LEGAL KNOWLEDGE
AND EVERYDAY PRACTICE
IN MEDIEVAL ASHKENAZ

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JEWISH LEGAL TEXTS are an important source for social history, and scholars have looked to rabbinic responsa and halakhic codes that detail how the law should be observed in order to better understand how daily life was actually lived. Yet, to what extent do these legal sources reflect the lives of all members of the communities within which they were written? Perhaps they convey only the priorities of the elite learned men who penned them. This talk will ask what kind of legal knowledge everyday Jewish men and women had, and ask to what extent the average Jew in medieval Ashkenaz attempted to observe the halakhah of the rabbinic elite.

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