PRIVACY AND THE PRIVATE IN EARLY MODERN JEWISH LIFE

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Privacy in Jewish Sources*

Abstract: The article introduces key concepts related to research into the historical notions of privacy, provides a brief historiographical overview, and discusses methodological tools that allow the researcher to examine privacy in primary sources. The second part discusses examples of the Jewish lived experience in the early modern period that were not only shaped by Jewish legal discourses but by the specific living conditions of an ethno-religious minority. The article offers some suggestions as to how privacy could have been understood in early modern Jewish communities and how individuals may have negotiated it in regards to the concepts of home, intimacy, gender, and notions of secrecy.

Keywords: privacy, historiography, Europe, Jews, early modern era.

Słowa kluczowe: prywatność, historiografia, Europa, Żydzi, wczesna epoka nowożytna.

Early modern privacy

The topic of early modern privacy is an increasingly important field of historical inquiry. In recent years, many important publications have appeared dealing with various dimensions of privacy: among them, the edited volume *Early Modern Sources and Approaches* (2022) covers a wide range of topics, from social and cultural history through legal and architectural history to the history of science,[1] while *Private/Public in 18th-Century*

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[1] Michaël Green, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, Mette Birkedal Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches* (Leiden–Boston, 2022).

Scandinavia (2022)[2] and *Privacy and the Private in Early Modern Dutch Contexts* (2021)[3] focus on particular territories. So far, however, privacy among early modern Jews has not received specific attention from historians. This lacuna will be addressed in this special issue.

The introduction will briefly set out the development of privacy studies, with a particular focus on the early modern period. This overview is followed by a discussion of privacy in early modern Jewish life, with some suggestions as to how privacy could have been understood in early modern Jewish communities and how individuals may have negotiated it. We will then introduce the six contributions to this special issue.

The study of historical notions of privacy benefited from two major contributions in the first half of the twentieth century, although neither dealt explicitly with the topic. Norbert Elias in his *Civilizing Process* asserts throughout his influential study that the early modern period was characterized by behavioral changes in all elements of society. He particularly addresses the idea of "self-constraint," and when he states "more and more people attune their conduct to that of others," which is an element of the civilizing process, he is in fact speaking about elements pertaining to privacy—sexuality, bodily functions, etc.[4] The historical background to these developments was, among others, the humanistic focus on the individual. Furthermore, the Reformation gave the same individual the power to interpret the Bible without mediation, bringing about a greater emphasis on the self. Jürgen Habermas in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* alludes to the fact that the concept of privacy as we know it nowadays was beginning to emerge in the early modern period. However, Habermas's focus on the emergence of the public sphere in the second half of the eighteenth century is hardly applicable to the entire early modern period, and lacks historical nuance.[5] It is not possible to recount all the literature published in the forty years since the appearance

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[2] Sari Nauman, Helle Vogt (eds.), *Private/Public in 18th-Century Scandinavia* (London, 2022).

[3] Natália da Silva Perez (ed.), *Privacy and the Private in Early Modern Dutch Contexts* (special issue), *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis / Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 18 (2021), no. 3.

[4] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, revised edition, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Malden–Oxford 2000 [1939]), 367–368. See his specific comments in "Part Two" on human behavior such as "On Behaviour in the Bedroom," 136–140, or "On Blowing One's Nose," 121–125.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger, Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1989).

of the seminal *Histoire de la vie privée* (*A History of Private Life*), edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Of particular importance, however, is the third volume on the early modern period, edited by Roger Chartier, in which a general understanding of how the idea of private became more and more prominent is established.[6] This publication was perhaps the most influential of all in highlighting the importance of privacy in historical studies.

