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## “Maistrin” (Mastress) and Business-Woman

### Jewish Upper Class Women in Late Medieval Austria

Apart from working as servants Jewish women primarily worked in the loan business in the Middle Ages, and they did this not only in Austria. Already the first Jewish woman mentioned in documents in the Archduchy of Austria, Dreslina, worked as a moneylender: she pawned to Nikolaus, provost of Klosterneuburg, a vineyard which Konrad of Tulln redeemed for him in November 1275. The credit amounted to 100 pounds, interests included, a truly impressive sum.<sup>1</sup> Dreslina's name—derived from Drazna or Draschna, the charming one—indicates that she may have come from a Slavic-speaking country.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be proven whether she lived in Klosterneuburg or not, her contacts were, however, quite high-ranking: the provost of Klosterneuburg was one of the mightiest landlords and mine masters of the Archduchy of Austria, Konrad of Tulln was the financial administrator of King Ottokar Premysl.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps she might have even come to Austria in the train of the Jewish counts-in-the-waiting of Ottokar, the brothers Lublin and Nekelo.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that a Jewish woman worked in business was an important aspect that helped her in establishing her position in legal life; the legal position was related to her economic state and vice versa the increasingly autonomous business activities of a woman improved her ability in the Jewish, as well as the Christian legal system. As there was an increasing number of “respectable women who carry on a business”, rabbis had to react and concede more rights and duties to a woman. This led to an enormous development and change of Talmudic law and made a woman a self-responsible legal personality.<sup>5</sup>

The general term “legal life” “does not only mean procedural conflicts, as it often happens, but above all also the legal implementation of activities and situations which result from the integration of an individual, in this special case a woman, into a social surrounding (family, village, town, country)”.<sup>6</sup> This comprises matrimonial law as well as property law and the custody of children, mobility, business transactions, the disposition of property and the position of women in orthopraxy. It should not be forgotten that the Jewish woman was subject to both Jewish law—by definition a religious law—and Christian Jewish law, valid for all Jews in a certain territory. Theoretically, she was under double royal protection, as a woman and a Jew. This interlocking of legal systems, the analysis of which is already complicated as far as Jewish men are concerned, is further split because of the special legal

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<sup>1</sup> Stiftsarchiv Klosterneuburg, Uk. 1275 XI 12. Printed in H. J. Zeibig, *Urkundenbuch des Stiftes Klosterneuburg bis zum Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Part 1 (Vienna, 1857) (Fontes Rerum Austriacarum II/10), pp. 20f., No. 26.

<sup>2</sup> The Yiddish form is Drejzl. A. Beider, ‘Jewish Given Names’, *Révue des Études Juives* 157/1 (1998), pp. 169–98, here p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Dopsch, ‘Zur Geschichte der Finanzverwaltung Österreichs im 13. Jahrhundert’, in *Verfassungs- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (A. Dopsch, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* 1) (Vienna, 1928), pp. 385–505, 450–53 and 477–480. K. Lohrmann, ‘Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Klosterneuburg’, in *Klosterneuburg. Geschichte und Kultur*, Vol. 1: *Die Stadt*, ed. the Stadtgemeinde Klosterneuburg (Klosterneuburg–Vienna), pp. 209–23.

<sup>4</sup> For those see K. Lohrmann, *Judenrecht und Judenpolitik im spätmittelalterlichen Österreich* (Vienna–Cologne, 1990), pp. 87–94.

<sup>5</sup> L. Finkelstein, *Jewish self-government in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, 1964), pp. 377f. He cites Meir bar Baruch of Rothenburg, *She'elot uTeshuvot*, Vol. 3 (Prague–Budapest, 1895, repr. Jerusalem, 1986), p. 137, No. 958.

<sup>6</sup> G. Kocher, ‘Die Frau im spätmittelalterlichen Rechtsleben’, in *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag. International Congress Krems an der Donau*, October 2–5, 1984, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs 9 (Vienna, 1986), pp. 475–86, here p. 475.

position of the woman. Therefore, this study will only deal with some legal actions of Jewish women, which are relevant for their business activities.

### **Matrimonial property law**

The prerequisite for carrying out lending transactions was personal capital or the disposition of foreign capital, mostly of relatives or friends, but also of Christians. Therefore, Jewish women had to have the right to dispose of their own money; such a right of disposal is provided by matrimonial property law, although modified to some extent.

In all legal systems there exists the problem of how to find a balance between the matrimonial community of property and the wife's interest in a certain material independence and security. In late-medieval Christian society married women disposed of their own property; there was a strict distinction between the possession of husband and wife, unless they made agreements on a partial community of goods or entered into such a community by means of "common action", that is, for example a joint purchase.<sup>7</sup>

In Jewish matrimonial property law as it had developed in and from the Talmud, the balance was created by the fact that the wife remained in possession of her dowry and her goods which she had received by heritage or donation during her marriage; while married, the husband, however, remained the usufructuary and administrator of these goods.<sup>8</sup> In the course of time though the forms of matrimonial possession were modified by agreements between the spouses and/or their families and adapted to the requirements.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of the Mishnah around 200 c.e. the marriage contract [*ketubah*] obliged the man to pay 200 or 100 sus and—as a rule—some kind of extra money in case of widowhood or divorce. The exchange rate of this Babylonian coin into the contemporary currency is a *minhag*, that is, a local legal custom. As the Colonialian currency, into which the *ketubah* sum was converted in the oldest communities of Germany, had not been in circulation for years, the Rabbi Synod of Mainz tried to fix a standard rate of exchange in 1381—600 florins for the virgin and 300 for the widow or the divorced woman—, which apart from Cologne all communities along the river Rhine accepted.<sup>10</sup> The relevant *ketubah* sums varied in the course of time and from place to place: Thus, in Austria the *ketubah* amounted to 400 pounds or 200 pounds of Viennese currency, in Franconia, Bavaria and Suebia 100 or 50 pounds of silver. In the area of the Lower Rhine (*Galil hatakhton*) its value amounted to 60 florins for the virgin and 30 for the widow. In Regensburg it was 100 pounds in iron weight, that is, 200 marks of silver or 50 pounds, that is, 100 mark silver.<sup>11</sup> These sums were fixed at an extremely high level to make a divorce as difficult as possible for the husband.

