

## INTRODUCTION

“She considers a field and buys it; / with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.” Medieval Jews and Christians would have recognized these words as part of a twenty-two-verse description of an ideal wife found at the end of the biblical book of Proverbs—a sacred text shared by the two communities.<sup>1</sup> The “woman of valor” described in Proverbs is wise and pious, but first and foremost, she is deeply invested in her labor both within and beyond the home. She provides food for her household and manages agricultural estates; she spins and sews both to clothe her family and to rake in profits by selling her wares. This book traces the experiences of the Jewish and Christian women who lived and worked in medieval Catalan cities, women who likewise helped support their households “with the fruit of their hands.”

The central argument of this book is that religious identity, combined with other factors including gender and socioeconomic status, played a crucial role in determining what kinds of work were open to women. In Catalan cities, Jewish women nearly always played a less visible role than Christian women. This pattern only changed during occasional moments of Jewish communal change and crisis, during which Jewish women briefly took on a more prominent economic role. Women who belonged to the Christian majority, in contrast, experienced more stability: their labor responsibilities were less thoroughly transformed by short-term changes.

## Defining Women's Work

Elite men in the Middle Ages often dismissed the meaningful economic contributions women made to their households. Catalan moralist author Francesc Eiximenis (ca. 1330–1409) encouraged women to occupy themselves with tasks such as sewing, spinning, and weaving, but only as a means of avoiding “standing at the windows”—an act he associated with spying on one’s neighbors, engaging in idle gossip, and even committing adultery. By concentrating instead on labor, virtuous women successfully avoided such sins.<sup>2</sup> All too frequently, historians have reproduced this idea that women who did not practice a particular trade “kept busy”—not that they worked.

Christine de Pizan (1364–ca. 1430), Eiximenis’s younger contemporary in France, offers a valuable corrective to medieval and modern assumptions about precisely what constitutes women’s work. According to Christine’s Lady Reason, “If you care to pay attention, you will see that all, or at least most, women are so assiduous, careful, and diligent in running their households and providing all things to the best of their ability that it sometimes irritates certain lazy husbands: they think their wives push them too much and prod them to do what they should be doing in the first place.”<sup>3</sup> Christine acknowledged women’s economic management of their households, and their husbands, as a full-time (albeit often unrecognized) job.

Most scholars of medieval Europe have characterized women’s work in this era as low-paid, low-status labor.<sup>4</sup> *The Fruit of Her Hands* complicates this picture by expanding the definition of women’s work to encompass the management of household assets as well as waged labor and artisanal production. Studies of women’s involvement in skilled, high-status trades have rarely incorporated their management of household resources, while scholarly treatments that address women’s control of assets seldom integrate women’s managerial responsibilities into larger conversations around women’s labor.<sup>5</sup> By placing women’s management of financial resources in the broader context of women’s work, I highlight the rich and varied spectrum of labor options available to women in medieval Catalan cities. Urban women of different socioeconomic strata ventured into local markets as creditors and debtors, buyers and sellers of real estate, investors in local and international commerce, artisans and tradeswomen, household servants and wet nurses. Taken together, these activities demonstrate that women across social strata performed work that benefited their households and contributed to urban economies.

Families and communities in Catalan cities, I argue, relied on women’s managerial labor under certain circumstances, but they also sought to tightly

control women's ability to participate in high-status and stereotypically male work. Although the men who shaped legal cultures envisioned men as responsible for the financial well-being of their households, their efforts to safeguard familial wealth sometimes required wives and widows to work to support their families.<sup>6</sup> However, as other scholars have emphasized, a patriarchal "glass ceiling" limited women's ability to engage independently in the most lucrative forms of work.<sup>7</sup> I build on this scholarship by exploring the tensions between the ordinary limitations on women's labor and the reliance on women's potential, if necessary, to support their families through their work in place of the men of the household.

