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BENJAMIN OF TUDELA AND HIS „BOOK OF TRAVELS“

Benjamin of Tudela is the best-known, most cited, and most translated Jewish traveler of the Middle Ages¹. Paradoxically, however, we have no personal information about him except for his name, his father's name Jonah, his birth and residence in Tudela, a city of Navarre, and his return to the kingdom of Castile in 1172/1173, a trustworthy date. The meager information regarding Benjamin appears in the prologue to the travel account bearing his name, which refers to him in the third person as deceased and provides the title „Sefer Masa'oth“ or „Book of Travels“². This information, especially the date of his return, suggests that the prologue was composed a short time after Benjamin's death by a Jew of Tudela presumably acquainted with him, either in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.

Benjamin's autograph report has not survived. Testimonies to the existence of his travel account appear only from the fourteenth century

¹ For a list of manuscripts, see M. N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*. Critical Text, Translation and Commentary, London 1907, XIII-XIV, and G. Busi, *Binyamin da Tudela*, Itinerario (*Sefer massa'ot*), Traduzione, introduzione, note e appendice, Rimini 1988, 85-86. Busi also provides a list of prints and a bibliography covering the years 1822-1986, *ibid.*, 86-95. Further studies are cited by G. Lacerenza, *Echi biblici in una leggenda. Tiro in Beniamino da Tudela*, in: *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale*, 56 (1996), 463, n. 3. It is impossible to list here all the recent publications dealing with Benjamin of Tudela. In order to shorten the notes only studies directly relevant to the issues examined here are cited below.

² Adler, *The Itinerary* (n. 1), 1-2, Hebrew text, cited below as BT with page numbers as indicated in the margins. Adler uses the corresponding numbers in his translation, yet since the latter is not always accurate I provide my own translation whenever necessary.

onward. A passage in the extant versions of the „Book of Travels“ regarding the Druze community living in Lebanon (BT 29) is cited verbatim by Shemuel Şarşa, a Jew of Valencia, Spain, in his „Sefer Mekor Ḥayim“, completed in 1368³. However, this citation does not reveal whether the version of the „Book of Travels“ before that author entirely conformed to the one reproduced by the earliest surviving copies of Benjamin’s book. In fact, this is rather doubtful, for reasons explained below, since British Library, ms. Add. 27,089, section 19, also from the fourteenth century, was executed in Ashkenazi script, thus outside Spain⁴.

The author of the prologue states that „in every place he [Benjamin] entered, he made a record of all that he saw or heard from trustworthy persons“ and that „he brought this book with him on his return to the country of Castile“. There is one instance confirming that Benjamin indeed recorded the information he obtained without delay and, therefore, that the „Book of Travels“ was based on written notes⁵. Some traces of the draft version of the travel account survive in the extant text. For instance, there are two different assessments of the Jewish population in Gibelet (presently Jubayl), Lebanon (BT 28), and two passages dealing with al-Anbār on the Euphrates having partly the same content (BT 53, 69). However, there is also evidence that Benjamin made later additions and revisions, whether in the course of his travels or after returning to Tudela. For instance, Benjamin notes, with respect to the Talmudic scholars and other prominent men of Thebes, that „there are none like them in the land of the Greeks, except in the city of Constantinople“ (BT 16-17), a city he visited later. Similarly, regarding Constantinople he states that „there is no other [city] like it in all the countries, except Baghdad“ (BT 20), an observation added after his stay in the Iraqi city at a later stage of his travels. Internal evidence, therefore, casts heavy doubts upon the assertion that Benjamin returned with a final draft of his report.

³ Edition Mantova, 1559, fol. 123r, col. 2 – 123v, col. 1. After the quotation the author adds the following: „and this has already been written by Rabbi Benjamin the author of the “Travels”“.

⁴ New dating and attribution by Dr. Edna Engel, Hebrew Palaeography Project, Israel Academy of Sciences, Jerusalem, whom I wish to thank hereby. The manuscript was previously ascribed to the thirteenth century. It is the basis for the text edited by Adler (see n. 1), who occasionally deviates from his model. Adler also lists variants, some with fairly important implications (see for instance below, n. 157), that appear in three other manuscripts dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and in two sixteenth-century prints.

⁵ See below, n. 34.