In case of widowhood the problem arose that the payment of the *ketubah* could exhaust the means of the deceased and the orphans could remain without adequate provision. Thus, it can be assumed that the high amounts fixed by law were not paid to the widow or the divorced woman to the full extent; she received, however, the right of disposal of some part or

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<sup>7</sup> Some examples can be found in W. Brauneder, 'Frau und Vermögen im spätmittelalterlichen Österreich'. in *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag. International Congress Krems an der Donau*, pp. 573–85, here pp. 574f. and 578f.

<sup>8</sup> 'Art. matrimonial law (law of matrimonial property)', in *Jüdisches Lexikon*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2 (Berlin, 1927, repr. Frankfurt/M., 1987), Col. 264–267.

<sup>9</sup> See Z. W. Falk, 'Jewish Matrimonial Law in the Middle Ages', *Scripta Judaica* 6 (Oxford, 1966), p. 145.

<sup>10</sup> L. Finkelstein, *Jewish self-government*, pp. 75f. and p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> I. Bar Petachya, *Terumat haDeshen*, ed. I. Abitan (Jerusalem, 1990). Part 1: Meir bar Baruch of Rothenburg, *She'elot uTeshuvot*, No. 350 and Part 2: *Pesakim uKhetawim*, No. 232. I. A. Agus, 'The Development of the Money Clause in the Ashkenasic Ketubah', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* XXX/3 (1940), pp. 221–56, here p. 222.

the whole family fortune. Additionally, the spouses made agreements which in case of divorce compared the compensation with the dowry brought in by the bride.<sup>12</sup>

The system was largely identical with the Christian “system of wedding gifts”, according to which the man promised his wife a morning gift after the wedding night which was adequate to the value of her dowry. Also in this case the agreed sum was hardly ever paid in cash, but the widow received the right of usufruct with respect to property. When the woman died first, her fortune was handed over to the heirs. This cleverly thought-out system “required extensive and complicated fortune, namely cash as well as property which yielded returns. Thus, it is to be found among the bourgeoisie and above all among the nobility.”<sup>13</sup> To this we have to add the following: it was to be found among Jews as well, who apart from cash and property also possessed pawns and letters of credit which served as an excellent means of redeeming the *ketubah*.

It happened of course more often than we learn from documents that the bequeathed heritage did not cover the agreed *ketubah* sum or its equivalent. A detailed Hebrew document reports of proceedings instituted by Mindel, the widow of Izchak bar Elyakim, called Isak of Reditsch, before the rabbi court in Wiener Neustadt in 1462. The court confirmed that Mindel had not received a *ketubah* and that the money left was not equivalent to this amount. Therefore, the rabbis granted her the house of her deceased husband in the Judengasse in Wiener Neustadt.<sup>14</sup> Mindel sold the house to her brother Hayim bar Yehoshua, called Chaim Hoschman, *laut eines judischen kaufbriefs, so bei dem gruntpuch ligt* [according to a Jewish letter of purchase enclosed in the land register], that has not been preserved.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we do not know the sales price and the amount in dispute. From the easement of six denars it may be assumed that the house was of average size and quality, that is, it had a value of about 80 to 100 pounds.

About 20 years later the widow of the above mentioned Chaim Hoschman, Krondel bat Naftali, went before the rabbi court in Wiener Neustadt and sued for the payment of her *ketubah* as well. The three judges granted her a letter of credit of her husband of 50 Hungarian florins.<sup>16</sup> It may be assumed that she redeemed it personally, that is, she worked in the loan business. Moreover, she was granted the jointly acquired house in the Judengasse and was written into the *Gewere*, that is, the transfer of the property was registered by the lord of the manor, *laut eines Judischen Morgengabbriefs, so bey dem gruntpuch ligt* [according to a Jewish letter of morning gift enclosed in the land register], which *Ir nach Irs vermelten manns tod durch die Juden zugesprochen ist* [was granted to her by the Jews after the reported death of her husband].<sup>17</sup> This document has not been preserved either.

The redemption of the *ketubah* sum did obviously not always work that well, as the wife’s oath-taking with respect to her *ketubah* is separately addressed in some responses. Petachyah, called Kechel, the son of Rabbi Isserlein of Wiener Neustadt, for example, writes to the long-serving house factotum of his father, Yosef bar Moshe of Hoechstädt:

Great welfare be with thee, my dear colleague Haver Jossel, what you told me with regard to a woman who took an oath on her *ketubah* by putting her hand upon the Torah scroll [*Sefer Torah*] instead of taking the scroll into her hand. And there was somebody who wanted to force her to take a new oath by taking the object into her hand, but you were not of this opinion, for it was sufficient like that. You have in your hand the *Teshuvah* [Responsum] of my master and father, the *Gaon* [prince], for the blessed

<sup>12</sup> M. Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich*, Enzyklopaedie deutscher Geschichte 44 (Munich, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> W. Brauneder, ‘Frau und Vermögen im spätmittelalterlichen Österreich’, p. 582.

<sup>14</sup> Stadtarchiv Wiener Neustadt (in the following: StAWN), Ji 37/3 (2 Ijar 222 = 2. 4. 1462).

<sup>15</sup> M. Keil, ‘Der Liber Judeorum von Wiener Neustadt 1453–1500’, in *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, ed. M. Keil and K. Lohrmann (Vienna–Cologne, 1994), pp. 41–100, here p. 78, No. 102 (1469 VI 27). *Judisch* in this case means in Hebrew script.

<sup>16</sup> StAWN, Ji 37/1 (12, Siwan 248 = 23.5.1488).

<sup>17</sup> M. Keil, ‘Der Liber Judeorum’, pp. 78f., No. 103.

memory of the just, who answered the Rabbi Avraham Mendel in this case. My dear friend, you decided well and wonderful was your intent; thus, I was told by my master and father, the *Gaon*, for the blessed memory of the just, that the legal custom throughout the territory [*Medina*] of *Ashkenaz* was that when the wife took an oath on her *ketubah* the Torah scroll is opened for her and she puts her hand on it; this is sufficient . . .<sup>18</sup>

The Austrian land law also provides for an oath-taking for Christian women as a proof of their claims to the morning gift: *Auch sol ain iegleich fraw ir morgengab behaben mit irem aid auf iren pruesten* [As to her morning gift every woman shall take an oath by touching her breasts]. The formulas of oath-taking by touching female features like “breast and braid”, for instance, were also common in the *Schwabenspiegel* and other regulations concerning customary law.<sup>19</sup> Such formulas did not exist among the Jews, at least according to our present state of knowledge. Because of the religious formulas and the use of a holy object like the Torah scroll or the Torah in book form the oath had the quality of an ordeal for men and women.