The present volume focuses on both notions of privacy and *vie privée* ('private life'). It is important to note that private life does not equal privacy, as privacy can be applicable to a community, a state, or a group of people, and may have nothing to do with one's personal life. Privacy is, however, a term that encompasses private life, as one of the dimensions of the latter. One possible source of the concept of privacy, as it emerged in the early modern period, is a form of self-reflection deriving from Protestant practice, which encourages the believer to engage in introspection *vis-à-vis* God. This is demonstrated through the emergence in this period of a variety of egodocuments (diaries, memoirs, etc.) that deal not only with religious self-reflection, but also with daily life in its various aspects, at times reflecting on personal and communal boundaries, such as the access to a certain community or personal well-being in a given setting.[7]

In recent years, the study of privacy has become an integral part of historical research, as more and more scholars turn to this concept to enrich their understanding of the early modern world. Many such studies concern local cases, for example in western and northern Europe, notably that of Lena Cowen Orlin and Ronald Huebert, who focus on Tudor London, and Benjamin Kaplan on the Dutch Republic, as well as smaller studies on Scandinavia and others.[8] Many of these studies consider privacy as a threat

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[6] The series was published in English in 1987–1991. Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby (eds.), *A History of Private Life*, vol. 3: Roger Chartier (ed.), *Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, 1989).

[7] See for example: Michaël Green, "'For My Personal Use': Notions of Privacy in Egodocuments from Early Modern Amsterdam," in Michaël Green, Ineke Huysman (eds.), *Private Life and Privacy in Early Modern Low Countries* (Turnhout, 2023), 27–62; id., "Spaces of Privacy in Dutch Early Modern Egodocuments," in da Silva Perez (ed.), *Privacy and the Private*, 17–40. General studies on the genre of egodocuments include: Rudolf M. Dekker, "Ego-Documents in the Netherlands 1500–1814," *Dutch Crossing* 39 (1989), 61–71; Rudolf M. Dekker (ed.), *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum, 2002).

[8] Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford, 2007); Ronald Huebert, *Privacy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto–Buffalo–London, 2016); Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern*

to the state and religious authorities. In the early modern era, from their perspective, individuals were able to engage in various unlawful activities in private, such as illicit sexual relations, the discussing and spreading heretical views, and even conspiring against the laws of the country.

Taking early modern privacy as a topic of inquiry can enrich existing scholarship by providing an additional dimension to understanding how society and private life functioned at the time. A significant problem for research into early modern notions of privacy is that in many languages (such as Dutch, French, Danish, German) the term "privacy" did not exist at the time—although English is an exception. So how we can research a concept that might appear anachronistic? A first step would be to adapt a working definition to help navigate the source material. According to Stephen Margulis, modern privacy can be defined as regulation of access to oneself, and—to some extent—to a group of individuals.[9] One also needs to consider that privacy can exist in certain spatial settings, and it is in the early modern period that this spatial aspect becomes visible.[10]

A significant breakthrough in the study of early modern privacy took place in 2017, when the Centre for Privacy Studies was established in Copenhagen.[11] Its director, Mette Birkedal Bruun, proposes a working method for navigating the zones of privacy in the early modern world, so-called "heuristic zones," which move from the most intimate—the soul/mind, through the body, bedchamber/chamber/alcove, house/household—to the community, and finally the state.[12] It is in these zones that privacy can

Europe (Cambridge, 2007). On Scandinavia, see: Nauman, Vogt (eds.), *Private/Public in 18th-Century Scandinavia*; Mia Korpiola, "Early Modern Swedish Law and Privacy: A Legal Right in Embryo," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 135–155. On the Dutch Republic: Renée E. Kistemaker, "The Public and the Private: Public Space in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," in Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. and Adele F. Seeff (eds.), *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (Newark, 2000), 17–23; Green, Huysman (eds.), *Private Life and Privacy*.

    [9] Stephen T. Margulis, "Privacy as a Social Issue and Behavioral Concept," *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (2003), 2:243–261. On Jewish egodocuments, see: Dan Michman (ed.), *Emotions, Imaginations, Perceptions, Egos, Characteristics: Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish History* (Amsterdam, 2021); Michaël Green, "Public and Private in Jewish Egodocuments of Amsterdam (ca. 1680–1830)," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 213–242.

    [10] See for example: Green, "Spaces of Privacy"; Valeria Viola, "Secret Routes and Blurring Borders: The New Apartment of Giuseppe Papè di Valdina (Palermo, 1714–1742)," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 401–422.

    [11] Website of the Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Privacy Studies: https://teol.ku.dk/privacy/about-privacy/ [retrieved: 25 Sept. 2023].