More importantly, there is good reason to believe that Benjamin's „Book of Travels“ does not reproduce his original account. There are serious inconsistencies and gaps in his itinerary, discussed below. In addition, there is an obvious disproportion in the amount of information regarding the cities he visited. Several of them are considered at length, namely, Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad, and al-Fuṣṭāṭ (Old Cairo), called Miṣraim. Others like Alexandria and Palermo are covered by shorter entries. Nablus is connected to a long piece of information about the Samaritans, and Teima to a report on the Jews of Arabia. Together with two long narrative episodes, those regarding the false messiah David Alroy and the expedition of the king of Persia against the Ghuzz (BT 77-81, 83-88), the material dealing with these cities makes up more than half the text, and in extent surpasses the short entries on some two hundred other places⁶. The evidence regarding or suggesting trade and shipping is extremely brief or entirely missing for some important commercial centers. There are no references to political or military events that occurred during Benjamin's extended journey. In addition, there is not a single indication regarding the means of transportation he used on land or on sea, natural or human perils he encountered along the way, conditions of accommodation, or fellow-travelers. While at the beginning of the account Benjamin refers to himself in the first person (BT 1), there are only two such additional instances afterwards. Benjamin reports that a Jew living in Jerusalem, whose name he mentions, recounted him a miracle that happened in the city shortly before his own arrival there, and in Iṣfahān he cites the name of the local Jew who told him of the war between the king of Persia and the Ghuzz (BT 39-40, 83-88). Finally, Benjamin's account is entirely devoid of personal emotions, although these are indirectly conveyed by his description of people and sites.

In view of the features of the „Book of Travels“ mentioned above, there can be no doubt that Benjamin's original account has been shortened and edited, presumably by the author of the prologue in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century⁷. It is impossible to determine the editor's precise criteria for his revision of the text. He preserved „all the matters not

⁶ A. Asher, ed. and trans., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, London 1840-1841, II, Introduction, XVI-XVII.

⁷ Abridgement was first suggested by A. Montanus, *Itinerarium Benjaminii Tudelensis (...) ex Hebraico Latinum factum Bened. Aria Montano Interprete*, Antverpiae 1575, Preface, 12; see also previous note. For the dating, see above, p. 135.

previously heard of in the land of Sepharad“ or Spain, as stated in the prologue. He clearly shared Benjamin’s sustained attention to Jewish communities, holy sites, the tombs of Talmudic sages, miraculous events, and to his prospective public of Spanish Jews, examined below. On the other hand, by removing all personal expressions from the travel account he apparently intended to sharpen the focus upon the topics just mentioned and to provide a more impersonal and ‘objective’ survey of the communities. The substantial amount of information he discarded must have included references to the slaughter and enslavement of Jews in the Egyptian city of Bilbays, captured by King Amalric of Jerusalem on 4 November 1168⁸. Benjamin was certainly aware of these events, since he visited the city within the following three years, during which money was being raised for the ransoming of the captives⁹. Only few of Benjamin’s observations regarding the lowly social condition of the Jews remain in the „Book of Travels“, namely, in his descriptions of Constantinople (BT 23-24), Thessalonica (BT 18-19) and Rūdbār in the Gīlān province of Iran (BT 76), in the latter two cases without any explanation¹⁰. By omitting painful political and military events the editor obviously intended to provide a felicitous picture of Jewish life, a feature particularly stressed in the description of the „Babylonian“ communities of Iraq and western Iran.

The last section of the „Book of Travels“ raises several questions. After leaving Sicily Benjamin reached Rome and Lucca (BT 109), which he mentions in passing only since he had already described them on his outbound voyage (BT 8-11). The itinerary then proceeds over considerable distances through the Alpine pass of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne to Verdun, „which is the beginning of the land of Alemania“, lists several Jewish communities in Germany as far as Regensburg „at the extremity of Alemania (...) called Ashkenaz“, then deals with Prague, Kiev, and switches to „the kingdom of Francia called Šarfāt [extending] from the city of Auxerre to Paris, the large city (...) [belonging] to King Louis“ (BT 109-112). The last leg of Benjamin’s journey back to Tudela is missing, although the

⁸ R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, Paris 1934-1936, II, 521-23.

⁹ Benjamin left Egypt before 10 September 1171; see below, p. 149. On the collection of funds, see S.D. Goitein, *Moses Maimonides, Man of Action. A Revision of the Master’s Biography in the Light of the Geniza Documents*, in: G. Nahon – Ch. Touati (Eds.), *Hommage à Georges Vajda. Études d’histoire et de pensée juives*, Louvain 1980, 155-160.

¹⁰ On Constantinople, see below, pp. 154 and 159.

phrasing and content of the prologue to the „Book of Travels“ imply that the text was once complete.

It is commonly assumed that Benjamin traveled as far as Kiev and returned home from Paris. The argument runs as follows. Benjamin was in Paris since he praises the local Jews for the generous accommodation they provide, which he apparently enjoyed, and blesses them, which he fails to do with respect to other cities. He then proceeded by land over the Alps or by sea in the Atlantic to reach Castile, since he avoided Barcelona which was in Aragon.¹¹ This construct is seriously flawed. Communal accommodation for foreign Jews is mentioned elsewhere in the „Book of Travels“ and does not imply that Benjamin took advantage of it, as we shall see below. Moreover, since we miss the last leg of the journey we do not know whether or not Benjamin passed through Barcelona. Yet there are more convincing objections against his presence in Paris.