This study assumes women's agency, insofar as it understands the working women of medieval Catalan cities as making choices that they believed would benefit themselves, their families, or their communities.<sup>8</sup> However, the assumption of women's agency does not mean that women fought to undermine patriarchal structures; many women maneuvered within such structures without questioning the gendered norms that shaped their lives. Moreover, although women exercised agency, most did so within a gender system that circumscribed the spectrum of choices available to them—not only as women but also as Christians or Jews and as members of the mercantile, artisan, or laboring classes.

### **Jews, Christians, and Gender**

This study adopts an intersectional approach that analyzes how categories including gender, religious or communal identity, and socioeconomic status combined to shape the social and economic options available to women. Increasingly, feminist medieval scholarship has emphasized the importance of intersectionality and attention to differences among women.<sup>9</sup> This book explores the diverse experiences of women in medieval Catalan cities, with an emphasis on how women's work was shaped by their faith communities: Jewish and Christian women's work followed distinctly different patterns.

The disparities between Jewish and Christian women's work are surprising, given the wealth of scholarship that has emphasized similarities among women of different faiths in the Mediterranean and beyond.<sup>10</sup> Especially in the Iberian Peninsula, the supposed resemblances among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women have supported the traditional view of the Jews of Sepharad (Spain) as deeply integrated into surrounding Muslim and Christian societies.<sup>11</sup> Increasingly, however, scholars of medieval Iberia have eschewed

the utopian implications of the term *convivencia* in favor of an emphasis on its literal meaning, “living together”—a practical coexistence that created a shared culture yet simultaneously relied on the creation and reinforcement of intercommunal boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Contact between Jews and Christians was part of everyday reality in medieval Catalan cities. People of different faiths lived literally side by side, not only in the same cities but at times in the same neighborhoods as well. Jewish quarters in late medieval Iberia were often located in the center of cities; they were neither exclusively Jewish nor the sole site of Jewish residency. Economic interactions required regular contact between Christians and Jews and created interfaith relationships that could be neutral or even friendly in character.<sup>13</sup> Such proximity helped create a shared culture, as Elka Klein has compellingly argued in her work on thirteenth-century Barcelona.<sup>14</sup>

Yet togetherness was a necessity rather than an ideal, and commonalities were constantly contested. Brian Catlos has suggested that the term *conveniencia*, “convenience,” more accurately characterizes the interdependent yet hierarchical relationships that Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula developed out of pragmatism.<sup>15</sup> Iberianists have increasingly emphasized the myriad ways in which governing elites and ordinary people—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—worked to create and reinforce the boundaries between faiths and embraced the construction and maintenance of distinct identities as essential to their community’s strength and cohesion.<sup>16</sup> Boundary marking and common culture were not antithetical in medieval Iberia. Concepts, values, and practices shared across communities were even employed in the service of vitriolic religious polemics that aggressively reified interfaith divisions.<sup>17</sup>

By delineating the differences between Jewish and Christian women, this book contributes to the rich scholarship on the complexities of interreligious interaction in the medieval Mediterranean in general and the Iberian Peninsula in particular. Christians, Jews, and Muslims closely resembled one another in their shared use of women’s bodies as boundary markers and as meaningful sites upon which to express anxieties about boundary violation. Concerns about sexual boundaries between communities were expressed through fears over the penetration of women’s bodies—and thereby also, symbolically, communal borders—by men from outside the community.<sup>18</sup> Here, I explore another way in which women functioned as boundary markers: families and communities expected the laboring bodies of women to conform to the legal and cultural norms that they understood as defining their community. Jews and Christians might have shared many ideas about

women and gender, but the male leaders of both communities crafted distinctly gendered norms surrounding women's control of assets and expected women to behave accordingly.

