-35.

¹⁵ For a discussion of institutionalized discourse, its functions and methods of operation, see Adrian Bangerter, Joep Cornelissen, “Studying Discourse Processes in Institutional Contexts”, *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Processes Routledge*, November 21, 2017. Accessed December 21, 2023, <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315687384-4>.

¹⁶ There are several studies focusing on the education of boys and young men in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages, mainly discussing Jewish education. However, this type of teaching was only one aspect of this discourse. Ivan G. Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992); Avraham Grossman, “The Yeshivot in Babylon, Germany and France in the Tenth-Eleventh Centuries,” in *Education and History: Cultural and Political Contexts*, eds. Rivka Feldhay and Emanuel Etkes (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 100-179 [Hebrew]. These studies expand our knowledge regarding the lives of young Ashkenazic men in the Middle Ages, but in these yeshivot only a small number of young men studied, and even in the

behavioral codes, and mental and physical depictions, transmitted orally or via written and visual representations, and the meanings instilled in them by contemporaries. Importantly, while cultural ideals are mental images people are called to internalize and act upon, by their very nature as *ideals* they are in fact unachievable.

To exemplify this process, let us consider a list of masculine characteristics as they appear in *Masekhet Avot im perush R. Simha me-Vitry*, from the second half of the thirteenth century, which disseminate age-old masculinity ideals originating in the Mishnah (Avot 6:8): “Beauty, strength, wisdom, wealth, honor, hoary head, and children are fitting for the righteous and fitting for the world [...] And it says: ‘The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the hoary head.’”¹⁷ Some medieval thinkers wondered whether all these qualities could manifest in a single man, as it is stated in the Mishnah regarding the second-century Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and his sons. According to the Midrashic compilation *Yalkut Shim‘oni*, compiled in Frankfurt in the thirteenth century, “[a] man of flesh and blood, if he is a hero, is not handsome, and if he is handsome, is not a hero. But the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like that, but rather holds both qualities and is proud of them.”¹⁸ In sum, if a single man cannot attain both qualities, he even more so would not be able to achieve other traits like wisdom, wealth, and honor. Masculine perfection, it is implied, is reserved for God alone, not for mortals. In *Sefer Hasidim*, an early thirteenth-century compilation of moral advice written primarily by Judah son of Samuel the Hasid (d. 1217), it is argued that even venerated biblical heroes were far from being perfect, as they could not resist their sexual urges. Unsurprisingly, women were blamed for the heroes’ misconduct: “Samson was a hero of heroes, David was the most pious among all men, and Salomon was the wisest among all wisemen, and [yet] they all

more popular ones there were no more than 25 students at a time (Kanafogel, *Jewish Education*, 67). According to Israel Peles and Shlomo Spitzer, in Maharil’s yeshiva in its last years, that is, in the third decade of the fifteenth century, there were about 50 students. Israel Peles and Shlomo Spitzer, *Introductory Book and Additions to Maharil’s Books* (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 2012), 136-138.

¹⁷ Jacob ben Shimshon, ed., *Masekhet Avot im perush R. Simha me-Vitry* (Tel Aviv: Emunim Publishing House, 1955), 117.

¹⁸ Hanokh Vagshal, ed., *Yalkut Shim‘oni Hashalem*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Vagshal Publishing House, 2003), 151.

failed. Samson and Solomon were failed by a woman and David was failed by a pretty maiden.”¹⁹

It is important to emphasize that the traits listed above—beauty, strength, wisdom, wealth, etc.—were ideals that men should strive to internalize rather than inherent qualities present in some and absent in others. These qualities are better understood as relative and context dependent. One can strive to be strong in every conflict, but even the strength of the strongest man does not last forever; even a mighty warrior like Goliath could be defeated by a young shepherd unexperienced in warfare.

Embodied Masculinity

A crucial aspect of masculinity is the male body—its physique and representations. Thus, medieval Jewish men were instructed on how to handle, groom, and adorn their bodies. Circumcision, originating in the Levitical commandment: “On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev. 12:3), is the most obvious example. But these men were also told how they should trim their beards, whether it was halakhically permissible to shave pubic hair and armpits and to grow long hair, and even whether it was appropriate for men to look in the mirror. Regarding the prohibition of shaving the male body, in the twelfth century Maimonides ruled that in those geographical areas where non-Jewish men shaved their armpits and pubic hair, Jewish men too were allowed to do so, while in those localities where this was only female conduct, it was forbidden. Men who refused to comply with this ruling risked being punished by flogging: “That is saying concerning a district where only women are practicing it, to prevent men from imitating the practice of women; but in a district where both men and women resort to the practice, no punishment is meted out to men therefor. It is permitted to remove the hair with a pair of scissors from all other limbs.”²⁰

¹⁹ Judah Wistenetsky, ed., *Sefer Hasidim*, Parma (Frankfurt: M. A. Wahrmann, 1924), 50 § 69.

²⁰ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Avodah Zarah ve-Hukot ha-Goyim*, 12:9, ed. Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Pub. Co, 1967), Sefaria, accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Foreign_Worship_and_Customs_of_the_Nations.12.9?vhe=Wikisource_Mishneh_Torah&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

Still, some Ashkenazic scholars found the halakhic ruling of Maimonides, who was immersed in his Muslim cultural context and its gender constructs, contradictory to their understandings of the male body. In northern France in the middle of the thirteenth century, R. Isaac of Corbeil warned men against shaving their bodies with a razor or with scissors.²¹ Maimonides' words shed light on the influences of hegemonic, non-Jewish masculinity on marginalized forms of masculinity and on the abovementioned social process of "inward acculturation," exemplifying how medieval rabbinic gender constructs were influenced by the surrounding cultures to some degree.