It is noteworthy that Benjamin follows a fixed pattern in describing his itinerary. He generally begins by stating the distance and geographical location of the city he visits with respect to the preceding one and proceeds with the names of local Jewish leaders and various urban features and traditions. This pattern is entirely absent from the ultimate section of the „Book of Travels“ beginning with Verdun. The strikingly different nature of that section can only be explained by the intervention of an editor, clearly *not* the one who condensed Benjamin's account. There is good reason to believe that the text obtained by the second editor was truncated, yet he did not attempt to complete the description of Benjamin's return journey to Tudela. Instead, since the „Book of Travels“ deals with Jewish communities around the Mediterranean and the Middle East, he considered it useful and appropriate to add some information about those existing in other regions. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the sequence of Prague and Kiev recalls the travel account of another Jewish traveler, Petaḥyah of Regensburg, who journeyed from Prague to Kiev in the 1170s. The second editor may have known the latter's account, briefly examined below. The information regarding the furs found in Eastern Europe reflects his interest in trade. His use of the names „Alemania“ and „Francia“ and especially the final lines dealing with King Louis and the „kingdom of France“ suggest that he may have resided in the latter region. The reference to the king, the only reigning monarch whose name appears in the last section of the „Book of Travels“, provides an important chrono-

¹¹ C. Roth, *Benjamin of Tudela: the Last Stage*, in: *Annuario di Studi Ebraici*, (1969), 47-50.

logical clue. Since Benjamin returned home in 1172/1173 and died some time later it is unlikely that an already incomplete copy of the „Book of Travels“ should have reached Paris or its region before the death of King Louis VII in 1180. It follows that the work of the second editor was carried out either under Louis VIII (1223-1226) or Louis IX (1226-1270)¹². The residence of that editor in the kingdom of France would easily explain his praise and blessing of the Jews of Paris.

In sum, Benjamin's original travel account appears to have undergone two revisions, first by an editor living in Spain and later by another one presumably residing in France. There is good reason to believe that Shemuel Šarša, the author of „Sefer Mekor Ḥayim“, completed in Valencia in 1368, was familiar with a version of the „Book of Travels“ circulating in Spain. We do not know whether it was complete, yet we may safely assume that it lacked the ultimate section beginning with Verdun. On the other hand, an incomplete version to which a section beginning with that city and dealing with Germany and France had been added was known outside Spain. It is noteworthy that this section appears in the earliest extant manuscript of the „Book of Travels“, the British Library copy executed in the fourteenth century in Ashkenazi script, as mentioned above, as well as in the fifteenth-century copies, including Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, ms. hebr. 3,097/1, executed in Italy in 1428. Despite the intervention of the two editors, various passages of the „Book of Travels“ reflect Benjamin's original text.

The extant version of the account nevertheless raises serious problems regarding Benjamin's itinerary, the chronology of his journey, as well as his motivations, attitudes and perceptions as traveler. These problems have been compounded by the absence of a reliable critical edition, as well as by the fact that few scholars have been aware or have taken into account that the „Book of Travels“ is an edited version of Benjamin's original account. In addition, many scholars lack direct access to the Hebrew text and rely on translations, most of which are marred by omissions, paraphrases, inaccuracies and outright mistakes that have given rise to erroneous interpretations and conclusions.

A brief comparison of the „Book of Travels“ with two other Jewish travel accounts of the twelfth century highlights some of its particular

¹² The brief reign of Louis X (1314-1316) seems too late. The earliest extant version of the „Book of Travels“, dated 1428 (see below), precedes the reign of Louis XI (1461-1483) which, therefore, does not offer any chronological clue.

features. The journey of Jacob ben Nethanel ha-Cohen to the Holy Land and Egypt cannot be precisely dated. However, since his short account alludes to the presence of Franks in Jerusalem and Hebron and to a knight from Provence in Tiberias, it belongs to the twelfth century before the fall of these cities to Saladin in 1187¹³. Jacob refers several times to himself in the first person and to his own experiences during his journey. While retaining the personal touch, the account has nevertheless been edited and shortened. A brief prologue has been added and there are several sudden transitions from one region to the other, which may partly derive from omissions or the loss of some sections of the account. Thus toward the end the itinerary switches from Jerusalem to a miraculous event on Mount Carmel which the author claims to have witnessed, followed by information on Mount Sinai, after which it abruptly ends. The account asserts that the fire burning on top of the lighthouse of Alexandria can be seen in Acre, Africa and Provence. This second reference to Provence, the only western region mentioned, suggests that the editor of the text may have resided there.

