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Being a Neighbor: Ideas and Ideals of Neighborliness in the Medieval West

Susan McDonough

This essay takes stock of current scholarship on neighbors in order to think through how medieval people understood and deployed the notion of neighborliness, which was more than simply living in a neighborhood alongside one another. In thinking about medieval neighborliness, it is useful to cast the net widely, to bring into the discussion scholarly work on neighbors and neighborhoods as well. There is a simple reason for this, for studies explicitly about neighbors and neighborliness in the European Middle Ages are relatively sparse. Instead, important discussions touching on these topics exist within studies of particular places, of religious encounters, and of medieval professional identity. Noting that, this essay will come at the topic of neighborliness from a side angle, and consider how historians and literary scholars have grappled with the topic of neighborliness as they have treated other subjects more directly.

Though various studies have touched on neighborliness, to date there is no single publication that offers a panoramic view of medieval understandings of the topic. Ayanna Brown has suggested that medievalists have not “explored how medieval neighborliness was defined, who was counted as a neighbor, what constituted a neighborhood, to whom charity and neighborliness were owed, or how these ideas were adapted over time as notions of community changed.”¹ In so arguing, she echoed a call Joel Rosenthal made a decade earlier for “a sustained consideration of neighborliness and how it was deployed across and within religious boundaries, in the bustling port towns, and the villages.”²

¹ A. S. Brown, ‘That peace shall always dwell among them and true love be upheld,’ 36.

² J. Rosenthal, *Telling Tales*, 153.

These twin suggestions that medievalists have ignored the way their subjects invoked and called upon their neighbors aren't entirely fair. Yet the scholarship about neighbors and neighborliness is concentrated in treatments of medieval cities and is often conflated with the notion of community or mentioned only as a small aspect of a larger point. One has only to think about important recent studies of medieval religious communities, legal communities, and linguistic communities to name just a few, to recognize the potency of community as a frame for thinking about the connections that united, and often divided, medieval people.³ Here is where a specific consideration of neighbors and neighborliness can amplify our understanding of medieval social and cultural dynamics. When historians invoke the idea of neighbors and neighborliness, they mean something beyond the people who lived in adjoining buildings or on adjacent plots of land. To be a neighbor in the Middle Ages was a particular identification that obtained a moral valence. When medieval people called someone as a "neighbor," the label conveyed a set of obligations, behaviors, and expectations, rooted in the idea that neighbors were among the group of people who were privy to the intimacies of each others' lives, at times both monumental and mundane. Here, we will consider how scholars have accessed medieval notions of neighbors and neighborliness in their exploration of medieval community.

Within medieval studies, considerations of neighborliness have focused on two particular geographies. With a few important exceptions, scholars of Mediterranean Europe, especially Italy, and England have been most attentive to neighbors and neighborliness. Exemplifying the

³ For a recent work on religious communities, see T. Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*; for linguistic communities see K. Fudeman, *Vernacular Voices: Language and Identity in Medieval French-Jewish Communities*; for legal communities see E. Cohen, *Crossroads of Justice: Law and Culture in Late Medieval France* and J. Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Politics of Daily Life in Early Modern France*. For a recent publication bringing together a wide range of topics under the rubric of community, see M. Halvorson and K. Spierling, *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe*.

social history boom in the 1960s and 1970s, which provided a new focus on family, social class, urbanization, Diane Owen Hughes scoured Genoa's medieval cartularies and abundant notarial casebooks for evidence of migration's effect on neighborhood ties. She found that immigrants to the city of Genoa from the nearby countryside recreated in their urban neighborhoods the close community of the village, and thus neighborhood ties and village ties worked to strengthen each other.⁴

Guided by the language of the sources themselves, in a classic article Christiane Klapisch-Zuber noted the frequent evocation of "kin, friends, and neighbors," in the record books of Florentine merchants. She sought to parse the ways in which each of those sets of relationships benefited elite Tuscan men. Her foundational study is important not only for its conclusions, but because it included a discussion of neighbors and neighborliness within the framework of a larger discussion of relationships within which medieval people found themselves enmeshed. She concluded that kinship ties were the most important to advance social standing, but that warm neighborly relations "introduced a greater freedom in social relations."⁵ Dropping by a neighbor's home for a drink was a social pleasure that was free from the constraining obligations to family or a patron, though they paid fewer dividends for social advancement.