Women's access to financial resources mattered to Jewish communal leaders because it was inextricably linked to Jewish self-governance. Christians and Jews in the medieval world were subject to divergent, albeit overlapping, legal systems—and when Jewish and Christian legal professionals made choices that shaped women's labor in the public sphere, they were influenced by the experience of belonging to a religious minority or majority community. Royal privileges endowed Jewish communal authorities with jurisdiction over most internal affairs; since inheritance, marriage, and divorce were almost by definition internal matters, Jewish communities had more autonomy in the area of family law than in almost any other sphere.<sup>19</sup> Local interpretations of *halakhah*, Jewish law, dictated whether women inherited wealth and whether they could manage their own or their husbands' assets during marriage.

Women's control over financial resources, and therefore also the work options available to them, became an arena for the resistance to acculturation promoted by male rabbinic authorities and carried out by Jewish men and even some women. Rabbinic elites did not actively seek to disempower women, but prevalent gender norms meant that few of the men who belonged to the economic and political elite of local Jewish communities challenged restrictions that limited women's access to wealth. As a result, women's work could serve as a focal point for the construction and maintenance of intercommunal boundaries while only rarely disturbing men's family financial strategies.

While the economic restrictions imposed on Catalan Jewish women had a firm basis in *halakhah*, a comparison with northern Europe suggests that local factors were paramount. Both quantitative social histories and individual case studies demonstrate that Jewish women in medieval northern Europe worked professionally in credit and trade, sometimes with substantial profits.<sup>20</sup> The contrast between the economic roles played by Jewish women in Ashkenaz (northern Europe) and Sepharad is strikingly mirrored in the two Jewish communities' interpretive use of the ideal wife of Proverbs 31. In Ashkenaz, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (d. 1238) modeled his elegy for his murdered wife, Dolce, on this biblical text. In his idyllic description of his wife, he portrayed her as laboring not only to support her husband while he studied Torah but also to manage a larger household that included both their children and her husband's students. Eleazar emphasized the profits Dolce's work wrought for their household and the Jewish community, rather than the details of her economic endeavors. However, he nevertheless

portrayed financial management skills as essential in a good wife—and the “fruit of her hands” as a valued contribution to their household.<sup>21</sup>

While Eleazar’s elegy envisioned the economically active wife of Proverbs 31 as a model for the flesh-and-blood women around him, the commentary tradition from the Iberian Peninsula and southern France tended to interpret the figure allegorically, rather than linking her to real women, or to emphasize qualities other than her economic prowess, such as her piety and her obedience to her husband.<sup>22</sup> The lived differences between the Jewish women of Ashkenaz and those of Sepharad mirror the distinct interpretations and applications of halakhic and biblical models for womanhood across communal lines. Local context is therefore crucial to understanding why Jewish women in Catalan cities found their work options more restricted than those of their Christian neighbors or their coreligionists to the north.

## Regional Context

Catalonia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a core territory of the Crown of Aragon, a federative monarchy that encompassed not only much of the northern and eastern Iberian Peninsula but also parts of southern France, Italy, and even Greece. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries saw the Crown of Aragon reach its apogee of economic efflorescence and political power as a Mediterranean empire.<sup>23</sup> The region’s economic prosperity, combined with the growing importance of notaries, generated abundant documentation recording the quotidian social and economic lives of the people who lived in Catalonia’s urban centers.<sup>24</sup>

Jews as well as Christians in Catalonia benefited from this era of power and prosperity. Jewish presence in the region dated back to the Roman Empire, and in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the Jewish minority was highly visible, self-assured, and growing. While Jews in England and France suffered expulsion, Jews in Catalonia were establishing new communities.<sup>25</sup> Yom Tov Assis even characterized the period of 1213 to 1327 as a “Golden Age” for the Jews of the Crown of Aragon, during which the social and economic stability and vibrancy of the kingdom as a whole facilitated culturally and economically productive achievements among its Jewish subjects.<sup>26</sup> Although Mark Meyerson has questioned the utility of the traditional narrative of a Golden Age followed by decline, he nevertheless emphasizes the security and confidence felt by the Jewish communities of the Crown of Aragon in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Moneylending was never the sole form of work practiced within the Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula, but it represented a profitable element of some Jewish families' economic portfolio. Julie Mell has recently argued that Jewish involvement in credit has been vastly overemphasized and that only a small elite actually worked as moneylenders.<sup>28</sup> Her work offers an important corrective to assumptions that credit was both an exclusively Jewish business and the sole profession practiced by medieval Jews. However, Mell ultimately overstates her argument and underestimates the importance of credit, at least in the Crown of Aragon, a region she does not discuss. Jewish moneylending, supported and encouraged by royal and baronial authorities, helped new communities establish themselves and provided supplementary income for Jewish families.