    [12] Mette Birkedal Bruun, "Towards an Approach to Early Modern Privacy: The Retirement of the Great Condé," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 12–60.

exist in various guises, and at times one zone can have a direct impact on privacy within another—for example, in the case of the Jewish community, the community is able to define the boundaries and/or limitations of its own privacy, and of an individual who is part of this community, while the state determines the boundaries of privacy for the Jewish community. Combining Bruun's suggestion of employing heuristic zones of privacy with the working definition of Margulis, which speaks of limitation of access, will allow researchers to trace the ways in which privacy functioned in the early modern era.

The present volume focuses on Jewish individuals and communities. So far Jewish studies as a discipline has not yet fully embraced privacy as an analytical concept. The aim of this special issue is to demonstrate how a focus on privacy allows us to gain a deeper understanding of Jewish societies in the early modern world. What did privacy mean for internal Jewish relationships and for relations with Christian neighbors and authorities? We hope that the contributions in this volume will shed new light on historical, cultural, political, and theological aspects of Jewish life and, importantly, will allow for comparisons between Christian and Jewish understandings and practice of privacy in early modern times, thereby enabling proper contextualization of the Jewish experience.

Privacy in a Jewish context

What does, and can, privacy mean in an early modern Jewish context? Just as in most European languages, there is no specific word for privacy in biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, the language of the foundational scriptures of the Jewish tradition. Furthermore, Arye Schreiber has suggested "that privacy is not a core value in Jewish law, and there is no general right to privacy in Jewish law."[13] When rabbinic authorities discussed the protection of privacy in determining law (*halakha*), "it was human dignity that was being protected, and privacy was protected when its violation was also a violation of someone's dignity."[14]

The following section discusses some examples of the Jewish lived experience in the early modern period. As has been observed for other early modern cultures, all facets of Jewish life had "public, social, or communal

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[13] Arye Schreiber, "Privacy in Jewish Law: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis," Berachyahu Lifshitz (ed.), *Jewish Law Annual* 20 (2013), 179–235, here 186.
[14] Ibid.

dimensions."[15] Specific Jewish experiences of privacy (including lack of privacy) in this period were not only shaped by *halakha* but also by the specific historical experience of being strongly communally orientated and an ethno-religious minority in beleaguered circumstances that affected both living conditions and relations with the majority culture.

The Jewish home as a private space

In privacy research, the home is often understood as a private place that is separate from the public space, a place in which there is a degree of protection from the communal gaze and where personal and intimate things take place.[16] The idea of transitioning from the public to the private space is supported by the biblical verse in which God "called Moses" (Leviticus 1:1) before speaking to him from the Tent of Meeting. In rabbinic sources this was interpreted as a requirement to seek consent before entering someone's else property.[17] In the lived reality of early modern Jewish households as crowded, intergenerational places, adhering to these ancient principles would have been a challenge. In cities with large communities like Frankfurt, Prague, and Rome, Jews lived in segregated quarters in which population numbers increased throughout this period but the available walled space could not be expanded. Many Jews living in small towns in Eastern Europe endured similar cramped quarters.[18] Privacy in even the most intimate matters would have been difficult to achieve.

Solomon Maimon (1753–1800) mentions in his autobiography that due to the limited number of beds in his grandfather's house as a boy he shared a bed with his grandmother in a room that also served as a study.[19] Later, he studied Kabbalah in a rabbi's "wretched little house" but the newly-married kabbalist was not pleased by Maimon's constant presence

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[15] David Cressy, "Response: Private Lives, Public Performance, and Rites of Passage," in Betty S. Travitsky, Adele F. Seeff (eds.), *Attending to Women in Early Modern England* (Newark, 1994), 187–197, here 187.

[16] Green, "Spaces of Privacy."

[17] Kenneth A. Bamberger, Ariel Evan Mayse, "Pre-Modern Insights for Post-Modern Privacy: Jewish Law Lessons for the Big Data Age," *Journal of Law and Religion* 36 (2021), 3:495–532, here 518.

[18] For a detailed discussion of the "Jewish house" in its materiality in German lands, see Nathanael Riemer, "Das jüdische Haus in seiner Materialität," in Nathanael Riemer (ed.), *Einführungen in die materiellen Kulturen des Judentums* (Wiesbaden, 2016), 31–72.