For scholars of the medieval English countryside, neighborliness was a helpful concept for thinking through the connections binding medieval villagers. The affective ties between neighbors were one way to explain village cohesion even after the cataclysm of the Black Death, for example. In the village of Halesowen, not even the Black Death could loosen the communal bonds shared among the villagers, who pledged as surety for their neighbors, raised the hue and

⁵ C. Klapish- Zuber, "Kin, Friends, and Neighbors," 92.

cry when one was attacked, and together battled the local abbot for recognition as free laborers.⁶ Judith Bennett and Maria Moiséa debated the function of an English village ritual called charity ales and while they disagreed about their role in bringing communities together, both agreed that they offered an avenue for neighbors either to offer charity to one who had fallen on hard times (which is Bennett's contention) or participate in a gift and credit institution (Moiséa's argument).⁷ Neighbors, in other words, are the participants in and beneficiaries of money-raising event, which provided one avenue for them to socialize while helping each other. Here, neighbors and their neighborliness provide social benefits for each other.

Neighbors and neighborliness has not only captured the attention of medievalists, but also of scholars of Early Modern England. In fact, the notion of neighborliness and its potential underscores much of that historiography. Keith Wrightson recently suggested that neighborliness remained an important way to negotiate community in England, despite the long tradition bemoaning its decline from the late middle ages onwards.⁸ The question of periodization, that is, the boundary between the medieval and early modern periods, has implications for the study of neighborliness in the British Isles. Naomi Tadmor suggested that new translations of the Bible in English emphasized the rhetoric of neighborliness as the Ten Commandments received more attention in a Protestant Early Modern world than they had in the Catholic medieval one.

New technological methodologies in the 1990s and 2000s amplified the precision with which scholars could address the perimeters of neighborhoods and the role of neighbors in medieval urban spaces. Shona Kelly Wray returned to the question of the effect of catastrophe

⁶ Z. Razi, 'Family, Land, and the Village Community in Later Medieval England,' 369-393.

⁷ The initial salvo in this debate was J. Bennett, "Charity and Conviviality," 19-41. Moiséa challenges her interpretation in 'Charity and Conviviality' 223-243. Bennett responded in "Reply," 235-242.

⁸ K. Wrightson "Decline of Neighborliness revisited," 32.

upon medieval communities and, through an intricate piecing-together of Bologna's neighborhoods, argued, as did Razi about Halesowen, that the Black Death did not diminish the tight bond between neighbors in Bologna. People who lived in the same neighborhoods acted as witnesses in each other's wills and sat with the dying next door, because these were "the interactions of individuals linked in social bonds that gave meaning to their lives."⁹ Beyond the contributions Wray made to our understanding of neighborliness, she also provided an important methodological framework for analyzing the thousands of extant testaments from the Bolognese archives. To collect and assist in the analysis of the roughly 1500 wills from 1347 and 1348, she employed *kleio*, a hierarchical/network database management system that other medievalists had developed. So doing allowed Wray to discern patterns of neighborly across a particularly rich dataset, and while she was instant that her conclusions "were not based on statistical tests," the data supporting her conclusions concerning the bonds of neighborliness in a time of crisis lend those conclusions a particular gravity.¹⁰

Like Wray, Daniel Lord Smail designed a database, which he called a "prosopographical index" to make sense of the clauses identifying space and locations in Latin notarial casebooks and episcopal records, as well as vernacular Occitan records of confraternities. In his consideration of how different linguistic communities mapped space in a world before cadastral maps, Daniel Smail analogized neighbors' memories to "archives containing legally important facts like time of birth and death, title in property, marital status and so on, information that would later fall into the purview of state archives."¹¹ Being a neighbor meant knowing the

⁹ S. Kelly Wray, *Communities and Crisis*, 193.

¹⁰ Wray, *Communities and Crisis*, 8.

¹¹ D.L. Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies*, 151.

intimacies of people's lives, and thus having knowledge that could be tapped during disagreements, whether formal or informal.