The much longer travel account of Petahyah of Regensburg is particularly important since the information it contains partly coincides with that offered by Benjamin of Tudela, yet also supplements it in various ways. Petahyah traveled from Prague to Kiev and the Caucasus, and after crossing the Black Sea reached the Middle East, where he arrived shortly after Benjamin. His travel account mentions „the king of Egypt“ as ruler of Damascus, which was the case for Saladin from October 1174 onward, he arrived in Baghdad a year after the death of the exilarch or head of the Babylonian Jewry, Daniel ben Ḥasdāy, thus in 1176, and he alludes to Latin presence in Jerusalem and Hebron, which ceased in 1187¹⁴. Petahyah

¹³ Edited from MS Cambridge Add. 539 by L. Grünhut, *Die Rundreise des R. Petachjah aus Regensburg*, II. Teil, Yerushalayim 1904, reprinted with separate pagination as an appendix to the account of Petahyah of Regensburg in: E. (sic) Grünhut, *Sibuv ha-Rav Rabbi Petahyah mi-Regensburg*, Frankfurt 1905. Inaccurate English translation by E. N. Adler, *Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages. 19 Firsthand Accounts*, London 1930, 92-99, who has arbitrarily changed the disposition of the text and skipped some passages. On this account, see J. Prawer, *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Oxford 1988, 184-191, who argues that since Jacob saw Ascalon, captured by the Franks from the Fatimids in 1153, his visit there occurred later. The argument is not convincing, since Jacob also visited Egypt.

¹⁴ Edited from a copy made in 1678 by L. Grünhut, *Sibuv*, 1-50, esp. 9, 28, 33; English translation by Adler, *Jewish Travelers*, 64-91. A different version has been edited from a fifteenth-century manuscript preserved in Warsaw by A. David, *Sibuv Rabbi Petahyah mi-*

took notes and collected both written and oral information along the way, yet he apparently conveyed his travel experience orally in Regensburg to an anonymous individual who compiled it. This process is illustrated by the compiler's question to Petaḥyah about Noah's Ark and his statement that „there is no need to record all the cities he [Petaḥyah] named [from Mesopotamia to Ḥamāt, Syria] and how many days he traveled from one to the other“¹⁵. Petaḥyah's travel account, like that of Benjamin of Tudela, has been shortened and edited, and a brief prologue and a brief epilogue have been added. One version of the account mentions that Rabbi Judah the Pious, who resided in Regensburg, refused to record or copy Petaḥyah's conversation with a Jewish astrologer who predicted the impending advent of the Messiah, while the Warsaw version cites their dialogue in full. This implies the intervention of successive editors in the shaping of the account. The Warsaw version also reveals the name of Petaḥyah's travel companion and the latter's refusal to proceed with him from Iraq to Egypt „because of the war“¹⁶. It is impossible to determine whether this is a reference to Saladin's military campaign of 1176 in Syria, or to later campaigns in that region and in Mesopotamia or against the Franks between 1177 and 1187¹⁷.

It is noteworthy that all the features mentioned above as missing in the „Book of Travels“ appear in the extensive and vivid contemporary travel account of Ibn Jubayr, a Muslim residing in Granada who accomplished his pilgrimage to Mecca, crossed Iraq and Syria, and returned home from Acre in the years 1183-1185. Ibn Jubayr is ever present in the foreground, opinionated, and at times highly emotional in his descriptions of places, people, and events¹⁸.

Regensburg be-nusab hadash (= *The Voyage of Rabbi Petaḥyah of Regensburg in a New Version*), in: Kobez al Yad. *Minora Manuscripta Hebraica*, XIII (XXII), Jerusalem 1996, 254-69, with preface *ibid.*, 237-253 (Hebrew). For the dates, see M. Gil, *Be-malkhut Yishma'el bi-tequfath ha-geonim* [English title: *In the Kingdom of Ishmael*], Yerushalayim 1997, I, 433-434.

¹⁵ David, *Sibuv*, 266; Grünhut, *Sibuv*, 19, 28.

¹⁶ David, *Sibuv*, 240-243; on Petaḥyah's companion, see also *ibid.*, 259. On his travel account, see Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 206-215, and on the collection of information and the intervention of editors, *ibid.*, 206-08. However, Praver was not aware of the version edited by David.

¹⁷ A. S. Ehrenkreuz, *Saladin*, Albany, N. Y., 1972, 143-152, 158-206.

¹⁸ *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst, London 1952. On this account, which has fortunately survived without the intervention of later editors, see N. Gugliemi, *Miradas de viajeros sobre oriente (siglos XII-XIV)*, in: D. Coulon – C. Otten-Froux –

Benjamin's account duly reflects his Spanish background and perspective and was clearly intended for a Jewish public in Spain. This is implied by his use of the Castilian plural and Castilian equivalents to Hebrew and other names. The inhabitants of the land of Yavan, Greece or more exactly Byzantium, are called „Grizianos“ or „Grigos“ (BT 19, 26, 106), the Druze are godless or „paganos“ (BT 29), „Tugarmim called Turcos“ is used for the Seljuks and the subjects of Nūr ad-Dīn, the ruler of Aleppo (BT 23, 26, 46), and the Samaritans are called „Samaritanos“ (BT 32). Benjamin identifies the valley of Ayalon as „Val de Luna“ (BT 24), and mentions the Hospitaller castle of Latrun as „Toron de los Caballeros“ (BT 42, variants in n. 38)¹⁹. He reports that a large fair „called feria“ is held each year at the tomb of the prophet Ezekiel, close to Baghdad (BT 67), thus explaining its nature by a Castilian term. In his description of Constantinople Benjamin stresses that „Sepharadim“ or Spaniards, more exactly inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula, are present among the foreigners trading in the city, a statement confirmed by other sources²⁰. He locates Constantinople between the „Sea of Sepharad“ and the „Sea of Russia“ (BT 20). The background and approach of the prologue's author were similar to those of Benjamin, as reflected by his statement that the latter recorded „all the matters not previously heard of in the land of Sepharad“.