In principle, Jewish as well as Christian women were admitted as plaintiffs and witnesses before a court. On the other hand they were held responsible for torts in the same way as men; in many cases, however, penal law was modified for women. Even in the last third of the thirteenth century when Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg vehemently protested against married women being admitted before a court and taking an oath, the independence of women with respect to fortune, which was also a criterion for tax payment and thus for the right of existence of the community, accelerated the improvement of the Jewish woman’s legal status.<sup>20</sup>

### **Jewish women before Christian courts**

In case of law suits with Christian debtors it was necessary to admit Jewish women as plaintiffs or witnesses before a court. As an introduction it has to be said that we only have few reports for trials involving women and that in most cases these women engaged a so-called *Fuersprech*, a legal representative. The reason for that might have been that it was better to be represented by a legally trained person, who could be compared with today’s lawyers—this was also common among Jewish men, as well as Christian men and women.<sup>21</sup>

The registrations in the town books show that not only Jewish men testified before a town court without restrictions, but also Jewish women could assert their claims without problems. In the present case from Wiener Neustadt—one out of several cases—it was about a proceeding involving a house which had fallen to the creditor—or rather to the female creditors—after the debts had not been paid. According to the customary law of Wiener Neustadt, Malka and her sister Sletlein had three so-called ‘bans’ pronounced against the house of Michel Weschin between February and September 1473. This meant that from then on the house could not be sold without the consent of the creditors. After the last term of payment had passed, the two sisters took possession of the house by symbolically taking one splinter. They had this legal act registered in the *Gedenkbuch* of the mayor Wolfgang Pillichdorfer on May 20, 1474:

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<sup>18</sup> J. Bar Moshe, ‘Leket Yosher’, ed. J. Freimann (Berlin, 1903, repr. Jerusalem, 1964), Part 2, p. 29, where the above mentioned responsum to Isserlein’s pupil Abraham Mendel is cited as well.

<sup>19</sup> Österreichisches Landrecht, art. 47, cited in G. Kocher, ‘Die Frau im spätmittelalterlichen Rechtsleben’, p. 483, note 47.

<sup>20</sup> L. Finkelstein, *Jewish self-government*, p. 378. Meir bar Baruch of Rothenburg, *She’elot uTeshuvot*, Vol. 1 (Cremona, 1557, repr. Jerusalem, 1986), No. 35.

<sup>21</sup> G. Kocher, ‘Die Frau im spätmittelalterlichen Rechtsleben’, p. 483.

*Als die Malka und Sletl Judin ein span auf dem Hawse der Michel Weschin haws fuerbracht haben, und darauf weitter umb Recht angerufft. Also ist zu Recht erkannt, daz sy das haws verkauffen sollen, und das vorerst dem andern tail zu wissen getan und ferrer bescheen solle, was Recht sey [As Malka and Sletl, Jewesses, took a splinter out of the house of Michel Weschin and asserted their right, it is thus approved by law that they shall sell the house, and this shall be made known to the other part at first and then be done, as the law says].<sup>22</sup>*

Before the two women took over the house they had to look for an agreement with the landowner of the house, the priest Andre Gaessel, because of the forfeit of pawns:

*Die sachen zwischen herrn Andre Gaessel an ayner und Malka und Sletlein den Judin an dem anderen taill ist auffgehebt mit Ir bayder will von hewt vber 14 tag, doch unentgelten yedem taill an seinem Rechten [The case between Andre Gaessel, on the one hand, and Malka and Sletlein the Jewesses, on the other, is set aside according to their own will from today on for the next 14 days, every part retaining his rights, however].<sup>23</sup>*

Also in the case of these two unequal litigation parties—a man and priest against two Jewish women—the sisters were granted their right. In this whole proceeding of the *verpot* [ban] and the taking of the splinter Jewish men and women were completely equal to Christian citizens.<sup>24</sup>

### Individual privileges for Jewish women

Privileges of Christian masters of Jews for individual Jews are relatively rare even for Jewish men; in most cases the representatives of the communities negotiated a privilege for the whole community. Individual privileges for “darlings” were not welcomed by rabbinical authorities, because it could follow that the tax relief for one rich community member increased the share of the others in the collective tax.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand the—most wealthy people who got individual privileges served as some kind of “buffer” between the community and the Christian authorities and could act as a mediator in case of threat and prevent calamities through bribes. An indication of the admittance of Jewish women are the individual privileges that some sovereigns issued to them—even if this scarcely happened. Around 1360, Count Meinhard VII of Goritia granted a very detailed privilege—which only exists in the form of a copy today—to the Jew Scharlat, widow of Schalom, and her mother Minz together with their servants.<sup>26</sup> He promised to protect her *als ander unser purger, diener und undertan* [as our other citizens, servants and subjects], they were allowed to loan on pawns and letters of credit with the usual interest rate of two pennies per pound and week—but not on free property and fiefs—and, what was no longer self-evident in the towns, *freie chaufmaney treiben als ander unser purger* [to have a free business as our other citizens]. If necessary, Meinhard granted them help before his court and mixed evidence. Should they be invited

<sup>22</sup> StAWN, Ii 40/3, p. 33 and 36. The ban proceeding is the same as usual.

<sup>23</sup> StAWN, Ii 40/1: Gorgen Schongrunter Burgermaister gedencpuch, a. d. 1473, p. 23 (1473 IX 9). That the house belonged to the church of Andre Gaessel, is learnt from another notice of this case: “*verfolgt, daz man Malka und Sletlein den Judin ainen span aus dem Hawse der Michel Weschin geben sol, so zu herrn Anndre Goessels Altar gehoert*” [pursued that a splinter from the house of Michel Weschin belonging to the altar of Andre Gaessel shall be given to Malka and Sletlein the Jewesses]. StAWN, Ii 40/2, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Keil, “. . . vormals bey der Judenn Zeit.” *Studien zur Geschichte der jüdischen Gemeinde Wiener Neustadt im Spätmittelalter*, unpublished Ph.D Dissertation. (Vienna, 1998), p. 105–108.

<sup>25</sup> *Terumat haDeshen*, Meir bar Baruch of Rothenburg, *She'elot uTeshuvot*, No. 341.