A neighbor's knowledge could provide the difference between being understood in the community as married or not, mother of a legitimate child or not, worthy of an inheritance or not. When neighbors rather than paper certificates were the repositories of people's histories and personal statuses, maintaining good neighborly relations was critical. A quick synopsis of a civil case from Marseille shows how this worked. Carlona Avione was a widow whose merchant husband Guilhem died at sea at hands of "impious Saracens." Left alone to provide for her infant son, Carlona sued her dead husband's family for support. In order to make her case, Carlona had to prove the legitimacy of her marriage, the parentage of her son, and her worthiness of financial support from her husband's family. In the contemporary world, a proof of a marriage resides in a notarized certificate and proof of legitimacy lies in our genetic code. But Carlona had neither to rely upon. Instead, she turned to her neighbors. Bernart Boeri, one neighbor, testified to the legitimacy both of Carlona's marriage and her son's birth, saying he was present during the negotiation of the dowry, when the two were betrothed before the doors of the local church, and that he saw them sleeping in the same bed, eating at the same table. Though he wasn't present at Lazaret's birth, Bernart was confident that the child was the product of this marriage. As a neighbor, he was privy to the intimacies of Carlona and Lazaret's lives, at times both monumental and mundane. Johan Anglici, another neighbor, affirmed all of Bernart's testimony, adding that he knew the couple was married and that Lazaret was their son "because their neighbors said so" and that they were thus recognized "by the neighborhood."¹²

¹² Archives Départementales des Bouches du Rhone 3B97 fol. 84r. The case began 7 June 1381 on fol. 63r.

The quasi-legal role of neighbors in Wray's Bologna or in the example from Marseille becomes a more directly imbued with legal authority in Jamie Taylor's medieval England.¹³ Neighbors did indeed have a legal status as givers of testimony, for their membership within their community gave them specialized knowledge about people's characters, crimes, and controversies. Yet as royal courts extended their jurisdiction, it became less clear that neighbors represented their communities rather than the crown. Neighborliness is thus complicated, as neighbors become both the repository of local knowledge and potential snitches to the royal authority. Despite this evolution, the idea animating this legal understanding of neighborliness still stood: being a neighbor was to participate in a relationship that had social value, that helped maintain critical bonds between people during times both normal and not.

Medieval Parisians, inhabitants of a space grander and more populated than England's villages, also valued the connections they made with the people who lived on their street, whom they encountered as part of their daily lives. In her study of medieval Paris, Simone Roux argues that while Parisians did not have a clear command of the topography of the city as a whole, they were intimately aware of the goings on in their own neighborhoods. Again drawing on the language of court cases, Roux suggests that neighbors, inhabitants of the same street, shared space and thus familiarity with each other. Neighbors shared funeral meals and called on each other's children to help with household tasks. Neighborliness was part of the social fabric of the smaller community of the street.¹⁴ The houses of medieval Paris were not the anonymous apartment buildings of its contemporary descendent.

¹³ J. Taylor, "Neighbors, Witnesses, and Outlaws in the Later Middle Ages," 86.

¹⁴ S. Roux, *Paris au Moyen Âge*, 38-39, 58. For a translation see *Paris in the Middle Ages*, translated by Joanne McNamara.

Economic inequity, a factor in medieval as well as modern urban landscapes, shaped neighborly relations in a particular way. Through her detailed analysis of the *Miracles of St. Louis*, Sharon Farmer has reconstructed the lives of the poor in thirteenth-century Paris, with a particular attention to the way in which gender shaped the likelihood of receiving help or not. Neighbors provided critical a critical safety net for poor women, many who were able to sustain life with disabilities for long periods because of help from their neighbors. At the same time, however, Farmer points to the ways in which proximity within a neighborhood was also a source of mistrust and tension. Old women living alone were particularly susceptible to neighborly worries that they might bring harm to those better off than they were.¹⁵ In Paris, then, a poor woman was more likely to receive neighborly support than an equally poor man, but those same women were more likely to be the object of suspicion as they aged.¹⁶

As Farmer's work suggests, women's and gender historians have found thinking about neighbors and neighborliness to be a fruitful endeavor. It is an open question whether or not male and female neighbors controlled different spheres of knowledge. In my own research in Marseille, men and women were equally likely to identify themselves as neighbors who cared for the sick or witnessed a birth. Yet other scholars have shown that being a neighbor had different effects for men and women. Recently, for example, Sara Mendelson examined how female neighbors provided an important alternative network of support for the gentlewoman Anne Dormer, married to an abusive patriarch.¹⁷ Bernard Capp notes that "good neighborliness" was

¹⁵ S. Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, 159-60.