For both Jews and Christians, prosperity was punctuated by crisis in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, including famines (especially that of 1333, which one chronicler described as *lo mal any primer*—the First Bad Year) and the Black Death of 1348.<sup>29</sup> The plague reached Barcelona by March 1348, traveling on ships from either Rosselló or Mallorca, and by the beginning of May it had taken enough of a toll to inspire a response in the form of religious processions. Girona saw the arrival of plague in early May, probably also from Rosselló.<sup>30</sup> Within a year, approximately 60 percent of the population of Barcelona and 40 percent of the population of Girona had succumbed to plague.<sup>31</sup> This demographic and public health crisis challenged and traumatized Jewish and Christian communities alike.<sup>32</sup>

Continued social conflicts and crises created demographic and economic challenges in Catalonia in general, and Barcelona in particular, through the rest of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>33</sup> Several Catalan Jewish communities—including that of Barcelona—experienced the most serious threat thus far to their physical safety and security in the wake of the Black Death. Christians, fearing that the plague was either a divine punishment for Jewish sin or the deliberate result of Jewish malice, attacked and murdered Jews in several cities and towns, including both Barcelona and Girona.<sup>34</sup>

The economic affluence and political power of the Crown of Aragon in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and the moments of crisis in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, provide an important backdrop for women's work during this period. However, as scholars have long recognized, economic and cultural efflorescence does not necessarily translate into increased opportunities or independence for women.<sup>35</sup> Neither Christian nor Jewish women could take full advantage of economic growth within the Crown of Aragon, with poorer women less able to do so than wealthier ones.

I further argue that Jewish women were disadvantaged by one of the very aspects of Jewish life that inspired Assis to term this period a Golden Age: the self-governing authority enjoyed by the elite male leadership of Jewish communities. Moreover, although the crisis of the Black Death was undoubtedly traumatic for women as well as men of all faiths, it briefly expanded the work options available to Jewish women.

## Urban Contexts

This book focuses on three cities of varied size and economic profile: Barcelona, an economic powerhouse and international commercial center; Girona, a regional capital with a substantial textile industry; and Vic, a midsize city with a thriving artisanal community and a market that attracted the inhabitants of the surrounding hinterlands. Comparing these cities allows me to distinguish between regional trends and local ones to craft a richer and more diverse portrait of women's work in medieval Catalan urban culture.

Barcelona was the economic, political, and cultural capital of the region as well as its largest urban center, with a population of around fifty thousand on the eve of the Black Death.<sup>36</sup> The counts of Barcelona had established their control over much of Catalonia by the twelfth century, and in 1137 they became the kings of Aragon through a dynastic marriage. Gradually, Barcelona became the main administrative and political center of not only Catalonia but the Crown of Aragon as a whole.<sup>37</sup> The city expanded dramatically over the course of the thirteenth century, resulting in the building of a new ring of walls that incorporated more recently settled suburbs into the fabric of the city.<sup>38</sup> The late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries also saw Barcelona's transformation into a major center of Mediterranean trade and shipping.<sup>39</sup> Merchant-bankers, who worked in commerce, shipping, and money changing, became increasingly important figures starting in the final quarter of the thirteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

Although Barcelona had resident notaries by the early twelfth century, the city only gained a recognized public notariate in 1258, when King Jaume I of Aragon granted the city a royal privilege that authorized its Christian citizens to elect their own notaries. The city's recognized Jewish inhabitants could also appoint Jewish notaries, who were empowered to craft legally valid contracts in Hebrew for transactions between Jews.<sup>41</sup> Royally appointed notaries worked alongside those appointed by other urban institutions, such as the vicariate or the city councilors, albeit not always without conflict.<sup>42</sup>