Not surprisingly, Benjamin displayed considerable interest in the numerous Jewish communities he encountered in the course of his journey. He provides invaluable information regarding many of them. He notes the number of local Jews²¹, records the name of their rabbinical and communal leaders, the presence of Talmudic schools, occasionally adds information about the social standing and occupations of the community's members, and reports local traditions with references to biblical, later Talmudic or popular traditions when dealing with revered sites in the Middle East. The

P. Pagès – D. Valérian (Eds.), *Chemins d'outre-mer. Études sur la Méditerranée médiévale offertes à Michel Balard*, Paris 2004 (Byzantina Sorbonensia 20), II, 425-437.

¹⁹ This last site does not appear in the British Library manuscript, yet in others. It fits in the itinerary and, given its Castilian form, must have appeared in their model. Adler's argumentation that the passage is corrupt rests on a misunderstanding of the text of these manuscripts: see his translation, 26, n. 2. On that site and on Val de Luna, see Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 195-196.

²⁰ See D. Jacoby, *Benjamin of Tudela in Byzantium*, in: P. Schreiner – O. Strakhov (Eds.), *Χρυσά Πύλα / Zlataia Vrata: Essays presented to Ihor Sevcenko on his Eightieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (Palaeoslavica 10/1 2002)*, 182-183.

²¹ On the interpretation of his figures, see below, pp. 159-161.

focus upon the Jewish communities has undoubtedly been sharpened in the abridged version of the „Book of Travels“ that has come down to us.

Various attempts have been made to determine the precise itinerary and especially the chronology of Benjamin's travels. As we shall see below, Benjamin did not visit all the cities and regions listed in his account. He returned to Tudela in 1172/1173, as noted above, yet we do not know when he left. It is impossible, therefore, to determine exactly how long his journey lasted. Nor can the detailed chronology of his itinerary be reconstructed, since Benjamin fails to state how much time he spent in each of the places he visited. He mostly expresses distances between localities in days or half days of travel time, yet for his land journeys he also uses length measures in *parsoth* (plural of *parsah*) and in miles²². The information about travel time is noteworthy, yet of limited value in the absence of precise indications about means of transportation and stops along the way. Even if we take into account the itinerary Benjamin presumably followed, as outlined below, the total number of days he traveled does not amount to a single year, out of more than a decade of absence from Tudela. The „Book of Travels“ nevertheless provides some important chronological clues, such as the names of rulers or other prominent individuals and references to past events.

After leaving Tudela in Navarre Benjamin journeyed through Catalonia, Languedoc, and Provence and arrived at Genoa. He describes this city as protected by a wall, which was completed in 1159 according to the Genoese chronicler Caffaro²³. On the other hand, he notes that Pisa is not surrounded by a wall, a section of which was apparently standing by 1161²⁴. It seems likely, therefore, that Benjamin visited these two cities in the intermediate period. Benjamin's direct sailing from Genoa to Pisa

²² *Parsah*, from Persian *farsang*, an ancient Persian distance unit corresponding to around 5.6 km. One day of traveling appears to have been equivalent to 6 1/2 *parasangs*: see H. P. Rüger, *Syrien und Palästina nach dem Reisebericht des Benjamin von Tudela, übersetzt und erklärt*, Wiesbaden 1990 (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins 12), 1-2. There are wide variations in the value of the *parsoth* as applied to distances in the Holy Land mentioned by Benjamin, as noted by Prawer, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 197, and some incorrect measurements for journeys elsewhere. They either derive from Benjamin's erroneous calculations or from a copyist's errors.

²³ L.T. Belgrano – C. Imperiale di Sant'Angelo (Eds.), *Annali genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori dal MXCIX al MCCXCIII*, Roma 1890-1929, I, 53-54.

²⁴ E. Tolaini, *Forma Pisanorum*, Pisa 1979, 87; M. Luzzati, *La Casa dell'Ebreo. Saggi sugli Ebrei a Pisa e in Toscana nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento*, Pisa 1995, 37-38.

provides an additional chronological clue. It clearly took place before the renewal of hostilities between the two cities following the Pisan attack on the Genoese quarter in Constantinople in the spring of 1162²⁵.