¹⁶ N. Tadmor, 'Friends and Neighbors in Early Modern England: Biblical Translations and Social Norms', 152.

¹⁷ S. Mendelson, 'Neighborhood as Female Community in the Life of Anne Dormer', 152-164.

“one of the few ‘active virtues’ that conduct literature praised women for.”¹⁸ And David Pennington has argued that that very virtue acted to preserve honest dealings between women neighbors in English marketplaces.¹⁹

Where these scholars queried how gender shaped medieval people’s experience of neighborliness, scholars of Florence have focused on social status as a defining characteristic of neighborliness. In this, they followed the path Klapish-Zuber created. Florence’s neighborhood of the Green Dragon, a district distant from the city’s commercial center, was the focus on Nicholas Eckstein’s research. A mixed population of poor artisans, workers, and members of old and venerable lineages lived side-by-side, were each other’s tenants and landlords, participated together in the festive life of the quarter, and served as members of its confraternity. Despite the range in economic well-being and professional identities, Eckstein found that shared participation in the civic life of the neighborhood provided a sense of neighborliness that cut across economic lines.²⁰ In Florence’s more prosperous neighborhoods, Dale and Francis Kent found that Florentines looked to their influential neighbors for help navigating the political world. However, awareness of a neighbor’s fortunes often led to jealousy and gossip about the source of other’s wealth.²¹ In Florence and in Paris, then, neighborly relations were no guarantee of peaceful ones.

Just as neighborliness overlapped with and was complicated by gender and economic status, so too was it enmeshed with professional identity. Unlike modern cities that often separate

¹⁸ B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 27.

¹⁹ D. Pennington, *Going to Market: Women, Trade and Social Relations in Early Modern English Towns*, 120

²⁰ N. Eckstein, *The District of the Green Dragon*, 266-7.

²¹ Kent et al., *Neighbors and Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence: The District of the Red Dragon in the Fifteenth Century*, 52-55. For more on neighborhoods as a site of competition and jealousy, see R. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*, 30-34.

spaces zoned for residential living or commercial sale, medieval houses blended the two. Families participated in the economy of the storefront and the home; there was little daylight between the two. This conflation of commercial and familial space meant that customers, colleagues and neighbors were sometimes the same people. A prosopographical study of Marseille using notarial records revealed that sixty-eight percent of artisans lived in neighborhoods that bore the name of their profession. This percentage was even greater among certain professions, like fishmongers and tanners, whose odiferous labor perhaps made them unappealing neighbors for those not in the trade.²² So, as a 1381 property dispute between families associated with Marseille butchers suggests, co-workers were also neighbors who were aware of business practices and spending habits of their rivals.²³ Yet I do not want to overstate the overlap between neighbor and coworker, since the butchers concerned in this lawsuit lived on Cooper Street, not in an enclave of butchers alone. So while neighborly knowledge potentially overlapped with professional knowledge, the coincidence was far from perfect and complete.

In fact, recent studies have shown that some of the received knowledge about medieval neighborhoods, and thus medieval neighbors, is perhaps overstated. Particularly in Italian cities, scholars have argued that parishes were tiny cities unto themselves, and that the boundary of the parish was the boundary of the neighborhood.²⁴ Joseph Wheeler's work complicates that assumption at least for Venice, where he found that many Venetians lived in parishes without bakeries, poor relief, or other social services, forcing themselves outside of their parishes for

²² D. L. Smail, 'La topographie socioprofessionnelle de Marseille au XIV^e siècle', 313.

²³ ADBdR 3B836 fol. 171r- 254v; case began on 12 June 1381.

