

25th Annual Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Lecture in Judaic Studies

# LEGAL KNOWLEDGE AND EVERYDAY PRACTICE IN MEDIEVAL ASHKENAZ

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## Elisheva Baumgarten

Elisheva Baumgarten is the Yitzhak Becker Professor of Jewish Studies and teaches in the Department of Jewish History and the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she also serves as the academic head of the Mandel Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities and Jewish Studies.



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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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