In his description of Rome Benjamin mentions Jews serving in the administration of Pope Alexander III, one of them as steward of his household (BT 8). This piece of information is somewhat problematic and has been interpreted in various ways. Alexander III was elected on 7 September 1159, yet was compelled to leave Rome shortly afterwards, was consecrated at Ninfa on 20 September, and remained afterwards in exile. Rome sided with the anti-pope Victor IV, consecrated at Farfa on 4 October of the same year with the backing of Emperor Frederick I of Hohenstaufen. At first glance, therefore, it appears impossible that Jews should have acted as officials of Alexander III until the latter's final return to Rome on 23 November 1165. It has been repeatedly suggested, therefore, that Benjamin first visited Rome after the pope's return in 1165, yet by then he was already in the Middle East, as shown below. It has also been proposed that he added the reference to Alexander III after reaching Rome on his way back to Navarre. This appears highly unlikely, since he would have inserted it in connection with his second passage through the city. In fact, Victor IV never set foot in Rome until his death in 1164. Moreover, Rome switched sides and supported Alexander III from late 1160 onward, the pope returned to the city in June 1161, yet left again a fortnight later after entrusting the local administration to his vicar Julius of San Marcello, cardinal of Palestrina from 1158²⁶. It is quite plausible, therefore, that Jews served in the pope's administration from 1161 onward, despite his absence from the city. In short, Benjamin's first passage through Rome may be safely dated after June 1161, the year 1165 or later being excluded.

Benjamin later crossed southern Italy. He refers to Bari as a large city destroyed by King William (BT 11) and, indeed, William I of Sicily ordered its destruction in 1156 as punishment for its alliance with Emperor Manuel I of Byzantium. Bari was reconstructed only under William II,

²⁵ On these events, see M. Balard, *La Romanie génoise (XII^e – début du XV^e siècle)*, Roma 1978 (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 235), I, 25-26.

²⁶ See P. Brezzi, *Roma e l'impero medioevale (774-1252)*, Bologna 1947 (Storia di Roma 10), 349-352, who does not mention his sources for this last piece of information. On Julius of San Marcello, see J. Laudage, *Alexander III. und Friedrich Barbarossa*, Köln u.a. 1997, 86 and n. 331.

whose personal reign began in 1169²⁷. Benjamin then sailed through the Adriatic, visited Byzantine Corfu, Thebes, Halmyros in Thessaly, and after passing through Thessalonica reached Constantinople. He mentions three times Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, who ruled from 1143 to 1180 (BT 15, 19, 21). He refers to spectacles involving jugglery and fights of wild animal taking place at the hippodrome on 25 December of each year. It is unlikely that Jews attended there the festivities of Christmas 1161 in honor of the marriage of Emperor Manuel I with Maria, daughter of the prince of Antioch²⁸. On the other hand, Benjamin may have witnessed some free-lance street performances at that occasion. In any event, his presence in the city around that time appears to be plausible, in view of the previous chronological clues regarding his journey in Italy and the one that will soon be adduced.

From Constantinople Benjamin crossed the Aegean on one or several ships to Rhodes and later to Cyprus, the last Byzantine territory through which he passed. It is likely that these were Byzantine vessels, in view of the itinerary via the Byzantine province of Cyprus, since Italian vessels would have rather sailed along the Levantine coast, then largely in Frankish hands²⁹. After traveling through the kingdom of Cilician Armenia Benjamin reached Antioch. He mentions Prince Bohemond Poitevin of Antioch (BT 26), in fact Bohemund III son of Raymond of Poitiers, who succeeded to Reginald of Châtillon in 1163, possibly as early as the last week of March, and reigned until 1201³⁰. Benjamin states that Gibelet is in the hands of the Genoese and ruled by Guglielmo Embriaco (BT 28), who by 15 June 1163 had been succeeded by his son Hugo II³¹. It follows that he was in Antioch and Gibelet in the spring and in any case before mid-

²⁷ R. Iorio – R. Licinio – G. Musca, *Sotto la monarchia normanna-sveva*, in: F. Tateo (Ed.), *Storia di Bari dalla conquista normanna al ducato sforzesco*, Bari 1990, 62-68.

²⁸ John Kinnamos, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, V. 4, ed. A. Meineke, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Bonn 1836, 210-11, mentions horse races and other amusements that took place at that occasion. On earlier appearances of mimes and fights of wild animals, see R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, Paris ²1964, 184.

²⁹ D. Jacoby, *Byzantine Trade with Egypt from the Mid-Tenth Century to the Fourth Crusade*, in: *Θησαυρίσματα*, 30 (2000) 37-38, 59-60, repr. in: D. Jacoby, *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean: Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy*, Aldershot 2005, no. I.

³⁰ On the troubled circumstances in which Bohemund III assumed power, see H. E. Mayer, *Varia Antiochena. Studien zum Kreuzfahrerfürstentum Antiochia im 12. und frühen 13. Jahrhundert*, Hannover 1993 (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Studien und Texte 6), 55-64, and for the dating of the earliest charters of Bohemund III, *ibid.*, 43.

³¹ E. Rey, *Les seigneurs de Gibelet*, in: *Revue de l'Orient latin*, 3 (1895), 400-401.

June of that year. Incidentally, the references to the rulers of these two cities offer the most precise chronological indications appearing in Benjamin's travel account.