The city was home to a long-standing Jewish community, one that probably dated back to the Roman era but was first clearly documented in the sixth century CE.<sup>43</sup> The Jewish quarter, known as the *call*, is documented from the ninth century.<sup>44</sup> By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Jewish community had around seven hundred or eight hundred inhabitants, making it the largest in the region, and it continued to grow along with the city's Christian population.<sup>45</sup> The growth of the community in the thirteenth century, owing to some extent to the arrival of refugees expelled from France, required its expansion into an additional Jewish quarter partly located outside the city walls.<sup>46</sup> The thirteenth century also saw the increasing involvement of the Jews of Barcelona in moneylending and the consolidation of a new Jewish urban elite.<sup>47</sup>

Girona, about one hundred kilometers to the northeast of Barcelona, functioned as an urban center with a vibrant economic life in its own right yet retained close mercantile ties to Barcelona.<sup>48</sup> Despite the economic success of several prominent Girona merchants, they remained on average less wealthy than their counterparts in Barcelona.<sup>49</sup> The city relied heavily on its textile industry, and merchant-drapers occupied the pinnacle of Girona's social and economic hierarchy.<sup>50</sup> Although we have only limited demographic information before 1360, Girona probably had between eight thousand and ten thousand inhabitants in the early fourteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Girona was also a major site of episcopal power; the bishops of Girona ruled the city and negotiated complex relationships with lay lords, including the count-kings of Barcelona-Aragon and the counts of Empúries.<sup>52</sup>

Girona possessed both an ecclesiastical and a public notariate. The ecclesiastical notariate was somewhat older; it arose from the twelfth-century practice of clerics acting as scribes and was formally authorized in a royal privilege of 1263.<sup>53</sup> The public notariate was under the control of a single family, the Taialà, who received the notariate by royal concession in 1286. Rather unusually, the family was granted the office in perpetuity, not just for the lifetime of the original recipient of the privilege.<sup>54</sup>

The Jewish community of Girona, which dated back to at least the ninth century, was the second largest in the region, after Barcelona, with a population of approximately five hundred Jews in the thirteenth century.<sup>55</sup> A royal privilege of 1258 granted the Jews of Girona the right of self-governance and extended broad (and sometimes arbitrary) powers of taxation to a group of about five officials, the secretaries of the community.<sup>56</sup> The city's *call* was first mentioned in 1160; most Jews lived in this area, partly by preference and partly through the encouragement of Christian authorities. The *call* was not entirely closed off from the city, although gates could block entry to certain streets.<sup>57</sup>

The final city included in this study was both smaller and less central to the regional economy. Vic, the capital of the county of Osona, lies to the west of Girona (about sixty kilometers) and to the north of Barcelona (about seventy kilometers). The bishops of Vic were the great power in the region. They retained political authority, despite challenges from both the count-kings of Barcelona and the Montcada viscounts. For years, jurisdictional authority within the city was geographically divided between the bishops and the Montcada family.<sup>58</sup> The bishops also successfully quashed an urban revolt demanding governance by the citizens in the twelfth century.<sup>59</sup> By the thirteenth century, Vic had become an active center of artisanal production, with a population of about three thousand. The textile, leather, and metal industries were particularly important, with tanned leathers and knives from Vic sold at markets across the Mediterranean.<sup>60</sup> Vic was also home to an ecclesiastical notariate dating back to 1155. The bishops of Vic retained the exclusive right to appoint notaries in their portion of the city until the fourteenth century, when royally appointed notaries began to appropriate jurisdictional authority.<sup>61</sup>