<sup>26</sup> Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Vienna (in the following: HHStA), Handschrift “Weiß” 594, fol. 62v-63r. See K. Lohrmann, *Judenrecht und Judenpolitik*, pp. 239f.

against their will to appear before a judge or bailiff who was subordinate to him they were allowed to turn to the count directly. Furthermore, Meinhard guaranteed the women that they would be protected against liability of the whole kinship: if someone of their family or servants violated the life and fortune of another, *denselben sol man darumb pessern, und sullen des die andern unvergolten sein* [he should be punished and the others not be made liable for his deeds].

What was important for the business activities of the privileged was the promise of free mobility. If they wanted to leave Goritian territory, they were given a safe-conduct for the towns of Laibach, Trieste and Cividale, and the count protected the property they had left behind for two months. In case he was not willing to prolong their privilege and expelled them from his territory therewith, he promised to help them with the recovery of their debts and give them a safe-conduct to the above-mentioned towns. Moreover, the women were able to inherit their property freely or give it away as a gift. For the granted rights they had to pay 4 marks of shillings to the count's chamber every September 4.

About four years later, on February 27, 1364, count Meinrad of Goritia granted another, in some points almost identical privilege to the Jews Paskul of Trieste and his brother-in-law Musch of Pettau. In one point it differs completely from Scharlat's: although the count gave them *schutz und scherm* [protection], he granted Paskul and Musch *alle die recht, die ander unser purger ze Gorcz in der stat habent, und sullen auch tun als ander unser purger und juden daselben* [all the rights which our other citizens of Goritia have in town, and they shall also do as our other citizens and Jews do there]. Klaus Lohrmann interprets this formula as the force for establishing a proper Jewish law in the county of Goritia.<sup>27</sup> The question arises, however, why only four years earlier in Scharlat's privilege not the least hint is included.

The reason probably lies in the fact that for Scharlat, as a woman, rights similar to those of citizens were not possible. She was granted the right to protection according to the existing Jewish laws, but as a woman she could by no means claim that her rights be adjusted to those of citizens—by the way you could not speak of a “citizen's right” for Paskul either. The regulation not to give loans on feuds and property was true for her as well as for her male colleagues; this meant that they were restricted in their ability to dispose of property and that they were excluded from the large, lucrative business transactions. Paskul, however, had to suffer even more restrictions concerning pawnbroking than Scharlat before him, although he was by far the better known moneylender—he gave high loans to the count of Goritia as well as later to his enemies, Hugo of Duino and Ulrich of Reifenberg. Apart from feuds and purchased property, he was also forbidden to pawn land, houses, vineyards, chalices and loose corn. With regard to the unfavorable, as well as the favorable regulations, Paskul's privilege had been further developed from Scharlat's privilege. It cannot be ascertained, however, if Meinrad had granted rights similar to those of citizens to Jews already in 1360; a privilege given to a Jewish man at the same time has not been preserved.<sup>28</sup>

As it has already been mentioned, individual privileges were rather rare before the reign of Frederick IV/III. Whereas some Jewish men in Austria were granted tax exemptions or reductions, only one single tax privilege to a woman has been preserved. This document exists only in a copy similar to a notice, which states that duke Albert V fixed the Jewish tax of Moederlin of Linz and her sons Jacob and Lesir for the next six years at 12 pounds of pennies. Half a year earlier Albert V had granted a similar privilege to two other Jews of Linz, Isserlein and Hetschlein, for eight years.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> HHStA, Handschrift “Weiß” 594, fol. 76v-77r. See K. Lohrmann, *Judenrecht und Judenpolitik*, p. 240.

<sup>28</sup> K. Lohrmann, *Judenrecht und Judenpolitik*, pp. 239, 242 and 260f.

<sup>29</sup> HHStA, Handschrift “Weiß” 8, fol. 113v., No. 314 and 313. See K. Lohrmann, *Judenrecht und Judenpolitik*, p. 295. He puts the privileges into context with the policy of Count Reinprecht of Walsee, the owner of the

What had led to the strengthening of the position of the woman, the Christian as well as the Jewish woman, was that they were able to have property and receive land, as well as houses by means of gift, heritage and purchase. From the 132 entries into the *Liber Judeorum* of Wiener Neustadt 18 concern women only, among them three daughters who jointly inherited a house. 46 women, that is, about one-third, received the title to a house or part of a house together with their husbands—a number similar to that of Christian couples. As widows they could dispose of the houses according to their own will. Purchases by women are documented, as well as the retention of the house instead of the *ketubah*.<sup>30</sup>

Jewish matrimonial law was recognized by the town authorities without restrictions. If a woman did not need a dwelling or if she preferred to live in a rented accommodation, she sold her part of the house: Machla, the widow of Abraham Hetschel, sold half a house to the physician Elchanan Hatschel; the purchase price is not mentioned.<sup>31</sup>

### **Jewish business-women**

With the *ketubah* sum she had received, the proceeds of a house she had sold or a letter of credit she had redeemed, a widow was given the chance to start a business of her own or to carry on a business without her husband. For late medieval Austria, and above all for the big Jewish communities of Vienna and Wiener Neustadt, it may be stated that after Plume of Klosterneuburg in the beginning of the fourteenth century there had not been any other outstanding female moneylender. Sara, the widow of Isserl (not the Rabbi Isserlein!), the most important moneylender of Wiener Neustadt around 1470 took over the business from her deceased husband, but only in some kind of loan cooperation with her sons-in-law Schalam, Hirschl and Judel.<sup>32</sup> In some German towns a few very high-ranking female moneylenders were in the loan business in the middle of the fourteenth century until the expulsion of the Jews.<sup>33</sup>

In general, a recession of high loans in the credit business set in in Austria from the end of the fourteenth century. The highest amounts were 6,800 pounds—granted only once by the family of Isserl; apart from that it was only 1,000 pounds. On the average the sums amounted to 100 or 200 pounds. The highest loans given by women did not exceed 200 pounds, their average sums amounted to 10 or 50 pounds, or even less, up to some minimal amounts of “groschen”.

### **Learned men—efficient women**

With a few exceptions higher amounts were loaned by the spouses or widows of rabbis.<sup>34</sup> Is it the highly praised Eschet chail, the “steadfast woman” who stands on her own two feet while her unworldly husband dedicates himself to religious studies? Even today this cliché,

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palace at Linz, which was friendly with respect to the duke.

<sup>30</sup> See note 17.

<sup>31</sup> M. Keil, ‘Der Liber Judeorum’, p. 80, entry No. 109.

<sup>32</sup> HHStA, Allgemeine Urkundenreihe (in the following: AUR), 1479 II 12.