According to this masculinity discourse, Jewish men were also expected to comply with a strict sexual regime. They were taught how to conduct their sexual lives, when they should perform which sexual acts, and with whom. To buttress and perpetuate this discourse, biblical and rabbinic commandments were often enlisted. The Levitical injunction "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence" (Lev. 18:22) is just one example used by medieval rabbis to police male sexuality. The fear of breaking normative sexual boundaries led Rashi (R. Solomon son of Isaac of Troyes, c. 1040-1105) to interpret the Deuteronomic commandment mentioned above ("A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing") as instructing clear gender separation.²² Normative Jewish sexuality was primarily confined to the marital unit, though sexually active unmarried men were tolerated (particularly young men, if they refrained from seducing another man's wife). Unmarried sexually active women, in turn, were condemned.²³

While Jewish husbands were halakhically commanded to procreate and to sexually satisfy their wives, Jewish wives were expected to act as obedient helpmates and assist their husbands in their quest to abide by their religious obligations. Beyond these two marital duties required of husbands, rabbis encouraged men to sexually

²¹ Isaac son of Joseph of Corbeil, *Ha-Semak me-Tzurikh*, vol. 1, ed. Jacob Har-Shoshanim-Rosenberg (Jerusalem: A. B. Printing House, 2008), 112 § 34. R. Isaac of Corbeil's book, *Sefêr Mitzvot Katan* (*SeMak*) is an abbreviated version of *Sefêr Mitzvot Gadol* (*SeMag*) written by R. Moses of Coucy, which is based on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and supplemented with other rabbinical sources known to the author.

²² Rashi, on BT Nazir 59a.

²³ See Eyal Levinson, *Gender and Sexuality in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center - Leo Baeck Institute, 2022), 74-78 [Hebrew].

treat their wives as they wished.²⁴ R. Eleazar of Worms, for example, insisted that, “anything a man desires to [sexually] do with his wife, he is permitted to do it, so he may not look at another woman. However, he should conduct sexual intercourse face to face because this is what satisfies a woman.”²⁵ The reason why any sexual position was permitted was to help men avoid pursuing extra-marital sexual relations. According to R. Eleazar, what has become known as the “missionary position” befit the “the ideal Jewish man”; this advice was similar to what thirteenth-century Christian theologians, canon lawyers, and writers of penitential handbooks prescribed for Christian men.²⁶

Appropriate femininity, according to medieval Ashkenazic rabbis, implied that women willingly accept their husbands’ sexual demands and refrain from loudly requesting sexual intercourse. Any woman who refused to have sex with her husband risked being labeled a *moredet* (a halakhic term meaning, “a rebellious wife”); her husband could demand a divorce without paying her the sum specified in the *ketubah* (the marriage contract). Halakhically, a wife could demand a divorce, claiming that her husband was repulsive to her (*ma’is alay*) and that she was unable to have sexual intercourse with him; but women who pursued this line of argumentation in divorce cases knew that they might lose the sum of their *ketubah*.²⁷

Reading Rabbinic Masculinity in Funerary Epitaphs

The epitaphs found in Ashkenazic cemeteries provide further valuable insight into medieval rabbinic masculinity. The epitaphs present culturally accepted formulations that Ashkenazic Jews inherited from the Bible or from late-antique Hebrew and Aramaic literature, such as “a blameless and upright man” (Job 1:8),

²⁴ *Sefēr Hasidim*, 282 § IIII; Alexander Suslin ha-Cohen, *Sefēr ha-Agudah, Seder Nashim*, ed. Eleazar Brizel (Jerusalem: Eleazar Brizel, 1979), 173 § 8.

²⁵ Eleazar son of Judah, *Sefēr Ha-Rokeah Ha-Gadol*, ed. Barukh S. Schneerson (Jerusalem: Otzar Haposkim, 1967), 23.

²⁶ Michael Camille, “Manuscript Illumination and the Art of Copulation,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 58-90; 70.

²⁷ See Avraham Grossman, *He Shall Rule Over You? Medieval Jewish Sages on Women* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2011), 247-249.

the Talmudic honorific term “*Gedol ha-Dor* (the greatest of the generation),”²⁸ or the tenth-century Midrashic expression “*Av la-Hakhamim* (father of the wise),” originally referring to Moses.²⁹ These formulations demonstrate cultural ideals that relatives sought to attribute to their dead. They also function within the masculinity discourse of Ashkenazic rabbis. The epitaph of Nathan ben Yitzhak, located in the Worms medieval Jewish cemetery, is a good example.³⁰ Nathan died on 4 October 1333, at the age of 71:

At the end of the holiday on the month of the mighty³¹ [?:] In the year 94 [?] according to the [Jewish] count: Father of the wise and the learned, he was gathered to his ancestors: With a good name and reaching old age, aged 71 [?:] Rabbi Nathan son of Rabbi Yitzhak the greatest of the generation, counselor, and honorable:³² An old man who sits among the wise: gained his learning and taught decent students: his adolescent years did not shame his old age: all his days he dedicated to the needs of many and to improvements: with body and soul he was in all matters, and his house was open like the desert, a refuge for the poor and the needy: Therefore, may the king who dwells above recognize him as one of his servants, and bring his only one into his innermost chamber.³³

Nathan’s epitaph shows that he was valued because he demonstrated wisdom, counseled others, learned and taught, his students were excellent, he was involved in communal affairs, and showed generosity towards the poor and needy.

²⁸ See for example BT Moed Katan 22b, Sota 12a, Kiddushin 32b.

²⁹ Tanna Debei Eliyahu, 25, Sefaria, accessed December 21, 2023, [https://www.sefaria.org/Tanna_Debei_Eliyahu_Rabbah.25.1?vhe=OYW_\(segmentation_according_to_Warsaw_1880\)&lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Tanna_Debei_Eliyahu_Rabbah.25.1?vhe=OYW_(segmentation_according_to_Warsaw_1880)&lang=bi).