²⁴ See, eg, R. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*, 9.

basic functions. Further muddling matters is language, for when Venetians invoked *vicini* or neighbors, they referred only to those property-owning men within the parish.²⁵

As scholars grapple with the fuzziness of the categories, it is also important to acknowledge that medieval neighborliness was neither uncomplicated nor understood as unequivocally positive. Neighbors were not always a source of unconditional support or love, as Farmer's analysis of thirteenth-century Paris showed above. Despite a Christian rhetoric that emphasized a love of one's neighbor as a vehicle for loving God, medieval studies have suggested that the figure of the neighbor was, in fact, a source of danger and disquiet. Louise O. Fradenberg turned to psychoanalytic theory to suggest that the medieval obligation to love one's neighbor masked both narcissism (for helping the other made one feel good about one's self) and fear. Fear because a neighbor's similarity and familiarity simultaneously contained something unknowable and potentially evil. The neighbor in Fradenberg's treatment of courtly love texts was the intimate stranger, a source of attraction and terror.²⁶ George Edmonson takes up this tension in his analysis of the Middle English poem, "The Vox and the Wolf," which he reads as an allegory for the challenges of neighborliness. He situates the figures of the Fox and the Wolf as neighbors, intimately connected yet capable of doing great harm to each other.²⁷ Together, these essays challenge the idea that neighborliness and charity must necessarily have a positive valence.

This notion of neighborliness as a source of unease explains, perhaps, why scholars of medieval religion and religious interaction showcase some of the most fruitful uses of the concept. Fradenberg and Edmonson's reminder that the notion of neighborliness, which

²⁵ J. Wheeler, "Neighbourhoods and Local Loyalties in Renaissance Venice," 34-35.

²⁶ L. O. Fradenberg, "Love of Thy Neighbor," 142-144.

²⁷ T. Edmonson, "Neighbours, Natural and Otherwise, in the 'Vox and the Wolf,'" 90-92.

comprised, often in equal measures, an intimacy and a desire for separation finds a receptive audience among those who grapple with the ways in which members of different faiths understood themselves next to their neighbors. In her study of Catharism in medieval Orvieto, for example, Carol Lansing found tremendous skepticism about the repression of heresy and resistance to following the inquisitors' condemnations. Instead, Orvietans dismissed the charges against those they considered "good neighbors."²⁸ Neighborliness, here, was a judgment against the power of the inquisition.

There is a reason scholars of interreligious interaction have found the notion of neighborliness useful. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all emphasized the religious imperative to care for one's neighbor. This could mean literally the person living next door to or across the street from you, but it also had a particularly insular meaning: caring for one's neighbor in the Christian textual context assumed the neighbor was a fellow Christian, in the Jewish context also a Jew, and in the Muslim context another Muslim. All three traditions made good arguments for the importance of providing care for the stranger (read here: people of other religion), but the premium set upon caring for neighbors assumed a responsibility for coreligionists.

Not only did the practitioners and believers in all three major monotheistic religious faiths of the middle ages espouse an obligation to be neighborly, but also members of all three faiths were, in fact, each other's neighbors. This is an important point that historians have contributed within the last decades, important because it undoes generations of work that envisaged absolute partition between the members of different faiths and imagined the three faiths untouched by the belief structures of the others. Cultural historians focused on the Iberian peninsula have provided critical insights into the ways in which religious difference did and did

²⁸ C. Lansing *Power and Purity*, 154.

not shape people's lived experiences. Mark Meyerson has insisted on that the demographic realities of the fifteenth century required Mudejars to interact economically and socially with their Christian neighbors. And despite efforts by King Fernando to mandate the segregation of Muslims in his kingdom in order to preserve the spiritual wellbeing of his Christian subjects, Meyerson found that for Christians who lived side by side with Muslims "it was perhaps easier to befriend them than to shun them."²⁹ Brian Catlos's research on Muslims living in Christian lands also suggests that Muslims with Christian and Jewish neighbors fought and collaborated politically, economically, and socially, despite religious traditions which should have made it "awkward, if not untenable: for members of both faiths."³⁰ Catlos argues that self-interest more than any other factor held Muslim and Christian society together, rather than slavish attention to religious difference.³¹ In other words, regardless of seemingly impassable religious difference, physical proximity and daily interactions allowed members of different religions to testify for each other in court, drink together in taverns, and develop friendships. They also allowed neighbors to fight, abuse, and cheat each other, another reminder that neighborliness is an uneasy state in which to live.

David Nirenberg's work on relationships among Jewish, Christian, and Muslims neighbors has been crucial for understanding how members of the three faiths coexisted, not always peacefully, as neighbors, not only in a metaphorical space but a literal one. He has argued that everyday violence served not only to police boundaries between different religious communities, but showed how frequently those boundaries were transgressed.³² More recently, he published a series of essays exploring how medieval and modern Jews, Christians, and

²⁹ M. Meyerson, *The Muslims in Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel*, 49

³⁰ B. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 312.