<sup>33</sup> See M. Toch, ‘Die jüdische Frau im Erwerbsleben des Spätmittelalters’, in *Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Frau in Deutschland*, ed. J. Carlebach (Berlin, 1993), pp. 37–48.

<sup>34</sup> Apart from Sara, widow of Isserl of Wiener Neustadt, also the Viennese moneylenders Leiblein, widow of Petlein, and Sara, widow of Josef of Feldsberg, stand out because of the relatively high loan sums. Documentary proof of them is to be found in the *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Wien* (in the following: QuGStW) 1/3, p. 360 (register Lieblein); *Germania Judaica* III/2, ed. A. Maimon s.A., M. Breuer and Y. Guggenheim (Tübingen, 1995), p. 1601, No. 7 (Josef of Feldsberg).

nourished by the stories told by Isaac Bashevis Singer and other descriptors of the *shtetl* milieu, retrospectively shapes the picture of medieval scholars and their wives. Was the pair of opposites ‘learned men–efficient women’ indeed a popular way of living already in the late Middle Ages?

The ideal of a woman who nourishes her husband, who for his part neglects his family duties, and her children by working on her own has been existing since Talmudic times—think of Rachel, the wife of Rabbi Akiba—, and it still exists today. Also in the Middle Ages this type of woman played a certain role. Thus, Rabbi Eliezer ben Yehudah of Worms wrote the following poem of mourning for his wife Dulze: “She fed and clothed him with grace so that he could promote his Torah studies and fulfill good deeds; her work provides him with books.”<sup>35</sup>

This grateful poem strikingly reminds us of the *ketubah* formula, vice versa, however. There the husband promises to work for his wife, to nourish and to clothe her. The importance of studying the Torah partly supersedes the duties of a husband and puts the wife in his place in economic affairs. The study of the Torah is the only “profession” because of which the man may neglect his duties of intercourse and reproduction for some years. As to business voyages, the woman may object.<sup>36</sup>

The black-and-white picture of an “efficient woman” and an “unworldly scholar” would have to be examined in the light of the reality of Jewish life in late medieval Austria. When we consult the still preserved documents concerning Austrian rabbis and their wives, we find a subtly differentiated picture:

*Neither the rabbi nor his wife appear as moneylenders*

This is the case with Rabbi Isserlein bar Petachya (ca. 1390–1460) of Wiener Neustadt. He came from a family of well-known rabbis and bankers in Austria, his uncle Hetschlein of Herzogenburg was the best-known moneylender of the fourteenth century apart from David Steuss. Another uncle, Rabbi Aron Bluemlein of Krems and Vienna, died during torture in the Viennese *Gezerah* of 1421.<sup>37</sup> Isserlein himself is only mentioned twice as a moneylender in minor loan transactions—in 1405 and 1415, when he was still young—, once in cooperation with his aunt Roeslein, the widow of his uncle Venzlein.<sup>38</sup> His biographer Jossel of Hoehstaedt mentions hints at further loan transactions, but these could have only been minor amounts.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> M. Toch, ‘Die jüdische Frau im Erwerbsleben’, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> R. Biale, *Woman and Jewish Law. An Exploration of Women’s Issues in Halachic Sources* (New York, 1984), p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> For Isserlein see A. Berliner, ‘Rabbi Israel Isserlein—ein Lebens- und Zeitbild’, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 18 (1869), pp. 130–135, 177–181, 224–233, 269–277, 315–323 and See M. Keil, “. . . vormals bey der Judenn Zeit”, pp. 192–197. For his family see H. Grahammer, ‘Hetschel von Herzogenburg und seine Familie’, in *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, ed. M. Keil and K. Lohrmann, pp. 100–20.

<sup>38</sup> On March 11, 1405 Heinrich Pinzer and his wife Elspet pawned the excess of the *Burgrecht* (title) to a vineyard in front of the ‘Schottentor’ for 9 pounds of pennies with a daily interest of 3 pounds of pennies from the term of payment (11.11.). Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (in the following: WStLA), Grundbuch 470, fol. 167v., printed in R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern zur Geschichte der Wiener Juden in Deutschösterreich* 10, p. 387, No. 1280. Ten years later, on November 22, 1415, Niklas Lederer and his wife Kathrei pawned to Isserlein and Roeslein, *Phenczlein witiß von Herzogenburg* [the widow of Phenczlein of Herzogenburg], her house in front of the ‘Stubentor’ for 66 pounds of Viennese pennies with a daily interest of 2 pennies per pound and week. WStLA, Grundbuch 36, fol. 216, printed in R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 510, No. 1708.

<sup>39</sup> M. Keil, ‘Der Liber Judeorum’, p. 32; II, p. 16.



Either Isserlein's fortune was on such a solid basis that he did not have to work as a moneylender or—what seems more probable—he acted as a silent partner of a loan cooperation with other Jews and/or Christians. He might have given some capital to a Jew who made business with it sharing profits and losses. As a rabbi, however, Isserlein dedicated himself to his profession as a scholar and was active in many areas as a legal expert or judge, and he had a large *yeshivah*.

Isserlein married a woman named Schoendlein; we do not know of which family she came from. They had four sons together, Petachya (called Kechel), Abraham, Schalom and Aron, and one daughter called Muskat, who died at an early age. His wife Schoendlein did not give any loans either; we only know her from the biography of her husband. Schoendlein might have been the classic type of a *rebetsn*, highly estimated by her husband as well as by other community members. She might have been the daughter of a rabbi or she might have learned a lot from her husband in the 'yeshivah' atmosphere of her house, because her knowledge superseded by far the education of average women. She lived in her own room, which she examined on her own for *khomets* before Pesach and was trusted therein.<sup>40</sup>

On behalf of her husband she wrote a rabbi letter of response in Jewish-German to a woman with a *Nidah* problem (impurity during menstruation). The woman, who suffered from abdominal bleeding, might have felt ashamed to turn to a man with this question. Thus, she wrote to Isserlein's wife at first, and Isserlein had his answer sent back through Schoendlein.<sup>41</sup> Schoendlein died before her husband; we have no evidence of whether she worked in the loan business or not.