Starting in the mid-thirteenth century, Vic also housed a small but well-documented Jewish community; even with subsequent growth resulting from immigration, the city's Jewish population only reached about one hundred inhabitants.<sup>62</sup> The new Jewish arrivals quickly became embroiled in jurisdictional conflicts between the bishop and the house of Montcada, as many of them resided in an area between the cathedral and the Castell de Montcada, directly along the jurisdictional dividing line of the city.<sup>63</sup> The Jews of Vic, too small of a community to form their own *collecta* (an administrative taxation unit), also maneuvered between the *collectas* of Barcelona and Girona.<sup>64</sup> Unlike Barcelona and Girona, the Jews of Vic did not establish an enclosed Jewish quarter; Jewish residences remained intermingled with those of Christians until at least the fourteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

## Sources and Notarial Culture

The contracts crafted by Christian urban notaries—for a clientele that included men and women, Christians and Jews, wealthy merchants and the urban poor—form the heart of this study. From the twelfth century onward, notaries played a central role in medieval Europe as legal professionals who possessed specialized expertise in drawing up economic contracts, court records, and governmental regulations.<sup>66</sup> Notaries were public officials, appointed by royal or municipal governments, who provided legal expertise

in contractual forms; even more importantly, they imbued private contracts with public authority.<sup>67</sup> Although all notaries had at least a modicum of literacy in Latin, some simply copied documents from a formulary and filled in their clients' names. More skilled notaries could adapt these formulae to create original documents to meet their clients' specific needs; a few notaries even had university legal training.<sup>68</sup> Increasingly, people of varied social strata, religion, and gender turned to notaries to record aspects of their everyday lives. Scholars have described this phenomenon, seen throughout the western Mediterranean, as the rise of "notarial culture."<sup>69</sup>

Notaries first appeared in Catalonia in the twelfth century, and the first public notariates arose in the second half of that century.<sup>70</sup> By the mid-thirteenth century, ordinary people in Catalonia, as elsewhere in the western Mediterranean, recorded a wide range of contracts with local notaries, including loans, property sales and rentals, wills, and marriage agreements. Starting in the thirteenth century, Catalan notaries began to keep manuals, or registers, with abbreviated copies of every contract. These registers created a record of every transaction that remained in the notary's possession, and they sometimes served as a basis for the official copies of the contract distributed to clients.<sup>71</sup> A fourteenth-century regulation required all notaries to adopt this practice.<sup>72</sup> Notarial registration proved attractive to medieval people; it lowered risk, especially in transactions involving credit, by creating legally enforceable records when money or property changed hands.<sup>73</sup> Notarial documentation might also be mandatory: Jewish moneylenders were legally required to register all loans to Christian debtors with a Christian notary.<sup>74</sup>

Notarial contracts have provided the quantitative and qualitative basis for numerous studies of the social and economic history of ordinary people.<sup>75</sup> As a result, notarial culture has shaped both medieval economies and modern scholarship. However, people experienced and accessed notarial culture in different ways, depending on their gender, religion, and socioeconomic status. Notaries worked with people from across the social spectrum, but first and foremost catered to individuals much like themselves: Christian men, mostly urban dwellers, of middling or elite status.

The norms of notarial culture combined to keep certain people away from the notaries and their transactions off the pages of notarial registers. Many women, both Christian and Jewish, rarely went to the notary unless accompanied by men. Some women may have concluded business transactions without formal documentation. Many Jews preferred to document intra-Jewish business using Hebrew contracts, few of which have survived. The urban poor avoided paying notaries' fees and, in any case, rarely

participated in the kinds of transactions that required notarial intervention. Jewish women, impoverished women of all faiths, and poor Jewish men faced an array of intertwined limits on their access to notarial culture.

Much of the work performed by Jewish and Christian women almost certainly occurred outside the confines of notarial culture. The details of these activities often remain invisible to modern scholars, as they generated little documentation. However, as economic life and notarial culture became increasingly interdependent, circumscribed access to notarial culture translated into real limitations on women's ability to participate in many forms of profitable, high-status labor. Christian women were more likely than Jewish women to work successfully within an economy dependent on notaries, but they remained less integrated into notarial culture than men of their own faith and socioeconomic status. Jewish women may have found more opportunities for business within their own community, documented in now-lost Hebrew contracts, but being confined within their own small minority community severely restricted their pool of potential economic partners. Jewish men were far less subject to such constraints.