³¹ B. Catlos, 524.

³² D. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*

Muslims defined themselves in relationship to the other faiths, often using the language of neighborliness to do so. His coining of the term “ambivalent neighborliness” nicely captures his contention that the religions of medieval Jews, Christians and Muslims were constantly transforming themselves as they learned more about and changed the rules of interacting with members of other faiths.³³ The metaphorical neighborliness of the three faiths meant that the real proximity in which medieval Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived, loved, and worked resulted in religions that were “coproduced” by their practitioners and detractors.³⁴

While the Iberian peninsula has long been a laboratory scholars have used to think about the neighborly interactions between members of different faith communities, historians of medieval Ashkenaz (roughly modern Germany and Northern France) were less certain that Jews and Christians shared space, ideas, and affinities. In fact, a particular notion of the Jews of Ashkenaz as hermetically sealed, walled off from their Christian neighbors, and permeated much of the historiography.³⁵ More recent histories, incorporating insights from anthropology and gender studies, suggest that Jews living in Ashkenaz were engaged with their Christian neighbors in real and highly influential ways. In a detailed analysis of one particular liturgical and ritual development, the introduction of young boys to the study of the Torah, Ivan Marcus argued that the religious life of the Ashkenaz is evidence of “inward acculturation.”³⁶ This process, a potent combination of polemics against Christianity and a borrowing from its rituals and images, was

³³ D. Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 4.

³⁴ D. Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 32.

³⁵ The bibliography here is vast, and dates to the nineteenth century German *Wissenschaft des Judentums* tradition. The focus on the textual production of the rabbinic elites and an understanding of medieval Jewish history as a history of persecution from Christians contributed to an understanding of medieval Jews as both under siege and uninterested in engaging with the Christian majority. For a good, if dated, overview of this historiography, see H. Liebeschütz, ‘Relations between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages’. More recently, see Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 5-9.

³⁶ I. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 8-9.

only possible in a world where Jews were aware of and interacting with their Christian neighbors. Elisheva Baumgarten's work on the shared understandings of and rituals around childbirth, the rituals of infancy, breast-feeding and parenting expands Marcus's insights and focused them on the daily praxis of Jewish family life. She determines that the "manifold social and intellectual relations" between Jews and Christians suggests that changes in Jewish society were characteristic of the majority Christian society as well.³⁷ In her subsequent book, the proximity of Jews and Christians who lived side by side are central to her argument. When Jews and Christians saw each other fasting, or heard the ringing of church bells or the blowing of the shofar, their shared cultural practices reflect the evolution of the pious practices of the two religions, sometimes in parallel and sometimes in opposition.³⁸

Only a society in which Christians and Jews lived and interacted as "close neighbors" would make such similar developments possible. And as Rosa Alvarez Perez's survey of Jews and Christians living as neighbors in medieval France makes plain, that proximity, common though it was, was laced with violence and distrust, another reminder that neighboring need always accommodate neighborliness.³⁹

Taken together, the work of literary scholars and scholars of medieval religion provide us with important tools with which to think about neighborliness and about the complexity of the medieval experience more generally. Certainly, medievalists must contend with world in which members of different faiths are not sequestered away, ghettoized, separate from each other. Both in Ashkenaz and Sepharad, members of different faith communities lived as neighbors. So

³⁷ E. Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*, 184.

³⁸ E. Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety*, 88.

³⁹ R. A. Perez, 'Next-Door Neighbors: Aspects of Judeo-Christian Cohabitation in Medieval France', 309-330. See too Sibon, *Les Juifs de Marseille* for the religious integration of neighborhoods in the Mediterranean city.