[19] Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Abraham P. Socher (eds.), *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon: The Complete Translation*, trans. Paul Reitter (Princeton, 2018), 17.

as the eager student's "transcendental interests clashed with [the rabbi's] earthly ones."[20] When trying to earn a living as a tutor, he taught children in a tiny smoke-filled single-room dwelling, sharing the space with peasants drinking brandy and women doing housework while sitting "behind the oven with my dirty, half-naked students, translating an old and tattered Hebrew Bible into Russian-Jewish dialect."[21]

Within the home, the watchful gaze of relatives ensured that children and young people were kept in line. Family surveillance included restricting access to reading material considered unsuitable. We learn from memoirs that family members intervened if they did not approve of what young people read. Full of curiosity for one such maligned text, a certain Meir (who would in 1681 convert to Christianity—exactly what his family had tried to prevent) started reading a copy of the New Testament on Christmas Eve, but had it snatched out of his hand and thrown behind the oven.[22] Solomon Maimon's grandmother observed the boy climbing out of the shared bed, reading an astronomical book and conducting experiments, and promptly reported him to his father.[23] Jacob Emden (1697–1776) secretly read secular books in "a place where it is forbidden to think about Torah,"[24] in Mark Glickman's words, his "secular reading-shrine—the toilet."[25]

Strangers in the home

It was not only older relatives who kept a watchful eye on others within the four walls of the home. This was also a space where non-family members came to stay, or were employed as servants. Unmarried men, such as rabbinical students, lodged with families, who not only provided food and a place to sleep, but closely observed them. Jewish and Christian domestic servants entered the most private spaces and knew the most intimate details of the household. As has been noted, "[s]ervants who were privy to the secrets of their employers could turn this knowledge into power when they needed to, thereby at times reversing the order

[20] Ibid., 55.

[21] Ibid., 82.

[22] Martin Difenbach, *Judaeus Convertendus, Oder verschiedene Urtheile und Vorschläge…* (Frankfurt am Main, 1696), 113–115.

[23] Melamed, Socher (eds.), *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon*, 17.

[24] Jacob J. Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1988), 551.

[25] Mark Glickman, *Stolen Words: The Nazi Plunder of Jewish Books* (Lincoln, 2016), 49.

of power."[26] Midwives supported Jewish women in labor, an intimate and often life-threatening event, but despite the increasing regulation of midwives throughout the early modern period it was common for several women to be present during labor.[27] In some Jewish families, wet nurses were necessary to suckle infants, providing intimate care and a lifeline when no alternative safe feeding arrangements were available,[28] although the Church strictly regulated such arrangements when Christian women were employed by Jews, for example prohibiting overnight stays.[29]

Intimacy

Furthermore, in early modern Jewish society personal matters such as engagement and marriage were not viewed as private affairs, but matters of public interest and negotiation. Families had a keen interest in arranging marriages that were mutually beneficial in terms of status and wealth. Individual autonomy, the desires of individuals and their privacy were not considered in these negotiations. The energetic businesswoman Glikl bas Leib (1646–1724) records in some detail in her family memoirs the marriage arrangements that were made for her twelve children. Her husband was not a physically strong man and therefore wanted to marry off all their children as early as possible to secure their future financial stability.[30] Other memoirists criticized their fathers for the choices they made, particularly if they could not marry their preferred bride, the arranged marriage was unhappy, or the match proved financially disastrous. Jacob Emden, fifteen years old when his father declined a match that could have achieved "ultimate perfection," "did not reveal what was in his heart" and accepted the decision.[31]

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[26] Elisheva Carlebach, "Fallen Women and Fatherless Children: Jewish Domestic Servants in Eighteenth-Century Altona," *Jewish History* 24 (2010), 3/4:295–308.

[27] Nimrod Zinger, "'Like Puah and Shiphrah': Jewish Midwives in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 112 (2022), 2:289–315.

[28] Carlebach, "Fallen Women and Fatherless Children," *passim*.