The three cities that form the focal point of this study were selected in part for their rich documentation prior to 1350. Barcelona has 168 extant registers dating between 1292 and 1350; Girona has 162 registers from between 1311 and 1350; Vic has 325 general registers from between 1250 and 1350, plus 22 notarial manuals devoted exclusively to marriage contracts and 28 *libri iudeorum*, notarial manuals dedicated particularly to transactions involving Jews, from the same period.<sup>76</sup> Despite the substantial number of extant registers, they probably account for only a fraction of the original total.<sup>77</sup> In Barcelona, lost registers pose particular challenges for the study of the city's Jewish community. The small number of Jewish contracts in most registers, combined with a few registers devoted predominantly to transactions involving Jews, suggests that some city notaries specialized unofficially in Jewish business. However, very few of their registers have survived, and some were later bound with the registers of other notaries.<sup>78</sup> In both Vic and Barcelona, the separation of most Jewish contracts into registers dedicated (formally or informally) to Jewish business renders direct comparison of Jewish and Christian economic life difficult. We cannot assume similar survival rates for these documents, and in Barcelona, Jewish contracts are almost certainly underrepresented in the documentary record.

Notaries recorded hundreds of individual transactions in each register, meaning that the several hundred extant registers from these three cities contain thousands of contracts. In order to look broadly across time and

place, I adopted a strategy of random sampling. Employing a random number generator, I selected several registers per decade per city; for these, I recorded information about all transactions and determined the proportion of transactions involving women. Using the same method, I selected a larger number of registers per decade per city for which I recorded *only* transactions involving women. The larger sample allowed me to more effectively trace individual women and to identify trends within women's transactions, such as differences by marital status. In total, I consulted 103 registers from Barcelona, 106 from Girona, and 63 from Vic, as well as all 28 of Vic's *libri iudeorum* and 11 of Vic's 22 marriage contract registers. Owing to the smaller number of contracts involving Jews, I consistently recorded all such contracts I found in Barcelona and Girona. In Vic, I randomly selected one *liber iudeorum* per decade from which I recorded all transactions. The thousands of contracts recorded in the consulted registers form the basis of both quantitative analysis and qualitative case studies.

The rich notarial evidence for these three cities remains underutilized. The scholarship on Barcelona's Jewish community is strongest before 1276 and after the Black Death, with something of a lacuna in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.<sup>79</sup> Most work on Christian women in medieval Barcelona also focuses on the late fourteenth or fifteenth century and relies mostly on the holdings of the Arxiu Històric de Protocols—with little attention to the rich collection of the Arxiu Capitular.<sup>80</sup> The Jewish community of Girona has received extensive scholarly attention, mostly from Catalan scholars, but little thus far has been published in English.<sup>81</sup> Alexandra Guerson and Dana Wessell Lightfoot are in the process of publishing the results of a recent collaborative project on Jewish, Christian, and *conversa* women in Girona, but their scholarship focuses on the fifteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Despite the wealth of sources after 1312, few scholars have considered Christian women in Girona at all, although Christian Guilleré occasionally discusses the importance of marriage alliances in the political and economic strategies of the city's urban elite.<sup>83</sup>

The Jewish community of Vic formed the subject of a monograph published in the early twentieth century, but the overt anti-Semitism of its author, Ramon Corbella i Llobet—who described Jews as particularly suited to moneylending because of their deceitfulness and lack of scruples—inspires suspicion about his conclusions.<sup>84</sup> Fortunately, Catalan scholars have begun to devote further attention to the Jews of Vic; the recently published volume by Irene Llop i Jordana offers thorough coverage of the period up to 1315.<sup>85</sup> The extensive notarial documentation from Vic has not yet been

extensively mined for studies of women and gender, although an article by Lluís To Figueras examines women's dowries from Vic as evidence for cloth consumption in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Catalonia.<sup>86</sup>