³⁰ Nathan’s epitaph is not unique, see among others the epitaph of Schmuel ben Eljakim (died 05.10.1319) <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrn-442&lang=de>; or the one erected for Elasar ben Natan Halevi [died 21.01.1314], accessed December 21, 2023, <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrn-1006&lang=de>.

³¹ The term “month of the mighty” in Hebrew “*Yerah ha-Eitanim*” is one of the biblical names given to the month of Tishrei (I Kings 8:2). According to the Talmud (BT, Rosh Ha-Shanah 11a) this is the month in which the mighty ones of the world, i.e., the Patriarchs, were born.

³² This is based on Isaiah 3:3.

³³ See this epitaph, a Hebrew transliteration, and a German translation via EPIDAT, accessed December 21, 2023, <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrn-190&lang=de>.

Moreover, an important characteristic of this masculinity is the uncompromising adherence to rabbinic norms throughout a man's life, from childhood to old age. Thus, "his adolescent years did not shame his old age." The epitaph is another example showing how biblical and Talmudic gendered constructs were interwoven. Interestingly, attributes associated with knightly masculinity, like courage, prowess, and strength, are absent. One possible explanation is that knightly masculinity befitted the young and strong while old age was associated with a loss of masculinity; another tentative explanation is that old age was a time to fully embrace rabbinic masculinity, a time to study Torah, abide by the commandments, and repent for past sins.³⁴

Thus far we have explored abstract ideals characterizing the "perfect Jewish man"; now we turn to the material culture associated with these young Jewish men and move from what was expected of them to exploring their daily lives.

Clothing, Masculine Identity, and Social Boundaries

Studying material culture, and especially clothing, as suggested by Susan Crane, sheds light on the inner worlds of medieval men and women and their gendered identities.³⁵ By clothing I mean what Julia Twigg defined as "the empirical reality of dressed bodies,"³⁶ and like Twigg I approach the sources applying sociological and anthropological methodologies that "regard clothing as a form of material culture, a species of situated body practice, and part of lived experience of people's lives."³⁷ Clothes may indicate internal characteristics, social affiliation, economic status, and gendered identities, but they can also help in disguising a person's identity and in subverting or reinforcing social norms. Therefore, we need to explore the written documents and illustrations in Hebrew manuscripts not only for discussions regarding clothing but also for those attesting for daily conduct,

³⁴ See Levinson, *Gender and Sexuality in Ashkenaz*, 172-175.

³⁵ Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

³⁶ Julia Twigg, "Clothing, Identity and the Embodiment of Age," in *Aging and Identity: A Postmodern Dialogue*, eds. Jason Powell and Tony Gilbert (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

speech acts, and nonverbal communications if we are to claim, as I do in this article, that young Jewish men’s identities were influenced not only by rabbinic masculinity, but also by knightly masculinity.

This methodological approach enables a better understanding of what Judith Butler defined as the performativity of gender. As Twigg further argues, Butler’s approach is fruitful to appreciate “the dynamic interaction of self, body and dress, acknowledging the embodied nature of clothing as it both expresses identity to the outside world and acts back on and reinforces it for the individual at a directly physical level.”³⁸ As in recent anthropological studies, I consider dress “as a set of competing discourses, linked to the operation of power, that construct the body and its presentation.”³⁹

The material culture of Ashkenazic young men, therefore, raises a number of productive questions: How did they dress and what accessories did they possess, and what does this tell us about their Jewish identities and perceptions of masculinity, and about the social boundaries that separated the Jewish minority group from the majority Christian society? To contextualize young men’s clothing within their broader cultural landscape, what follows is a brief discussion of the changes in men’s fashion that occurred in northwestern Europe towards the end of the eleventh and the first half the twelfth century, coupled with the criticism Christian moralists expressed regarding those developments.

For about 600 years, young men in northwestern Europe wore short tunics, resembling those of the Romans of Late Antiquity. Sometime during the eleventh century these grew longer and more extravagant, as other clothing items, hairstyle, and facial representations changed as well. In England, these changes occurred following the Norman conquest of 1066. As Nancy Bradfield states,

Tunics were long and lavishly decorated. Flowing hair and beards returned to favour. The under-tunic with the fitting sleeves was longer during this reign [of William II (1087-1100)]. The long, richly embroidered tunics of the Normans and Flemings who came to the English court in great numbers were soon adopted by the fashionably minded men. The skirts, reaching to the ankles, were sometimes slit at the sides, and for full dress

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Karen Tranberg Hansen, “The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 369-392; 370.

the gowns were so long that they trailed on the ground [...] Short hair went out of fashion; it was now cut in quite a long 'bob' covering the ears [...] Bands were sometimes worn round the head.⁴⁰

Contemporary Christian moralists, like Edmar (ca. 1060-ca. 1128), William of Malmesbury (ca. 1090-ca. 1143), and the English chronicler and Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis (1075-ca. 1142) expressed harsh criticism of these fashionable changes; long tunics and curled hair and beards were especially criticized. For Vitalis, for example, these changes showed a loss of masculinity:

Our wanton youths are sunk in effeminacy, and the courtiers study to make themselves agreeable to the women by every sort of lasciviousness [...] Sweeping the dusty ground with the prodigious trains of their robes and mantles [...]. The forepart of their heads is bare after the manner of thieves, while on the back, they nourish long hair like harlots [...] Now, almost all the world wear crisped hair and beards, carrying on their faces the tokens of their filthy lust, like stinking goats. Their locks are curled with hot irons, and, instead of wearing caps, they bind their heads with fillets.⁴¹

The young aristocrats, however, turned a deaf ear to such admonitions, and these changes infiltrated from the nobility to the wealthy urban population and from there to the lower classes. These changes, as mentioned above, arrived in England with the Normans and the Flemings, thus it comes as no surprise that young Jewish men in Ashkenaz were also influenced by these fashionable changes.

