Cleanliness and *Convivencia*: Jewish Bathing Culture in Medieval Spain*

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The existence of public bath houses in the cities of medieval Spain might be seen as one of the most potent markers of an urban culture shared between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. All three religious groups patronized the public bath houses for reasons of hygiene, health, and sociability. Yet at the same time, bathing was also among the most religiously segregated and strictly unshared activities in medieval Iberian life. For Jews and Muslims, cleanliness was an important requirement of their faith that marked them as distinct both from each other and from Christians, while for Christians, there was no religious rationale for bathing their bodies. This paper represents a brief summary of evidence for the Jewish use of public bath houses in Muslim and Christian Spain, with particular attention to the ways in which bathing customs were shared and yet unshared in the medieval period.

Jewish law mandates bathing, especially before the Sabbath, and in medieval Iberia this cleansing would often have taken place in the steam, hot water, and communal atmosphere of a public bath house (*a ḥammām* in al-Andalus or *a baño* in Christian lands). Some public bath houses were open to all citizens of a town, regardless of religion, either at certain times or whenever patrons wished to bathe. Other bath houses were more regulated, especially in Christian Spain where it became common for urban law codes to require different groups, men and women, Jews and Christians, to visit the bath house on separate assigned days. As well as patronizing public bath houses, Jewish women also would have regularly visited the *mikveh*, a cold-water bath for ritual immersion and purification. Although there is evidence that some medieval Jews used public bath houses for this purifying immersion, it was more common for a *mikveh* to be a completely separate facility, often located near a synagogue.¹ This ritual bathing requirement was unique to Jews, and because

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of the religious, communal, and gendered nature of mikve’ot, these baths were never shared across confessional lines and they rarely appear in non-Jewish written sources. For these reasons, they do not fall within the scope of the public bath houses described in this paper.

The bathing traditions of al-Andalus and the broader Muslim world were embraced by many inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, regardless of religion or region, throughout most of the medieval period. Public bath houses had long been an important part of urban culture in the medieval Islamic sphere, where it is generally assumed that their existence derived from Late Antique traditions of bathing. Nevertheless, there were a number of important differences from that earlier period, since Andalusī bath houses (and later medieval Christian bath houses) did not serve the broad range of recreational, social, and athletic functions that were typical of Roman bath houses. Ḥammāmāt were smaller, without deep pools for swimming or the many different rooms and spaces characteristic of earlier bath houses. Archeological evidence and existing structures show that most baths in al-Andalus were relatively simple, with a room for changing and three basic bathing spaces equivalent to the Roman cold room (frigidarium), warm room (tepidarium), and hot room (caldarium). In Arabic, these spaces were called, respectively, al-bayt al-bārid, al-bayt al-wasṭānī, and al-bayt al-sakhūn. Most Andalusī bath houses were of modest size, though there were also more lavish examples; some ḥammāmāt were public spaces for common use, while others were privately owned and open only to a select group of bathers.

Although Andalusī bath houses were typically small, there were often many of them in a city, and their presence was an important element in urban life. Medieval Arabic geographers routinely described even modestly-sized towns as having “mosques, markets, bath houses, and hostelries,” creating a collective trope that recognized bathing among a cluster of other markers of urban identity. The twelfth-century geographer al-Idrīsī cited this constellation of baths, markets, and fanādiq not only in major cities, such as Cordoba, Almeria, and Malaga, but also in several smaller Andalusī towns. In the fifteenth

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