

(romanticized?) and yet simplistic narrative of genocide would be displaced by more complicated narratives of apartheid, diaspora, cultural struggle and change. We ourselves must be careful not to distort the historical record out of a desire to create counter-narratives of victimization that simply invert those critiqued in many of these commentaries. Such counter-narratives, it seems to me, too often allow the Westerner to insert her/himself yet again into a privileged position of knowledge vis-à-vis the cultural Other.

## TOWARDS A COMPLETE MEDIEVAL HISTORY

*Charlotte Newman Goldy, Miami University*

‡

At this January's AHA, I gave a paper calling for a comparative approach to the history of the twelfth-century English family. I argued that comparing family patterns "cross-class" (noble, town, peasant) within a particular region like England which was integrated by politics, economics, and increasingly "culture," was a better approach than our usual one of taking one group through time. I maintained that these comparisons would give us more ways to understand what affected behavior and why families formed the way they did. It could help us understand why there was a discrepancy between the ideology of the family (as voiced in the clerical and secular culture) and behavior within families, a discrepancy especially evident in the women's issues. I envisioned an analysis which included everyone: women and men, all ages, non-heirs as well as heirs, celibate relatives, and friends.

The most developed part of the paper was the argument that there were fundamental differences between twelfth-century Jewish and Christian ideologies of family: in what the relation of a family was to the religions themselves and the culture of the religions, as well as in the ideal roles assigned to some of the members of families. Since the ideologies differed, I expected to see some very different behaviors when I surveyed the literature about the Medieval Anglo-Jewish family, and I did. Yet I also noted that some behavior clearly deviated from Jewish belief and was closer to contemporary Christian behavior. Discrepancies like this allow us to understand how economic needs, gender biases, or survival needs can override religious beliefs. Putting Jewish and Christian side by side, therefore, could help us isolate what motives were religious, just as comparing town and peasant help us to isolate economic factors, or comparing noble and peasant highlight the effects of residence patterns. My great fear was that the audience would respond by saying that all this was obvious. I was wrong.

No one—not on the panel, in the audience, or in later conversation—questioned the possibility or desirability of comparison by "class" or the need to include people not traditionally included as family, but the idea of comparing Jews and Christians as individuals who lived in the same time and place met with strange responses from people I respect. In an otherwise thoughtful and positive response, the commentator remarked that she had checked some of my statements about particular Medieval Jewish rituals "by asking a Jewish friend." I find it hard to imagine this scholar checking on a Medieval Mass by asking a "Catholic friend." I was too surprised to suggest that my notes included readily available material in English. Another scholar I greatly admire privately told me

that she was not convinced that there would be any difference in family behavior in spite of fundamental religious differences in attitude towards the family, because “probably” all town families (Christian or Jewish) were alike. Since this scholar studies the religious of the Middle Ages I found it odd that she was implying that only economic factors, not religious attitudes, have an effect on families. I sadly regret that this conversation was cut off before the implication of the statement had registered in either of our minds.

What happened? I would have been receptive, though disappointed, to hear that I had not made a convincing argument but why were the responses so unprofessionally unthinking? And that is what they were, unthought-out reactions. Neither of these scholars are prejudiced people, yet neither gave the question of including Jewish families the same professional consideration they would and have given other marginalized peoples. Was it just, as a colleague proposed, their resistance to being asked to change the narrative? I am sure we have all heard the reaction that we have enough to think about already, “we can’t do it all.” But each of these scholars has worked a lifetime to change the narrative in other ways. And besides, there is no set narrative yet for medieval family history.

The “multicultural” issue of *MFN* arrived while I was still mulling this over. The articles are all helpful. Still, they by and large say that when we use medieval sources or look at the actions of medieval people, we should not take for granted their reading of Others, whether we avoid that by using comparative sources or different readings of European ones. I heartily agree, and this is part of the narrative that I have been using in Western Civilization for fifteen years; every article added to my knowledge of how to do that and I learned from this issue.

Yet I do not believe historians, even we in the Medieval Feminist Society, have really come to terms with multicultural history as the history of so many minorities side by side in a majority world. Our classes may be less phallogocentric or less egotistically Eurocentric (they are, after all, Eurocentric by definition, the same way a course on Chinese history should be centered on China). Yes, most of us integrate what Steven Epstein calls the story of “violence, persecution, and forced submersion” of minorities into that European history. Certainly we have papers and conferences on the majority view of the minorities in the Middle Ages. But we still have trouble with the simple integration of the ordinary aspects of the history of minorities. This is true even (or maybe especially) in the case of Medieval Jews who have left documentation of their lives and attitudes, who are not even what Glory Dharmaraj calls “submerged voices.” Yet, we still write and teach “Medieval history” or “Jewish history.” Isn’t this what we have fought against as Feminist Historians? Haven’t we said that it is not enough to recognize a separate women’s history and that it is not enough to talk of men’s attitudes towards or actions against women? One of our goals remains an integrated history of women and men as active agents of and voices for their own lives. Yes, we need to study and recognize the construction of gender and the perpetuation of patriarchal behavior. Yes, we need to study and to recognize the growth and perpetuation of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. But we also need to write of and to teach about men and women, and Christian and Jew *together* in “ordinary” Medieval history.