Rabbinic Criticism of Young Men's Dress Code

Already at the end of the eleventh century, Rashi criticized Jewish young men for imitating the fashion of young Christian noblemen, whom he called *parashim* (literally meaning "horsemen," but referring to knights): "Israel is arrogant in their

⁴⁰ Nancy Bradfield, *Historical Costumes of England, from the Eleventh to the Twentieth Century* (London: George G. Harrap, 1997), 15-17.

⁴¹ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, vol. 2, trans. Thomas Forester (London: H.G. Bohn, 1854), 478.

hair and in their arrogant clothes like these *parashim*.⁴² Rashi's critical approach was reiterated in the thirteenth century by R. Eleazar of Worms, who reminded his readers "[t]hat even with his clothes one must show that he is a Jew."⁴³ Apparently, both the garments and the new hairstyle, featuring curled locks, attracted criticism, blaming the young men for exhibiting pride and for not differentiating themselves from their Christian neighbors. According to some Ashkenazic rabbis, the reason that young men curled their hair was "to be beautiful and to show their pride."⁴⁴ This critical attitude reappears in Rashi's commentary on the book of Genesis (39:7), where he argued that the wife of Potiphar was Joseph's punishment for curling his hair. The idea that hair growing is motivated by pride appears already in the Mishnah (Sotah 1:8); in the fourteenth century it was echoed in *Sefer ha-Agudah*, written by R. Alexander Suslin of Frankfurt. This time not Joseph but Absalom was the one who grew his hair, was proud of it, and therefore was hung by it.⁴⁵

The connection between a certain dress code and pride appears also in *Orhot Tzadikim*, an anonymous fourteenth-century Ashkenazic ethical treatise. Pride, argued the author,

is also evident in the matter of food and drink, and in garments of vanity, the clothes of the gentiles [...] All in one matter, [God] warns that Israel must be separated in his garments and in his words and in all his customs from the gentiles.⁴⁶

In the German lands in the early thirteenth century, R. Judah the Hasid forbade men who grew their hair, shaved their beards, and dressed like the gentiles from reading from the Torah scroll at the synagogue: "And any man who grows his hair and shaves his beard even [if he does not do it with a knife as the law forbids, but

⁴² Rashi, on BT Shabbat 139a.

⁴³ *Moshav Zekenim on the Torah*, ed. Sasson Saliman ben David (London: Hill Printing House, 1959), 305.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁴⁵ Suslin ha-Cohen, *Sefer ha-Agudah*, 58.

⁴⁶ *Orhot Tzadikim ve-hu Sefer ha-Midot* (Jerusalem: Or ha-Haim, 2008), 11.

rather] with scissors, or he is dressed like the Gentiles, must not be called up to the Torah.”⁴⁷

While for Orderic Vitalis and other Christian moralists, the young aristocrats who grew their hair and curled it showed a loss of masculinity, for medieval Ashkenazic rabbis, the Jewish young men who adopted the fashion of the aristocracy were blamed for *ga'ava*, or arrogance. Christian preachers were preoccupied with the transgression of gender categories; the rabbis were more concerned about the blurring of social boundaries between Jews and Christians.

Throughout the high and late Middle Ages there were young Jewish men who dressed like their affluent neighbors, “those *parashim*” as Rashi referred to them. Exploring these young men’s daily conduct shows that dressing like the men of the upper echelons was not only a superficial, outward manifestation. It reveals some appropriation of chivalric culture and knightly masculinity ideals.

Jewish Young Men, Leisurely Activities, and Chivalric Masculinity

Hunting and falconry are two leisurely activities associated with chivalric masculinity, and according to halakhic sources, illustrations in Hebrew manuscripts, frescos, and court documents in Latin, Jewish young men were also fond of these activities. Israel Abrahams already noted that “as a matter of fact, Jews did at least occasionally participate in hunting.”⁴⁸ But apparently, it was more than just occasionally. A fascinating example from 1286 England is found in a source containing medieval lawsuits and legal cases heard before travelling courts.⁴⁹ The text describes a hunt conducted by a group of twenty Jewish young men, among them Moses of Oxford, Aaron of Winchester, as well as a Jacob, Samson, and Abraham, who travelled to attend a friend’s wedding in Stamford.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Judah son of Samuel he-Hasid, *Sefer Gematriyot*, 29 § 30.

⁴⁸ Abrahams, *Jewish Life*, 376.

⁴⁹ The British National Archives, Eyre Rolls, PRO E 32/76 m.12.

⁵⁰ Jean Birrell, “Who Poached the King’s Deer? A Study in Thirteenth Century Crime,” *Midland History* 7, 1 (1982): 9-25; 19. See also Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146. On Jewish hunters in Medieval England, see Charles R. Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 104; Robin R. Mundill, *The King’s Jews Money, Massacre*

On their way to the wedding, in Rockingham Forest, they hunted a deer with the help of two greyhounds, as was common among Christian hunters of the upper echelons, and later consumed it at the wedding. This incident, however, happened in one of the King's forests; hunting the king's deer was a serious crime which could result in severe punishments. Importantly, according to the court document, Moses of Oxford, who slaughtered the deer, did so according to his custom (*more suo*), slicing the deer's neck while his servant held its feet. These young Jewish men slaughtered the deer according to their understanding of Jewish law.⁵¹ The act of slaughtering clearly identified them as “other,” those who have different customs, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the presiding judge. This story demonstrates that there were Jewish young men in thirteenth-century England who behaved like their Christian peers while preserving their cultural uniqueness and Jewish identities.

Medieval Hebrew manuscript illustrations portraying hunting scenes serve as further evidence that hunting was a favorite activity known in detail to Ashkenazic Jews and part of their cultural imagery to convey their thoughts, beliefs, and hopes. Art historians often interpret these hunting scenes as alluding to the persecution of Jews by Christians.⁵² Marc Epstein emphatically concluded that “hunting by Jews was unequivocally condemned throughout ancient and medieval rabbinic literature, which viewed it as a distinctly non-Jewish activity, one of the classical excesses of the gentiles.”⁵³ Therese and Mendel Metzger, on the other hand, argued that “although essentially not a Jewish pastime, hunting—either with dogs or with falcons—was a sport indulged in by the Jews who frequented Spanish courts even as late as the second half of the fourteenth century. For other Jews hunting was no more than an occasional spectacle.”⁵⁴ However, even among Ashkenazic Jews the picture is more nuanced, particularly when

and *Exodus in Medieval England* (London: Continuum, 2010) 34; Cecil Roth, “Oxford Starrs,” *Oxoniensia* 22 (1957): 66-67.