[29] See Katherine Aron-Beller, *Jews on Trial: The Papal Inquisition in Modena, 1598–1638* (Manchester, 2011), 87–124, chapter "The Jewish household: Jewish masters and Christian servants."

[30] Chava Turniansky (ed.), *Glikl: Memoirs 1691–1719*, trans. Sara Friedman (Waltham, 2019), 194. In recent scholarship Glikl is referred to as Glikl bas Leib (Glikl the daughter of Leib) as this is how Glikl called herself in her writing.

[31] Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden*, 34. See also Solomon Maimon's critical descriptions of his father's marriage negotiations.

Gendered privacy

Once married, a woman was equated with the home of her husband. The Talmud quotes Rabbi Yossi, "During all my days I have never called my wife 'my wife.' Rather I have called my wife 'my house'" (Gittin 52a). This suggests two different spheres, equating the public sphere with men and the domestic with women, making "the boundary between gender roles coincident with that between public and private and partially coincident with the boundary of the home as well."[32] However, it is well documented that early modern Jewish women were not restricted to the domestic sphere, were active in a variety of fields and typically enjoyed greater economic independence than Christian women.[33]

The same agency does not apply to religious authority. While women were seemingly happy to financially support their husbands in their religious duties (the "sacred sloths," as Maimon called the numerous religious scholars), the concept of *tzni'ut* (often translated as 'modesty') relegated their own piety to the domestic sphere, as both the public performance of religious rituals and holding positions of communal power would be against *tzni'ut* ("All the honor of the king's daughter is within," Ps 45:14).[34]

Tkhines, supplicatory prayers written for and sometimes by women in Yiddish, aimed to control and regulate female piety, which was shaped to fit domestic life, actively turning women away from the public and communal life of the male synagogue.[35] This privatization of female spiritual life in the domestic sphere could be seen as marginalization, but at the same time also allowed for the expression of personal needs, individuality and even interiority. An unknown woman wrote a *tkhine* asking for help in finding a new affordable home where she and her family would not be bothered by their neighbors: "I am going out now to look for a dwelling in which to settle with my husband and children. Please help me, God, send me to a nice, kosher place where I shall not have to haggle about

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[32]   Stuart Shapiro, "Places and Spaces: The Historical Interaction of Technology, Home, and Privacy," *The Information Society* 14 (1998), 4:275–284, here 281.

[33]   Robert Liberles, "On the Threshold of Modernity: 1618–1780," in Marion A. Kaplan (ed.), *Jewish Daily Life in Germany: 1618–1945* (Oxford, 2005), 61–64; Debra Kaplan, "*Women and Worth*: Female Access to Property in Early Modern Urban Jewish Communities," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55 (2010), 1:93–113, here 96–98.

[34]   Bamberger, Mayse, "Pre-Modern Insights for Post-Modern Privacy," 525.

[35]   Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston, 1998).

the rent or fall in among bad neighbors."[36] The liturgical form of *tkhines* indicates a separate, private piety for women.

While female piety mostly happened outside the public eye for the sake of modesty, at the same time the concern with the observance of ritual commandments also subjected women to intrusion. According to Schreiber, "there is little sexual privacy in talmudic law."[37] The virginity of young women, the menstruation cycles and ritual purifications, the frequency of sexual intercourse and the infertility of married women were tightly regulated and observed.[38] Public references on the gravestones of women to keeping the laws of menstrual purity (a praxis Evyatar Marienberg has observed in the largest Jewish cemetery in Alsace, near Rosenwiller)[39] turns something intimate and personal into public practice, serving as an example to others.[40]

Privacy or secrecy?

Erica Longfellow reminds us that for early modern individuals, "private" was either a value-free term implying "less public" or "not public" spheres, such as "the private family," or else it denoted secrecy and therefore could be morally suspect.[41] Christian accusations of Jewish secrecy turned everyday rituals that happened in private (i.e. hidden from Christian eyes) into suspicious activities.

Daniel Jütte has highlighted in his work on the "Age of Secrecy" (the period between 1400 and 1800) the commercial character of the trade in secrets, by which secrets became a commodity to be traded for economic gain.[42] The title of Anthonius Margaritha's 1530 book *Der Gantz Jüdisch*

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[36] Devra Kay (ed., trans., comment.), *Seyder Tkhines: The Forgotten Book of Common Prayer for Jewish Women* (Philadelphia, 2004).