From Gibelet Benjamin proceeded before mid-June 1163 along the Mediterranean coast to Tyre and Acre, from where he pursued his journey to Jerusalem. After what appears to have been an extended stay in the Holy Land and visits as far south as Ascalon, he traveled to Damascus and Aleppo, naming Nūr ad-Dīn as their ruler (BT 46). Benjamin records the large-scale destruction inflicted by a violent earthquake that took place at some unspecified time before his visit in Tripoli and Ḥamāt (BT 27, 49-50). This was clearly the earthquake sequence of 1156-1157 that severely damaged several cities, especially Aleppo, Ḥamāt and Tripoli³². Strangely, the „Book of Travels“ refers to the Jewish communities existing in Aleppo and Ḥamāt, yet fails to mention one in Tripoli. It is unclear whether this omission reflects the absence of Jewish residence in the city in the 1160s, in the aftermath of the earthquakes, or is due to an editor of the text.

From Aleppo Benjamin pursued his voyage eastward and followed the Euphrates to Qal'at Gabar and to ar-Raḡḡa (BT 50-51), which he reached at the earliest in the late summer of 1167, when Nūr al-Dīn ceded the latter city to his youngest brother Ẓuḡb al-Dīn, and at the latest on 26 October 1168 when he got hold of the former³³. Benjamin successively moved to Mosul, Baghdad and western Iran. While in Iṣfahān, he was told by a local informant of a battle in which the king of Persia had been vanquished fifteen years earlier (BT 83-88). This must have been the battle of 1153 in which Sultan Sandjar was heavily defeated by a group of Oghuz or Ghuzz, as called in contemporary sources, who were settled in the eastern part of

³² On the dating of these earthquakes and the destruction they caused, see E. Guidoboni and A. Comastri, *Catalogue of Earthquakes and Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Area from the 11th to the 15th Century*, Roma 2005, 153-165. These authors rely on the later dating of Benjamin's journey by various modern authors and, therefore, mistakenly consider that he refers to the earthquake of 29 June 1170: *ibid.*, 189-210, esp. 208-209. This would imply that seven years or more passed between Benjamin's visits to Antioch and Aleppo, which is excluded. The date of 1170 may also be dismissed since Benjamin was already in Iṣfahān by 1168: see below, pp. 147-148.

³³ For the identification of these events in Benjamin's narrative, see Rūger, *Syrien und Palästina* (n. 22), 25. On their dating, see N. Elisséeff, *Nur ad-Din. Un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des croisades (511-569 H./1118-1174)*, Damascus 1967, II, 616-17 and 620-22 respectively.

Khūrāsān in the region of Balkh³⁴. Benjamin's presence in Iṣfahān in 1168 neatly ties in with the former stages of his journey. It is unlikely that Benjamin proceeded southward to Shiraz and from there eastwards to Gazniḥ in Afghanistan and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, although he mentions these cities and the head of the local Jewish community in Samarkand by name (BT 82)³⁵. Indeed, after quoting his local informant in Iṣfahān, he traces an itinerary from that city to the west: „And thence one returns [i. e., in the description of the itinerary] to the land of Khuzistan which is by the [river] Tigris and thence one sails down on the river and reaches the Sea of India“ (BT 88), i. e. the Persian Gulf³⁶.

After presumably stopping in the island of Kish (modern Kays) (BT 88-89) and later in Aden (BT 95-96) Benjamin crossed the Red Sea, most likely to 'Aydḥāb, a harbour on the African coast linked by a caravan route passing through the desert of southern Egypt to Aswan, the first city he mentions in that country (BT 96-97). This route was used by pilgrims and by merchants trading with India³⁷. Benjamin proceeded along the Nile to al-Fuṣṭāṭ or Old Cairo and later to Bilbays (BT 103), Alexandria and Damietta. He did not travel to the biblical sites located in the Sinai peninsula appearing in his account. This is clearly implied by his confused description of Mount Sinai, examined below, and by the statement following his treatment of these sites: „Let us return [i. e. in the description of the itiner-

³⁴ See Adler, *The Itinerary* (n. 1), 61, n.1. On the historical background, see Cl. Cahen, *Ghuzz*, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, II, Leiden – London ²1965, 1109. The reference to „fifteen years ago“ is a unique instance in the „Book of Travels“ proving that Benjamin took notes during his journey.

³⁵ On his sources of information, see below. Benjamin is the earliest western source to use the form Samarkand: B. Hamilton, *Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne*, in: Ch. F. Beckingham – B. Hamilton (Eds.), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*, Aldershot 1996, 179, n. 51.

³⁶ P. Borchardt, *Der Reiseweg des Rabbi Benjamin von Tudela und des Rabbi Petachia aus Regensburg in Mesopotamien und Persien. Ein Versuch*, in: *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft*, 16 (1924), 137-162, confirms the accuracy of Benjamin's itinerary and his timetable. He asserts (*ibid.*, 161) that in Iran Benjamin did not go beyond Susa (modern Persian Shūsh) in the south-west Persian province of Khūzistān, which implies that he did not visit Iṣfahān. This is clearly a misreading of the travel account regarding this city.