⁵¹ Whether they strictly abided by laws of *shehita* (slaughtering) is unclear, but it seems that this was their intention.

⁵² Shalev Eyni, *Jews among Christians*, 71-6; Sara Offenber, “Beauty and the Beast: On a Doe, a Devilish Hunter, and Jewish-Christian Polemics,” *AJS Review* 44, no. 2 (2020): 1-17.

⁵³ Mark Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Penn. State University Press, 1997), 23.

⁵⁴ Therese and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle-Ages: Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts of the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (New Jersey: Chartwell Books Inc., 1982), 212.

distinguishing between hunting for sustenance and hunting as a sportive activity and when considering differences between French and German halakhic authorities.⁵⁵

An illustration of a hunting scene appears in a Hebrew manuscript originating in Coburg, Germany, also dated to the last decade of the fourteenth century. On folio 170r there is a decorated initial-word panel marking the beginning of *Ein ha-Koreh* (The Eye of the Reader), a grammatical treatise composed by Yekutiel ben Judah ha-Nakdan in the first half of the thirteenth century. At the bottom of the panel, underneath the gold initial word, *Barukh* (blessed), there is a detailed pictorial representation of a hunting scene. Here we see two hunters riding horses; one of them is blowing a horn while another hunter, also blowing a horn, is walking in front of the riders, two of the hounds biting into a large deer.⁵⁶ One of the hunters wears a pointed hat that looks more like a *Judenhut* than a medieval hunting hat, which may indicate his Jewishness. Moreover, it seems unfitting to interpret this opening scene of a grammatical treatise as alluding to the persecution of the Jewish people, allegorized as the chased doe, while the dogs and hunters are seen as representative of the enemies of Israel, as often argued by art historians when interpreting similar illustrations.⁵⁷ This pictorial representation rather shows that hunting was an activity with which Jews were familiar, important enough to be included in a range of manuscripts, and which carried for them different meanings.

⁵⁵ Leor Jacobi, "Rabbis on the Hunt: From Palestine to Poland," in *Falconry - Its Influence on Biodiversity And Cultural Heritage in Poland And Across Europe*, eds. Urszula Szymak and Przemyslaw Sianko (Białystok: Muzeum Podlaskie Białymstoku, 2016), 169-186.

⁵⁶ London, British Library, Add. 19776, fol. 170r.

⁵⁷ Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 22.



Fig. 2. A hunting scene accompanied by dogs, appearing in manuscript from Coburg, Germany dated to 1390-1396 and including the Pentateuch, the five scrolls, haftarahs and other books. London, British Library, Add. Ms. 19776, fol. 17or (Public Domain).

Some rabbis, including R. Isaac of Vienna, criticized Jews who hunted with dogs, and warned that “anyone who hunts with the gentiles with the aid of dogs will not see the joy of Behemoth and Leviathan [in the world to come].”⁵⁸ Still, this rabbinic warning did not deter some Jewish men from hunting with dogs. R. Eliezer ben Joel of Bonn, active in the second half of the twelfth and in the early thirteenth centuries, was asked for his opinion regarding the halakhic permissibility to leash hunting dogs to a riding horse; he permitted it.⁵⁹ The main concern of the responsum was not whether hunting was permissible, but rather

⁵⁸ Isaac son of Moses, *Or Zarua*, vol. 1, 17 § 51.

⁵⁹ Eliezer son of Joel of Bonn, *Sefer Ra’abiah: Hu Avi Ha-Ezri*, vol. 1, ed. David Deblitzky (Bene Brak: David Deblitzky, 2005), 172.

whether leashing a dog to a horse transgresses the laws of *Kilayim* (mixed species).⁶⁰

Young Jewish men in Ashkenaz were also engaged in another type of hunting, falconry, a most endearing occupation of the upper echelons during the Middle Ages. Several illustrations in Hebrew manuscripts corroborate the notion that Jews expressed interest in falconry. One image of a young man riding a horse and holding a bird of prey in his hand appears in a micrographic illustration from Germany dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, known as the “Jonah Pentateuch.” The illustration shows a rider wearing a leather glove on his right hand, resembling the glove falconers used while hunting to protect their hands from the sharp claws of the bird.⁶¹ Dalia-Ruth Halperin suggests that this falconer may represent the Messiah son of David, a plausible interpretation, carefully crafted by reading the micrographic texts forming the image.⁶² Moreover, this reading follows similar interpretations by art historians depicting hunting scenes and images of knights in Hebrew manuscripts as harboring eschatological messages.⁶³

⁶⁰ These laws, part of the Laws of *Kilayim* (mixed species) originate in the biblical commandment “you shall not plow with an ox and an ass together” (Deut. 22:10), and expounded by late-antique rabbinic scholars to include a list of different animals: “A wolf and a dog, a wild dog and a fox, a goat and a deer, a gazelle and a ewe-lamb, a horse and a mule, or a mule and a donkey, a donkey and a wild donkey, even though they are similar one to the other, constitute nevertheless, kilayim one with the other” (Mishna, *Kilayim* 8:1) Sefaria, accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah_Kilayim.1.6?lang=bi.

⁶¹ London, British Library, Add. Ms. 21160, fol. 181v.

⁶² Dalia-Ruth Halperin, “The Three Riders: The Apocalypse in the Figured Micrography of BL Add 21160,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 69, no. 2 (2018): 340-373; 364.