Legal evidence enriches the portrait of women's economic life created by notarial documentation. I have drawn on published Jewish and Christian legal codes influential in Catalonia during this period, urban regulations passed by the city council of Barcelona, and *responsa*—queries addressed to rabbis and their legal rulings—from rabbis active in and around Catalonia between 1250 and 1350. The *responsa* can best be used to glean evidence of what important rabbinic authorities in the region considered appropriate practice. *Responsa* tend to lack identifying information; real names are normally replaced with a set of standardized biblical names, and place names are often omitted. As a result, *responsa* rarely allow for fine distinctions between cities or families.

### Structure of the Book

This book is divided into three thematic parts: “Family Law,” “Notarial Culture,” and “Women's Work.” The first two sections together offer a multifaceted explanation for both the restrictions experienced by women of all faiths and the wider array of work options available to Christian women than to their Jewish counterparts. Part 1, “Family Law,” compares the legal structures and practices surrounding marriage and inheritance among Catalan Christians and Jews. In chapter 1, I posit that Catalan Christian marriage and inheritance practices placed women in a position where they could manage household financial resources, at least under certain circumstances. Legal and social norms positioned men as the preferred managers of financial resources but treated women as valid alternatives in moments of familial or communal need. In contrast, Jewish communities adhered to a set of marriage and inheritance practices that disadvantaged women financially. Chapter 2 argues that rabbinic authorities treated family law and women's control over assets as sites of resistance to acculturation. Through an analysis that incorporates Hebrew and Latin sources, this chapter demonstrates how Jewish communal authorities worked to restrict women's claims to family financial resources and explores the ways in which Jewish families negotiated occasional tensions between communal legal norms and their own economic strategies.

Part 2, “Notarial Culture,” presents an intersectional study of how gender and religious identity shaped people's relationship to notarial culture,

ultimately arguing that women and Jews, in different ways, had tenuous relationships to notarial culture—and that Jewish women were doubly marginalized. Restrictions stemming from family law and social norms linked to notarial culture combined to narrow the work options for all women, but especially for Jewish women. Chapter 3 explores the push and pull experienced by Christian women, who experienced challenges in negotiating the male spaces associated with notaries but could also develop a lifelong familiarity with notarial culture. In chapter 4, I argue that Jews' understanding of notarial culture as fundamentally Christian shaped their decisions about whether to go to notaries. Jewish women developed a particularly fraught relationship with notarial culture.

Part 3, “Women’s Work,” delves into the details of what women’s work looked like in practice and what opportunities and restrictions shaped the labor performed by women in Catalan cities. Chapter 5 offers an overview of Jewish and Christian women’s work as revealed through notarial documentation, which demonstrates that Christian women participated more frequently than Jewish women in a broad range of public economic transactions. Chapter 6 explores in depth the case study of the real estate market, where both Christian and Jewish women played an especially prominent role but Jewish women still faced more restrictions than their Christian counterparts. The final chapter addresses a revealing exception to this pattern: the expansion of Jewish women’s role in the credit market during moments of communal change and crisis, as seen through the case studies of Vic in the mid-thirteenth century and Barcelona and Girona in the wake of the Black Death. Communal necessity or crisis forced Jewish communities to adjust their expectations for women’s work responsibilities. The challenges posed by life as a minority community required occasional flexibility on women from Jewish communities, yet the changes wrought for women were always temporary.

The conclusion addresses how this book complicates three major narratives: the “Golden Age” of Jews in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Crown of Aragon, the contrast between Jewish acculturation in Sepharad and Jewish cultural isolation in Ashkenaz, and the dichotomy between economic self-determination among the women of northern Europe and economic constraints on their counterparts in Mediterranean Europe. The Jewish and Christian women who lived and worked in Catalan cities challenge us to reassess both women’s history and Jewish history in the medieval Mediterranean.