*Both the rabbi and his wife were active in loan business transactions*

This constellation becomes especially evident with regard to the couple Meir bar Baruch Halewi of Fulda/Erfurt and Hansuess. Rabbi Meir worked as a rabbi in Vienna from 1393 to 1406 and became known because of his reorganization of the tasks of rabbis, especially in the field of matrimonial law.<sup>42</sup> He was married with the best catch a Jew could make in late medieval Austria: Hansuess, the daughter of David Steuss, the "Rothschild of the Middle Ages". For Rabbi Meir it was already the second marriage; he had the sons David and Salman and some daughters from an unknown woman; two sons died at an early age. He must have been at least 65 years old, when he moved to Vienna after an eventful life as a rabbi.<sup>43</sup> Hansuess was also a woman of about forty or more, because her father David Steuss was born around the year 1320. Meir might not have been her first husband, although we do not know her first husband by name. During her marriage with Meir Hansuess never called herself after her husband, but after her famous father: *des Steussen tochter* [the daughter of Steuss].

The age of the spouses made it impossible for them to have children, although an entry into the *Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* suggests it: In January 1404 the furrier Peter Zistel pawned to Hansuess, *des Stoesleins tochter* [the daughter of Stoeslein], for six and a half pounds the overcharge of a house which he had already pawned to *Maister Mayren von Erffuert, yerem man, und Salman, irem suen* [master Meir of Erfurt, her husband, and Salman, her or their son].<sup>44</sup> This is, however, the only proof for Salman as son of Hansuess. In other

<sup>40</sup> M. Keil, 'Der Liber Judeorum', I, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> M. Keil, 'Der Liber Judeorum', II, p. 19f.: "*Gar vil guter Jor, die müssen dir werdn wor, wi du gesunt bis, as du mir host lassn schreiben...*" [A lot of good years which have to become true for you, when you are well, as was written to me on your behalf...]. We learn therefrom that the woman who had asked the question was unable to write.

<sup>42</sup> *Germania Judaica* III/2, pp. 1603f., No. 31.

<sup>43</sup> His year of birth is said to be around 1325. *Germania Judaica* III/2, pp. 1063f.

<sup>44</sup> *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann (Vienna–Leipzig, 1908), with a

documents he is either mentioned with his name only—which makes his relationship to them doubtful anyway—, or as son of Meir.<sup>45</sup>

Hansuess might have had no children of her own—a real catastrophe for a Jewish woman, and above all a woman from such a well-known family—, or she had daughters who called themselves after their husbands and thus cannot be traced by name. In any case, she married a widower who was much older than her and the father of a family in a “barter” of spiritual and financial wealth, that is, the reputation of a rabbi against material wealth. We may assume that the Steuss family asserted its influence in the *Kehila* when making Meir rabbi of the Viennese community.

Rabbi Meir of Erfurt married into a upper class family, whose lifestyle may be compared to that of the Christian nobility, and was inspired by it, as was the upper class bourgeoisie in a town, and probably also motivated by feelings of competition. We can well imagine the luxurious dwelling of the Steuss family similar to the house “Zum Brunnenhof” in Zurich: As it was found out during renovation a short time ago the representative hall of the house of the Jewish widow and well-known moneylender Minne and her sons Moses and Gumprecht was decorated with colored frescoes according to motives of songs of the minstrel Neidhart of Reuenthal, peasants’ dance and falconry. The trim above shows coats of arms of Christian noble families with a Hebrew caption.<sup>46</sup> Hansuess might have been accustomed to similar splendor and continued this lifestyle during her marriage. She had one of the biggest and most expensive houses in the Jewish quarter of Vienna. Duke Albert V sold it twelve years after the Viennese *Gezerah*, the expulsion and killing of Viennese Jews in 1420/21, to Mosman, citizen of Vienna, for the considerable amount of 200 pounds.<sup>47</sup>

The business activities of the two spouses were diverse and differentiated. Both loaned alone as well as with business partners, but only twice did they act jointly. Immediately after Meir’s arrival in Vienna, Siman Viviancz pawned his house in the Baeckerstraße for 144 pounds and 20 pennies of Viennese currency, an amount that was clearly above their later average loan. The second joint loan only amounted to 60 pounds.<sup>48</sup>

Meir bar Baruch Halewi is chiefly mentioned as *Meister Meir von Frankfurt* in the documents and debt book entries, and only twice is he mentioned as *des Steussen eidem* [Steuss’ son-in-law], which showed that he was recognized as an independent personality, an honor that a “normal” son-in-law would not have achieved. The loans which he mostly gave as an individual ranged from three to 68 and a half pounds; the sums were a bit higher when he was in cooperation either with his son Salman, his son-in-law Eisak or a certain Selikman of Bruenn.<sup>49</sup>

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specimen of handwriting (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutsch-Österreich 1), p. 66, No. 243.

<sup>45</sup> *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, p. 136, relates him to Hansuess and Meir of Erfurt (parents) in the register. I. Schwarz, *Das Wiener Ghetto. Seine Häuser und seine Bewohner* (Vienna–Leipzig, 1909) (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutsch-Österreich 2), p. 152, note 8, considers it much more probable “that Salman is either his or her son from his or her first marriage”. The documentary proof speaks for the first variant.

<sup>46</sup> D. Wild and R. Böhmer, ‘Die spätmittelalterlichen Wandmalereien im Haus “Zum Brunnenhof” in Zürich und ihre jüdischen Auftraggeber’, *Zürcher Denkmalpflege*, report 1995/96, ed. Hochbaudepartement of the town of Zurich (Zurich, 1997), pp. 15–33, here above all pp. 17ff. and pp. 28f.

<sup>47</sup> It was called the Cantorey, perhaps after her deceased husband’s work. I. Schwarz, *Das Wiener Ghetto*, pp. 93f., No. 402 (1433 VI 30).

<sup>48</sup> In R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, S. 206, No. 649 (1393 IV 18) and pp. 233f., No. 747 (1394 V 29).

<sup>49</sup> In R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, Register, p. 601 (Mayr) and *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, Register, p. 135 (Mair). Selikmann and his wife Slana or Slaffa appeared as moneylenders in Vienna several times. See Sh. Spitzer, *The Jews in Austria in the Middle Ages till the Reformation (1520)*, unpublished Ph.D. Diss. (Ramat Gan, 1974), p. 139, No. 897 and p. 142, No. 919a.