⁶³ Sara Offenber, “A Jewish Knight in Shining Armor: Messianic Narrative and Imagination in Ashkenazic Illuminated Manuscripts,” *The University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 4 (2014): 1-14; Offenber, “Jacob the Knight in Ezekiel’s Chariot: Imagined Identity in a Micrography Decoration of an Ashkenazi Bible,” *AJS Review* 40 (2016): 1-16; Shalev Eyni, *Jews among Christians*, 81.



Fig. 3. A micrograph of a falconer appearing in a manuscript originating in Germany, dated ca. 1250-1299.

London, British Library, Add. Ms 21160, fol. 181v (Public Domain).

However, falconry, as Joseph Shatzmiller explains, “was a favorite sport of the knightly class and one that sent a message of romance and desire of the flesh.”⁶⁴ An illustration of a falconer appears also in a medallion for the month of *Sivan* (May) in the Tripartite Mahzor (c. 1322).⁶⁵ Sarit Shalev Eyni, described this image: “Here against the background of a tree in blossom, a young man wearing a wreath or crown on his head is seated in a royal posture: his legs are crossed, one hand is at his waist, while the other supports a falcon.”⁶⁶ Shalev Eyni further remarked that, “[m]ost of the depictions of courtly scenes, such as the combat and falconry, reflect a noble ideal in which Jews could not directly participate.”⁶⁷ However, as Leor Jacobi has demonstrated, some notable rabbis were engaged in this leisurely

⁶⁴ Joseph Shatzmiller, *Cultural Exchange: Jews, Christians, and Art in the Medieval Marketplace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 67.

⁶⁵ Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection, MS. A. 384, fol. 143r.

⁶⁶ Shalev Eyni, *Jews among Christians*, 94.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

activity while others forbade it as incompatible with Jewish law.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the above mentioned responsum regarding hunting with dogs leashed to riding horses was understood by contemporaries as referring to hunting with falcons or hawks.⁶⁹ This responsum, so it seems, is not a mere theoretical deliberation, but rather discusses an activity in which Jewish men were involved.

The divergent opinions among rabbinic authorities regarding falconry indicate that chivalric culture exerted its influences not only on young men unaffiliated with the erudite elite but also on members of the rabbinic elite.⁷⁰ Some medieval Jewish men were engaged in hunting with dogs and in falconry, two activities associated with chivalric masculinity. There was yet another daily conduct inseparable from this masculinity, and that was fighting.

Jewish Fighters

Fighting skills, prowess, courage, protecting one's family and community, and the ability to carry and display armor and weapons—these were all essential aspects of knightly masculinity. Christine Magin and Markus Wenninger have shown that throughout the high and late Middle Ages Ashkenazic Jews owned weapons and carried them openly in times of danger.⁷¹ Indeed, responsa literature and Hebrew chronicles indicate that during this period Jews armed with their weapons often fought against rioters, robbers, or crusaders.

A well-known example took place in Mainz in May 1096, when during the First Crusade Count Emicho of Leiningen arrived with a large army to the gates of the city. There, Jewish men wearing armor (most likely, chainmail gear) and carrying

⁶⁸ See Leor Jacobi, "Jewish Hawking in Medieval France: Falconry, Rabbenu Tam, and the Tosafists," *Oqimta* 1 (2013): 421-504. Accessed December 21, 2023, <http://www.oqimta.org.il/english/gilteng.aspx#>.

⁶⁹ Isaac son of Moses, *Or Zarua*, vol. 1, 221 § 291.

⁷⁰ In his article, Jacobi discusses mainly Rabbi Jacob ben Meir Tam (Rabbenu Tam, ca. 1100-1171) and his circle of Tosafists.

⁷¹ Markus J. Wenninger, "Bearing and use of Weapons by Jews in the (late) Middle Ages," *Jewish Studies* 41 (2002): 83-92; Christine Magin, ">Waffenrecht< und >Waffenverbot< für Juden im Mittelalter," *Aschkenas Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 13, no. 1 (2003): 17-33. Israel Yuval, "Rabbinical Perspectives on the Bearing of Weapons by the Jews," *Jewish Studies* 41 (2002): 51-55.

weapons fought for their lives: “Then they wore armor and harnessed their weapons, from old to young, and R. Kalonymus [...] at the head [...] and they approached the gate to fight the crusaders and the burghers.”⁷² In February 1201 the Jews of Worms defended their city together with the other citizens, even on a Sabbath, and in 1309 the Jews of Erfurt participated in the defense of their town. In Cologne, Jews were obliged to defend the city fortifications. In 1112, they were assigned to protect one of the city’s gates, and again, in 1331, they were granted a letter of protection by the city council which included their duty to guard and defend the so-called “Jewish Gate” whenever the city was attacked.⁷³ During the struggles between the municipality of Cologne and the Archbishop Conrad von Hochstaden (1232-61), Jewish men courageously defended the city alongside their Christian neighbors against the troops of the archbishop. The municipality showed its gratitude by including them in the peace treaty of March 1252.⁷⁴ Some Ashkenazic Jewish men carried weapons not only when their lives or property were in danger. In thirteenth-century Bohemia, young Jewish men proudly strolled around their neighborhood on Friday nights carrying their swords and shields. Rabbi Isaac of Vienna warned that these young men were desecrating the Sabbath: “Our brothers in Bohemia are not doing the right thing, when they carry swords and shields on Friday night. Sometimes when people are afraid and guard the city, then it is permitted.”⁷⁵ These young men were undoubtedly influenced by knightly masculinity. R. Isaac did not criticize the fact that they were displaying chivalric masculinity but only that they did so on the Sabbath.

A few Jewish men lived like knights and were rewarded for their courage and fighting skills. In an early twelfth-century example, Joshua, a Jewish physician

⁷² Eva Haverkamp, ed., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während des Ersten Kreuzzugs*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Hebräische Texte aus dem mittelalterlichen Deutschland, 1 (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2005), 317.