[37] Schreiber, "Privacy in Jewish Law," 209.

[38] Evyatar Marienberg, "Traditional Jewish Sexual Practices and Their Possible Impact on Jewish Fertility and Demography," *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013), 3:243–286.

[39] Evyatar Marienberg, "A Mystery on the Tombstones, or: Menstruation in Early-Modern Ashkenazi Culture," *Women in Judaism* 3 (2003), 2:1–18 (e-journal).

[40] Erica Longfellow, "Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), 2:313–334, here 321.

[41] Ibid., 333.

[42] Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400–1800*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven, 2015). For more on secrecy and privacy, see: Thomas Max Safley, "The Paradox of Secrecy: Merchant Families, Family Firms, and the Porous Boundaries between Private and Public Business Life in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 245–265.

Glaub [About the Whole Jewish Faith] promises to disclose the private customs of the Jews which they observe in their homes and synagogues.[43] Margaritha, a convert from Judaism and scion of a long-established rabbinic family, had privileged access to the inner-Jewish observances that he wanted to unveil. One of the first early modern "polemical Christian ethnographies" of Jews and Judaism,[44] his work caters to Christian interest in 'secret' Jewish rituals and ceremonies. The private space of Jewish religious observance is exposed to the prying eyes of mistrustful Christians and turned into secrets (i.e. "intentionally concealed" due to its anti-Christian nature) that are traded as part of the expertise of a convert. However, in the eyes of many Christians, anything that Jews did in the privacy of their own homes or their synagogues was suspicious or a source of curiosity, although Christians visited Jewish prayer services and attend circumcision rituals and other festivities quite regularly.[45]

A well-known example of Christian suspicion of Jewish domesticity is the Inquisition targeting "New Christians" (recent *conversos* from a Jewish background) in Spain and Portugal. They were suspected of secretly observing Jewish rituals and customs in defiance of their confessed Catholicism. François Soyer has shown how ecclesiastical and secular authorities created a "moral panic" about *conversos* that cultivated conspiracy theories. After the late medieval mass conversions of Jews, it was feared that these newly-baptized Jews would infiltrate and undermine church and state institutions from within, because "the Jewish threat had become an invisible one and consequently was perceived to be all the more dangerous."[46]

Antagonism promoted by the authorities could turn into actual violence. One might read the smashing of windows of Jewish houses across Europe by Christian louts not only as disturbing acts of—often highly

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[43] The German *heimlich* denotes both 'home' and 'secret,' a double meaning that is important for the scope of Margaritha's book. Maria Diemling, "Anthonius Margaritha and His 'Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub'," in Dean Phillip Bell, Stephen G. Burnett (eds.), *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Leiden, 2006), 303–333.

[44] Yaacov Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2012).

[45] Wolfgang Treue, "'Ich verlangte sehr, sie in ihren Synagogen zu sehen…' Juden und jüdisches Leben im Spiegel christlicher Reiseberichte des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts," in Birgit E. Klein, Rotraud Ries (eds.), *Selbstzeugnisse und Ego-Dokumente frühneuzeitlicher Juden in Aschkenas: Beispiele, Methoden und Konzepte* (Berlin, 2011), 329–353. Elliott Horowitz, "As Others See Jews," in Nicholas de Lange, Miri Freud-Kandel (eds.), *Modern Judaism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford, 2005), 415–425.

[46] François Soyer, *Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories in the Early Modern Iberian World: Narratives of Fear and Hatred* (Leiden, 2019), 48.

ritualized—urban anti-Jewish violence, but also symbolically as violations of liminal space between public and private. As Daniel Jütte has shown, windows are complex interfaces between street and house, near which people worked in search of natural light, looked outside with curiosity, or chatted and received the latest news and gossip. Regulating what Jews could see through their windows, from Christian symbols and churches to the ritual bath, was a concern for both Jewish and Christian authorities.[47] The concept of *hezek re'iya* ("harm from seeing," virtual trespass) is based on the rabbinic understanding of Numbers 24:2, in which the biblical seer Balaam delivers a divinely-inspired blessing to the Israelites after seeing that the openings of the tents of the Israelite tribes were not aligned with each other, "preventing voyeuristic intrusion and passive or unintentional glances."[48] These laws provided the basis for "peaceful coexistence between neighbors," and formed part of a system of laws enabling civilized urban living.[49]