What does not fit into this scheme is a loan of 200 pounds to the Abbot of the Scots Thomas in August 1403. This document preserved in the *Wiener Grundbuch* [Viennese land register] is five times longer than other entries and confirms in very great detail the usual agreements of deadlines and interests, the liability with all monasterial property, the provision of two knights and two horses in case of non-payment and the affirmation *mit unsern trewen und pey unserm orden* [with our followers and the consent of our order] that he would not ask any spiritual or secular authority for discharge of debts.<sup>50</sup>

This loan, which was outstandingly high for Rabbi Meir's means, could be compared to another loan in volume as well as in accuracy; only a few months earlier, his wife Hansuess loaned 132 Hungarian florins or ducats to the same abbot Thomas under the same conditions, which the abbot swore and sealed in good faith.<sup>51</sup> This was also by far the highest loan she gave as an individual. Her average amounts were even lower than the ones of her husband, between five and twelve pounds. Before her marriage she granted higher loans of 200 and 218 pounds, in 1388 and 1389, together with a certain Joslein of Regensburg.<sup>52</sup> Further business partners were a Mendlein, *Moidleins eidam von Tulln* [son-in-law of Moidlein of Tulln], and for a loan her "colleague" Rifka, the wife of the second Viennese Rabbi Abraham Klausner. The two women gave a credit of 46 pounds and 6 shillings, that is, an average sum, to Hans Perman of Vienna, who pawned them his house in the Singerstrasse.<sup>53</sup> Hansuess' clients were Viennese citizens and their widows, as were the clients of her husband.

As already mentioned, Hansuess did not call herself after her husband after she had got married, as would be proper for a married woman, but after her father David Steuss, who was much better known in Austria. Even after Meir's death—he was last mentioned in documents in January 1406, she in 1410—she remained *Steussens tochter* [Steuss' daughter] and did not, as other women of her position, change her epithet into widow of Rabbi Meir. The cliché of "the woman who nourishes the learned man" does not fit this couple, who led an almost independent business life from each other, either.

#### *The wife of a rabbi is the more active partner in the loan business*

Meir of Erfurt's colleague, Abraham Klausner worked as a rabbi in Vienna from about 1395 until his death between June 1408 and January 1410.<sup>54</sup> Not much is known about the family he came from, but as he was the brother-in-law of Rabbi Shalom of Neustadt, he certainly belonged to the establishment of the Austrian rabbi and banker families. We do not know anything about the family of his wife Rifka either. They had a son Schaul, a daughter Mirl and two other daughters; one of the latter was married to Salman, the son of Rabbi Meir Halewi. The name of the second son-in-law was Baruch or Werach, son of Eislein of Wiener Neustadt—also a prominent moneylender.<sup>55</sup>

The business activities of Abraham Klausner were within negligible boundaries. Two loans of five pounds and one of ridiculous three pounds were granted by him alone, a loan of

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<sup>50</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 354, No. 1171 (1403 VIII 20).

<sup>51</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 350, No. 1159 (1403 III 13).

<sup>52</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, Register, p. 594 (Hansuess) and *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, Register, p. 135 (Hansasin). Joslein of Regensburg also gave her own loans in Vienna. See Sh. Spitzer, *The Jews in Austria in the Middle Ages*, p. 79, No. 492.

<sup>53</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 381, No. 1262 (1404 XII 23).

<sup>54</sup> *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, pp. 77f., No. 257; Ryfko, Maister Abrahams witib [Ryfko, widow of Master Abraham]. On October 16, 1408 Rifka was mentioned as Abraham's housewife: R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 431, No. 1436. The document of November 12, 1408 (pp. 431f., No. 1438) still mentions Abraham, but it might refer to an earlier transaction.

<sup>55</sup> *Germania Judaica* III/2, p. 1601, No. 2.

20 pounds was granted jointly with his wife and his son.<sup>56</sup> Once the couple joined in a loan business and loaned 37 florins, for which Larencz der Holzscheuffel pawned them the overcharge of his house at the 'Kienmarkt'.<sup>57</sup>

His wife Rifka was, as far as we know, not working as a business-woman before her marriage. As *maistrin* [mastress], as she is called in a document, she granted much higher loans than her husband, namely between 13 and 77 pounds; in total we only have proof of six transactions between March 1404 and November 1408.<sup>58</sup> After Abraham's death she became more active in the loan business and granted at least four loans between 6 and 70 pounds a year as an individual. Her highest credit went to Ulrich Haug von Stillfried, who pawned two houses in the 'Kaerntnerstrasse' for 120 Hungarian florins to her.<sup>59</sup>

As a married woman she had only worked jointly with her husband and her son; as a widow she entered numerous business cooperations with relatives: with the brother-in-law of her deceased husband, Rabbi Shalom of Neustadt and his sons Judlein and Jona, as well as with her son-in-law Werach and her sister Perlein. These jointly granted sums amounted to between 50 and 260 pounds.<sup>60</sup>

It seems as if Rifka functioned as some kind of intermediary for the moneylenders of Wiener Neustadt and Vienna. The partnership with her colleague Hansuess has already been mentioned.

While her husband was alive, Rifka was indeed the more active business partner. She could most likely fit the assumption that she supported her husband through her business activities—perhaps with his capital—, at least after her children had grown up. After the death of Abraham Klausner she set up a real widow's business. Her last transaction is proven to have taken place in October 1418—it is to be hoped that she died of a natural death before 1420 and was not among the women burnt at the stakes.<sup>61</sup>

Let us now have a short look at other prominent rabbis' wives. The wife of Shalom of Neustadt of whom we do not even know the name, does not appear as moneylender, the business transactions were carried out by her husband and the two sons Jona and Judlein. As already mentioned, the women of Isserlein of Neustadt's family, daughter-in-laws and other female relatives, also played no or only a minor role in the credit business. His daughter-in-law Redel granted minor loans to the prostitutes of Wiener Neustadt, a fact that was not considered immoral.<sup>62</sup>

His cousin Plume, daughter of Rabbi Aron Bluemlein and married with Rabbi Juda Murklein of Marburg, issued only one document, already as a widow, but not in a business transaction.<sup>63</sup> Isserlein's sons did not become active as moneylenders either.

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<sup>56</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 307, No. 1007 (1399 VIII 17), p. 403, No. 1339 (1406 II 15), p. 408, No. 1355 (1406 V 26) and p. 414, No. 1376 (1407 I 8).

<sup>57</sup> He had already pawned this overcharge to the prominent moneylender and tax collector Jeklein, son of Hetschlein of Herzogenburg, for 72 pounds of Viennese pennies. R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 431, No. 1438 (1408 XI 12). In this loan Abraham Klausner is last mentioned.

<sup>58</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 365, No. 1207 (1404 III 7): *Maistrin der judinn, Abrahams hausfraw des juden* [Maistrin the Jewess, housewife of Abraham the Jew]; p. 384, No. 1273 (1405 II 19), p. 405, No. 1346 (1406 III 17), p. 427, No. 1423 (1408 IV 2), p. 431, No. 1436 (1408 X 16).