⁷³ Adolf Kober, *Cologne*, trans. Solomon Grayzel (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940), 65.

⁷⁴ Tanja Porthoff and Michael Wiehen, “‘da man die Juden zu Colne sluch [. . .] inde die hus in der Judengassen verbrannt wurden’. Das Kölner Judenpogrom von 1349,” *Archäologie des Glaubens. Umbrüche und Konflikte. Mitteilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft für Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit* 31 (2018): 21-36.

⁷⁵ Isaac son of Moses, *Or Zarua*, vol. 2, 40.

leading a chivalric lifestyle, served Bruno, the archbishop of Trier (1102-24).⁷⁶ The English Abraham the Jew, a crossbowman, was rewarded with a house in Canterbury in 1215 by king John.⁷⁷ Markus Wenninger mentions another Jew who “quite clearly led his life in the manner of a knight,”⁷⁸ named in sources as “the Jew D” and also known as Teka, who in the Spring of 1236 robbed a castle belonging to Bela IV, king of Hungary. Other Jews became owners of castles, Jörg Müller has shown recently.⁷⁹ These Jews lived like knights, and yet continued to identify themselves and be identified by others as Jews.

Jewish Children and Knightly Masculinity

Startling evidence for the integration of knightly ideals in Jewish culture can be found among the archaeological items unearthed by the MiQua-LVR Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne, a museum currently being built on the ruins of the medieval Jewish quarter, which was completely destroyed in 1349 in a pogrom associated with the Black Death.⁸⁰ The museum is located right in front of Cologne’s historical city hall. With its synagogue, ritual bath (*mikveh*), and other community buildings and private houses, it is the most preserved medieval Jewish neighborhood in Germany. These buildings were an inseparable part of Cologne’s medieval landscape before the Plague, as was the whole Jewish community.

⁷⁶ Alfred Haverkamp, *Jews in the Medieval German Kingdom*, trans. Christopher Cluse (Online Edition: Trier University Library, 2015), 27. Accessed December 21, 2023, https://ubt.opus.hbz-nrw.de/opus45-ubtr/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/671/file/Jews_German_Kingdom.pdf.

⁷⁷ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 349.

⁷⁸ Wenninger, “Bearing and use of Weapons,” 85. Teka was recently discussed by Birgit Wiedl, “Den Panzer von den Juden gekauft und empfangen: Jüdische Lebensrealitäten zwischen Krieg und Katastrophen,” in *Krisen, Kriege, Katastrophen: zum Umgang mit Angst und Bedrohung im Mittelalter*, eds. Christian Rohr, Ursula Bieber, and Katharina Zeppezauer-Wachauer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2018), 199-232; 217.

⁷⁹ Jörg R. Müller, “Juden und Burgen im Mittelalter Eine nur scheinbar marginale Beziehung,” *Die Burg: Wissenschaftlicher Begleitband zu den Ausstellungen „Burg und Herrschaft“ und „Mythos Burg“*, eds. G. Ulrich Großmann and Hans Ottomeyer (Dresden: Sandstein, 2010), 110-125.

⁸⁰ For more information regarding this project see <https://miqua.blog>, accessed December 21, 2023.

In a cellar of one of the Jewish homes the archaeologists found several chainmail shirts. Damages caused by the fires are detectable. It is still unclear whether these chainmail shirts were private property, merchandise, obtained by a pledge or even the remains of the fighting that may have taken place during the pogrom. According to fourteenth-century French chronicler, Gilles le Muisit (1272-c. 1353), the city's Jews had armed themselves and offered bitter resistance to the attacking mobs.⁸¹ Although historians take his report with a grain of salt, the idea that armed Jews protected themselves seems very plausible, especially in Cologne.

Another artifact found at the site is a slate on which a drawing of a knight riding a horse is etched. This is one of many slates found by the MiQua team that present various drawings, writing exercises in Hebrew, and lists of Hebrew names with amounts of money next to each one. Perhaps the most exquisite finding was found in the pit underneath the women's synagogue. It is a tin and lead toy representing a knight riding a galloping horse.



Fig. 4. A fourteenth-century toy of a knight riding a horse found in the pit underneath the women's synagogue in Cologne.
Photo credit: Stefan Arendt; LVR-Zentrum für Medien und Bildung.

Remarkably, this finding may indicate that Jewish children too were fascinated with knights and that at least some parents thought that such a toy suited their

⁸¹ Gilles le Muisit, *Chronique et annales de Gilles le Muisit, abbe de Saint-Martin de Tournai 1272-1352*, ed. Henri Lemaître (Paris: Librairie Renouard, H. Laurens, successeur, 1906), 223-227.

children. A similar toy, this time made of clay, was also unearthed by the MiQua team. These artifacts demonstrate that chivalric culture and knightly masculinity were an integral part of everyday life for Ashkenazic Jews—adults and children alike. The beautiful mid-fourteenth century frescos found in Frau Minne’s home in Zurich, depicting chivalric culture drawings and coats-of-arms, further corroborate this notion.⁸²