The brief discussion of some aspects of privacy presented here demonstrates that early modern Jewish understandings of the latter drew on well-established halakhic discourses that needed to be negotiated in Jewish settings that were deeply shaped by the environment of a non-Jewish majority. Returning to the idea that Jewish privacy law is about the preservation of dignity, this can involve control and close regulation of the behavior of women and young people, for example, but it is also the case that human dignity is clearly violated by attributing notions of suspicious and malicious secrecy to the private affairs of others.

The articles

This special issue consists of four articles dealing with various aspects of early modern Jewish privacy and private life. Several articles are concerned with the city of Amsterdam, a major center of Jewish life in the early modern period, with a thriving Jewish communal life.

In the first article, Julia Lieberman investigates how the Amsterdam Sephardi congregation organized its private educational system with the

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[47] Daniel Jütte, "'They Shall Not Keep Their Doors or Windows Open': Urban Space and the Dynamics of Conflict and Contact in Premodern Jewish–Christian Relations," *European History Quarterly* 46 (2016), 2:209–237.

[48] Bamberger, Mayse, "Pre-Modern Insights for Post-Modern Privacy," 504.

[49] Schreiber, "Privacy in Jewish Law," 187.

aim of shaping the future members of the community, starting in the early 1600s. She identifies the critical stages in this process, which in 1639 resulted in a school that consisted of seven grades. She argues that this educational system was a blending of attributes from the Jewish medieval tradition and the Iberian Jesuit system that emphasized the character formation of its students, and which the lay founders of the Sephardi congregation had experienced while living as *conversos* in Spain and Portugal.

The second article, written by Michaël Green, focuses on Jewish ego-documents from Amsterdam. It was originally published in English in the edited volume *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches* and is included here in Polish translation for the benefit of the wider readership in Poland.[50] By examining three Jewish authors dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, Green traces the development of concepts of privacy for Jewish individuals on the one hand, and that of Jewish egodocumental writing on the other. Various aspects of privacy come forward in these sources—space, finance, health, and family matters.

Relating to the spatial dimension, the third article by Jessica Roitman challenges assumptions about what spaces were actually "private" in the late early modern (colonial) world. Roitman discusses a case study of alleged adultery within the Portuguese Jewish community in Willemstad, Curaçao, in the late eighteenth century, in order to investigate the intersection of privacy, public life, and close-knit religious communities in colonial societies.

The fourth and final article by Maria Diemling explores the question of privacy in Jewish letters. She reflects on Jewish epistolary culture and notions of privacy by examining an extraordinary cache of Jewish letters that were mostly written on a single day—22 November 1619—in a single city, Prague, and sent to a single destination, Vienna. Paying particular attention to gendered communication and increased literacy, Diemling argues that privacy was negotiated in family networks that allowed for "privileged confidentiality" but were fiercely protected from outsiders.

The initial idea to study the privacy of individuals and in the Jewish community developed as part of the research interests of the editor. In November 2020, Michaël Green organized an online symposium at the Centre for Privacy Studies in Copenhagen (DNRF138) in order to facilitate discussion with scholars of Jewish studies. Several months later, the

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[50] Green, "Public and Private in Jewish Egodocuments."

editors of this volume decided that a publication examining Jewish notions of privacy in the early modern period was a desideratum, and commissioned additional articles from specialists in Jewish studies, and cultural history. This volume is an important contribution to privacy studies, as the different perspectives of the authors suggest diverse research possibilities, but all aim to achieve one goal—a better understanding of what privacy meant for the Jewish population of the early modern era, not only in Europe, but also beyond, taking into account transnational perspectives. We hope that the work presented here will stimulate further research on privacy in Jewish culture: from legal discussions to the study of emotions and self-reflection; from private objects to architecture and space; from anthropology to intellectual history.

A word of thanks

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