<sup>59</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 462, No. 1544 (1411 VI 21) *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, Register, p. 136 (Rifka). Here she is already mentioned as Abraham's widow from June 1408.

<sup>60</sup> R. Geyer and L. Sailer, *Urkunden aus Wiener Grundbüchern*, p. 482, No. 1612 (1413 III 1), p. 483, No. 1613 (1413 III 1), p. 492, No. 1646 (1413 XII 20), p. 507, No. 1698 (1415 IV 10).

<sup>61</sup> The Jewish-German report of the "Viennese Gezerah" in *Das Judenbuch der Scheffstrasse zu Wien* (1389–1420), ed. A. Goldmann, pp. 125–33, esp. p. 131. See S. Krauss, *Die Wiener Geserah vom Jahre 1421* (Vienna–Leipzig, 1920).

<sup>62</sup> J. Bar Moshe, 'Leket Yosher', II, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> She assigned the rights of some acres granted to her by court to a citizen of Marburg. Steirisches Landesarchiv (in the following: StLA), Privaturkunden No. 5790 (1442 IV 27). Printed (without Hebrew confirmation) in A.

Where are the efficient women who made the undisturbed study of the Torah and the performance of the rabbi's duties possible for their husbands? In late medieval Austria we really do not find this type of woman. As almost all rabbis at this time came from wealthy families and/or married into such families, they did not need to earn their living and thus did not depend on the business activities of their wives; they might not even have wanted it.

Wives of rabbis made loan transactions when they themselves came from moneylender families, brought their own capital with them and carried on practicing their profession after their marriage. These women had a basic education in writing and counting and they certainly knew some Hebrew. Some signed their letters of debt with their Hebrew signature. When women—above all widows—issued documents on their own, it may be said from the few documents still preserved that in the German part the name of the husband or the deceased husband is added to the name of the woman, as it is usual with the Christians as well. In Hebrew, however, she either signed with the name of her father or as widow of her deceased husband. The daughter of Rabbi Aron Bluemlein, called “Plumel” after her grandmother, issued her document with *Ich Plumel die Judin, maister Murckleins wittib zu Marchburg* [I Plumel, the Jewess, widow of master Murcklein of Marburg], the Hebrew confirmation written in her own hand was signed by her with “Plimel, daughter of Rabbi Aharon the martyr, of blessed memory”.<sup>64</sup> *Priba Judin, des Juda Keschl wittib zu Marchburg* [Priba, Jewess, widow of Keschl of Marburg], signed with “Priba, widow [*Almanah*] of Juda, of blessed memory, of Marpurk”.<sup>65</sup> Also in this case legal practice seemed to grant some scope; as we have already seen, in German documents also Hansuess never named herself after her husband, but always after her father.

Although wives and heirs were mentioned in letters of debt and purchase, it rarely happened that they were signed by them in their own hand. An exception to that is the receipt of Muschel of Friesach, his housewife and his heirs of a redemption of the cupbearers Niklas and Hans of Osterwitz. Muschel's wife signed in Hebrew with “Mirl, daughter of Moshe, for the blessed memory of the just”.<sup>66</sup> Also in this case the Jewish woman gave the name of her father, which was in contrast to the Christian legal practice.

Apart from the Hebrew confirmation of Plume of Marburg, the receipt of Roeslein, wife of Haeslein of Friesach, also proves that women could now and then write more than their signature in Hebrew. Roeslein confirmed concisely and in set phrases that her brother-in-law “Shemariah, son of the honored Mordechai”—he was also called Freudmann—had deposited two documents with her.<sup>67</sup> Some women also had a command of some kind of “business Hebrew”, which they had learned from their fathers or husbands or even from their

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Rosenberg, *Beitraege zur Geschichte der Juden in Steiermark* (Vienna–Leipzig, 1914) (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutsch-Österreich 6), p. 167, No. 19.

<sup>64</sup> The formula of confirmation was as follows: “I the undersigning, have everybody known that everything that was written above in pagan [Aramaic] script is my will and my request. Thus spoken by Plimel, daughter of Morenu haRaw Aron, the martyr, of blessed memory.” The epithet of her father refers to the fact that he was killed by torture in the Viennese *Gezerah*.

<sup>65</sup> StLA, Privaturkunde No. 7252c (1468 VI 28).

<sup>66</sup> HHStA, AUR 1372 XI 9.

<sup>67</sup> This confirmation of December 5, 1367 is enclosed in a document of Shemaryah/Freudmann. HHStA, AUR 1368 VII 15. Printed in Sh. Spitzer, ‘Hebräische Urkunden des 14. Jahrhunderts aus Kärnten’, *Carinthia* I, Vol. 174 (1984), pp. 141–54, here pp. 146ff., No. 3. At this time Shemaryah, called Freudmann, was still a Jew, shortly afterwards he had himself baptized with the name Paul. His father Mordechai was probably Merchel of Murau, mentioned in documents from 1329 onwards. See W. Wadl, *Geschichte der Juden in Kärnten im Mittelalter. Mit einem Ausblick bis zum Jahre 1867* (Klagenfurt, 1981) (Das Kärntner Landesarchiv 9), pp. 193–209, and M. Keil, “Petachja, genannt Zecherl”. *Jüdische Namen und Beinamen im deutschen Sprachraum des Spätmittelalters*, in *Personennamen und Identität. Namengebung und Namengebrauch als Anzeiger individueller Bestimmung und gruppenbezogener Zuordnung*, ed. R. Härtel (Graz, 1997) (Grazer Grundwissenschaftliche Forschungen 3 = Schriftenreihe der Akademie Friesach 2), pp. 119–46, here pp. 144f.

mothers who worked in the loan business.

All women mentioned here belonged to the upper class though, they were daughters of community rabbis or other leading members of the Jewish society, who united a profound religious education with a solid knowledge of business. Many female members of the lower classes, most of them were servants, also did grant loans, but only to a minimal extent and rarely safeguarded by a document or a register entry. The knowledge of their circumstances of living is thus as poor as their earnings must have been. In *responsa* literature they appear as witnesses or, what happens even more rarely, as acting persons. A further source for their activities in everyday life are the depictions in illuminated manuscripts and other pictorial sources, the evaluation of which has not been made yet from this point of view.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The author plans the evaluation of a picture data bank of the 'Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit' in Krems (Lower Austria) within the scope of a research project on Jewish women in late medieval Austria.