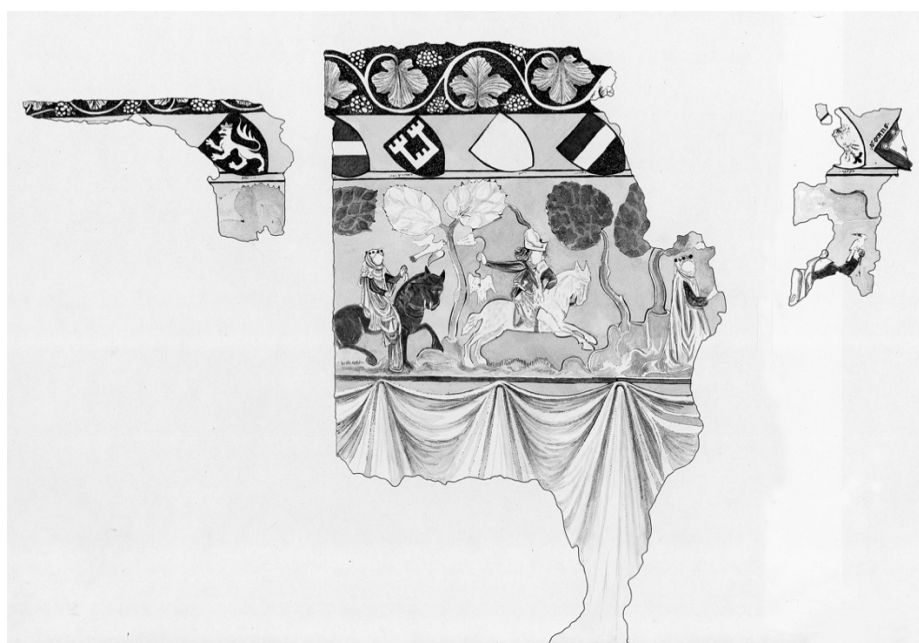


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the fourteenth-century fresco in the west wall of the Jewish house located at 8 Brunnngasse, Zurich. Stadtarchäologie Zurich. Photo courtesy of Wild Dölf.

Joseph Shatzmiller describes the scene in detail: “On the extreme left a gracious lady riding a black horse is setting free a falcon. She is preceded by a galloping horse led by a man who is trying to capture the bird. Then the lady appears again, this time standing on the ground. The original painting, of which only a faint fragment has survived, obviously had a longer story to tell. It is noteworthy nevertheless that

⁸² Dölf Wild and Roland Böhmer, “Die spätmittelalterlichen Wandmalereien im Haus «Zum Brunnenhof» in Zürich und ihre jüdischen Auftraggeber,” *Zürcher Denkmalpflege Stadt Zürich* (1995/96): 15-33.

similar hunting scenes were discovered in other medieval buildings in Zurich.”⁸³ This affluent family, like other contemporaneous well-off Jewish families, adopted a lifestyle similar to the one exhibited by their noble clients and neighbors.⁸⁴

Between Two Masculinities

To conclude, let us return to the illustration in the *Forlī Siddur* with which we began. This image appears underneath a blessing for a newlywed couple because most likely it reflects jousting-like competitions taking part during Jewish weddings. If as a result of these competitions men and horses were injured, this raised a halakhic question whether compensations should be paid for the damages: “Those young men who ride horses for a bridegroom and fight with each other (i.e., joust) and rip off their friend’s garment or spoil his horse, they are exempt from paying compensation because they do so for the joy of the groom.”⁸⁵ The renowned twelfth-century troubadour Chrétien de Troyes vividly described the violent reality of the tournaments: “The knights snap lances, break shields, and knock men and horses to the ground in such a way that it is impossible to know which side has the better or the worse.”⁸⁶ As Maurice Keen concluded, “[t]he line could indeed be thin between mock war and the real thing.”⁸⁷ These violent jousting competitions held by Jewish young men are discussed in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century rabbinic literature from Spain, Provence, northern France, and Austria.⁸⁸ This was seemingly a widespread phenomenon, perhaps an attempt to imitate the jousting competitions conducted during wedding celebrations of the nobility. It is yet additional evidence of the extent to which Jews absorbed knightly ideals from their surroundings.

⁸³ Shatzmiller, *Cultural Exchange*, 67.

⁸⁴ See Shalev Eyni, *Jews among Christians*, 88.

⁸⁵ Tosafot, *Sukkah* 45a. This custom is mentioned in Marcus, “Why is this Knight Different?,” 142.

⁸⁶ Joan Tasker Grimbert and Carol J. Chase trans., *Chrétien de Troyes in Prose: the Burgundian ‘Erec’ and ‘Cligés’* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 42.

⁸⁷ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 85.

⁸⁸ See Levinson, *Gender and Sexuality in Ashkenaz*, 96-97.

Jewish young men were not only involved in jousting competitions during Jewish weddings, but some also participated in real tournaments. Evidence for Jews participating in tournaments is found in a responsum written by R. Eliezer ben Joel of Bonn probably in the early thirteenth century, discussing a man who lost a shield he had borrowed from a friend in a tournament.⁸⁹ Young Jewish men took part in a tournament in Weissenfels in 1386.⁹⁰ Moreover, there is a good possibility that Jewish men also participated in a tournament in Regensburg in 1408.⁹¹ Interestingly, the rabbis expressed no objection to this custom. They were more preoccupied with the young men's garments and hair style, hoping to reinforce social boundaries.

The rabbis' goal was to direct young men to a different masculinity ideal than the one encouraged by chivalric culture—one which valued *some* aspects of knightly masculinity such as prowess, strength, honor, and courage, yet inwardly acculturated them. These traits were not meant for self-aggrandization and enhancing one's own reputation, but rather for the glorification of God's name and the Jewish people. Nevertheless, as we have seen in this essay, young men's dress and conduct show that they were navigating two masculinities, and that they internalized complex identities, which enabled them to identify as Jews and at the same time to feel that they were part of mainstream urban culture to some degree. This is yet another example, joining those of previous studies, demonstrating the extent to which medieval Ashkenazic Jews were part of their surroundings.

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⁸⁹ Eliezer son of Joel of Bonn, *Sefer Ra'abiah: Hu Avi Ha-Ezri*, vol. 3, ed. David Deblitzky (Bene Brak: David Deblitzky 2005), 425. I thank Aviya Doron for this reference.

⁹⁰ Abrahams, *Jewish Life*, 377.

⁹¹ See Wenninger, "Von jüdischen Rittern," 62.

them: “Situated Fathering in Medieval Ashkenaz” and “Male Friendship in Medieval Ashkenaz.”

Keywords: Medieval Masculinities, Jousting, Youth Culture, Material Culture, Medieval Jewish Fighters

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