exchanges of ideas, of values, of tensions, and of animosities happened as part of daily life, not just in the rarified confines of the world of religious intellectuals. Yet while religious authorities recognized that living next door to someone of a different faith might occur, that did not mean they encouraged friendly interactions. Here is a perfect example of the perception that neighbors could be dangerous. A look at the rabbinic *responsa* of Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg, reveals two important realities of neighborliness in the middle ages: they acknowledge that Jews and Christians could live side by side, thus could be physical neighbors, but they show a distinct preference for limiting interactions across confessional lines. A partial explanation for this was logistic, as a responsum concerning carrying items on the Sabbath, reveals. Jewish law prohibited Jews from transferring items from a private to public space, or vice versa on the Sabbath, as this was considered a type of work. In order to facilitate this type of movement, rabbinic authorities developed the concept of the *eruv*, which enabled a religious understanding of mixed space as, in fact, unified, so that things could be carried back and forth through courtyards and streets. What happened, though, when a series of Jewish-owned courtyards were interrupted by a Christian household? Did the *eruv* pertain, or not?⁴⁰

His answers to people's questions also hint at the potential for danger that lingered, always, in the background of interfaith contact. His *reponsa* acknowledge longstanding traditions of Jews giving presents to their Christian servants on certain holidays like *Purim*. Though he prohibits the introduction of that tradition in new communities, he does not forbid them in communities where the practice is longstanding, "lest it disturb peaceful relations with the Gentile neighbors."⁴¹ These were not generic Christian neighbors, but people right on the other

⁴⁰ I. Agus, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg: His Life and Work as Sources for The Religious, Legal, and Social History of the Jews of Germany in the Thirteenth Century*, responsa 61.

⁴¹ Agus, *Meir of Rothenberg*, responsa 85.

side of a courtyard who might take offense at being summarily denied gifts they had come to expect annually. And that offense might, as the work of Nirenberg and Catlos, among others, make plain, have developed into the violence that lurked in the background, and limited the possibilities for neighborly interactions in the Middle Ages.

Directions for further research:

So far I have suggested that the study of neighborliness in the Middle Ages has been concentrated in particular geographies and in two main categories: as part of a larger discussion of community or as an aspect of thinking through religious interaction. In Ashkenaz, as we have seen, Jews and Christians learned about each other's liturgical calendars and pious practices through their senses, when they heard liturgical music or smelled festive meals, or observed ritual garb in shared streets. Yet most medieval Europeans did not live in areas with significant Jewish or Muslim populations, especially by the fourteenth century. Thus, medieval people thought about neighborliness and identified as neighbors constantly and in many different circumstances, not only as members of different faiths. To be a neighbor was not simply living next door to someone, it was having access to information about them and to be enmeshed in a series of obligations to them. In that, perhaps, medieval people were not so different from modern. The soundtrack for many contemporary Americans' childhoods was Mr. Rogers' singing request that began his weekly show: "Won't you please, won't you please, please won't you be my neighbor." And social scientists are currently engaged in experiments that measure how the behavior of proximate neighbors can either increase or decrease income inequality in

particular neighborhoods.⁴² We medievalists might take our cues from these more contemporary concerns.

For we are still missing a big picture of medieval neighborliness, an understanding of how proscriptive demands, legal identities, physical space, economic standing, gender, and religious faith informed how medieval people understood what neighborliness meant and how it could be deployed. To obtain this comprehensive understanding of medieval neighborliness demands looking across the genres of the sources, in literature, legal texts, sermons, responsa, hadith, scripture, notarial documents and borrowing from archeologists and material culture historians to better understand the space within which neighbors operated. The space of medieval cities and villages operated differently, and it follows that neighbors would thus define neighborliness in different ways. As more medieval texts become available digitally, so to do new opportunities develop to further grapple with the question of whom medieval people called neighbors, who claimed the title of neighbor, and what behaviors they expected that term to encompass. Beyond the digitization of sources, other digital tools could provide exciting new directions for understanding medieval neighborliness. Classicists at the University of Arkansas are currently using virtual reality with the game engine Unity to permit modern users an immersive experience in ancient Pompeii.⁴³ At the University of Toronto, Nicolas Terpstra leads a team using GIS to reconstruct an interactive digital map of early modern Florence, building outward from the rich archival material.⁴⁴ From the scholarship offered so far, we have a good sense of what neighborliness meant in a few particular locations throughout the medieval West. What we need is an understanding of how that concept morphed, expanded, and contracted as the

⁴² A. Nishi, et al., "Inequality and Visibility of Wealth in Experimental Social Networks," 426-429.

⁴³ http://pompeii.uark.edu/DigitalPompeii_Content/index.html

⁴⁴ <http://decima-map.net>

context changed. New digital tools combined with traditional textual analysis are great points for further discovery.

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