³⁷ S. D. Goitein (trans.), *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, N. J., 1973, 70, 181-185, 197-201, 207-212, 335-338; J.-C. Garcin, *Transport des épices et espace égyptien entre le XI^e et le XV^e siècle*, in: *Les transports au moyen âge*, Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest, 85 (1978), 305-310.

ary] to Damietta“ (BT 107)³⁸. Benjamin may have visited Tinnīs (BT 107). Since he refers to the Egyptian caliph (BT 98-99), he left Egypt before the end of Fatimid dominion over the country and Egypt's renewed recognition of the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad as lawful caliphs on 10 September 1171³⁹. Unfortunately, we miss further chronological clues enabling an approximate dating of the last stages of Benjamin's voyage.

From Egypt Benjamin reached Messina. He mentions King William of Sicily, in fact William II who had attained his majority and had seized power in 1169⁴⁰. The „Book of Travels“ lists Siracusa and Catania without referring to the earthquake that struck Sicily on 4 February 1169 and completely destroyed these two cities⁴¹. It is clear that Benjamin did not visit them, since they were not on his way. Indeed, from Messina he proceeded directly along the northern coast of Sicily to Palermo and Trapani⁴². He later reached Rome and Lucca (BT 109). As noted above, the „Book of Travels“ then suddenly drifts away from the itinerary leading to Tudela, states the distance from Lucca to Verdun, deals with Germany and regions eastward as far as Kiev, and ends with Paris (BT 109-112). It is impossible to reconstruct the last leg of Benjamin's return journey to Tudela.

The geographic and chronological data examined so far provide a more plausible itinerary than hitherto suggested and an approximate time frame for several stages of Benjamin's journey. It is likely that his departure from his home town took place in 1159 or in 1160 at the latest, since he arrived in Pisa in 1161 and in Rome in the second half of the same year or somewhat later. He apparently traveled from Rome to Constantinople in less than six months, arriving late in 1161 or in the first months of 1162 in the Byzantine capital, where he presumably stayed most of the time he spent in the Byzantine empire. His sojourn in the city and his voyage from there to Antioch may have lasted some fifteen months at most, as implied by his presence in Antioch and Gibelet in the spring of 1163. His stay in the Holy Land was much longer, since after leaving it he did not pass

³⁸ This statement is included in a short passage missing in the British Library manuscript, which has been rightly added from the Oxford version: see Adler, *The Itinerary* (n. 1), p. 78, n.1.

³⁹ Ehrenkrewitz, *Saladin* (n. 17), 89-94.

⁴⁰ S. Tramontana, *La monarchia normanna e sveva*, in: G. Galasso (Ed.), *Storia d'Italia*, III, *Il Mezzogiorno dai Bizantini a Federico II*, Torino 1983, 629-636.

⁴¹ On that earthquake, see Guidoboni and Comastri, *Catalogue of Earthquakes and Tsunamis*, 175-188.

⁴² The omission of the earthquake, therefore, cannot serve as a chronological indication.

through ar-Raḳḳa before the late summer of 1167. In the intermediate four years he made several journeys back and forth between the north and the south of the Holy Land. It is likely that his itinerary in the region has been modified and shortened by an editor, which explains why it appears to be rather confused⁴³. As implied by Benjamin's presence in Iṣfahān in 1168, his visit to Baghdad, Iraq and western Iran was rather short, despite his intense interest in the Jewish communities and holy sites of those regions. Iṣfahān was the last major city in which he stayed before traveling to Egypt, which he left before September 1171. The ultimate section of his journey back to Tudela, which he reached in 1172/73, must have lasted between one and two years. Benjamin was thus absent from his home city for twelve to fourteen years, most of which he spent in the Middle East. The overall chronological framework of Benjamin's travels is corroborated by evidence regarding various contemporary Jewish communal and spiritual leaders and Talmudic scholars appearing in his account⁴⁴.

As noted earlier, according to the prologue „In every place he [Benjamin] entered, he made a record of all that he saw or was told of by trustworthy persons“. Indeed, his „Book of Travels“ includes first-hand, accurate and most valuable factual evidence from personal observation and experience, as well as information from hearsay, including fanciful stories and popular traditions, some of which are unrecorded elsewhere. The leaders of the numerous Jewish communities, whose names he mentions, were among Benjamin's main informants, and in two cases he cites them as such⁴⁵. Yet he also obtained data from merchants, as we shall see below. Beyond cultural boundaries, Benjamin and his Jewish informants shared Hebrew as a common language. As a result he had a clear advantage over contemporary Christian and Muslim travelers, who in foreign lands often

⁴³ Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 194-196, 198-206, has already pointed to the confusion in the description of Benjamin's itinerary in the Holy Land. A similar confusion exists in Petahyah's travel account covering that region: see *ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁴ Evidence in that respect has been collected in Asher, *The Itinerary* (n. 1) II, 1-229, notes to the text by L. Zunz. The head of the Jewish community of Tyre mentioned by Benjamin, Rabbi Ephraim the Egyptian, corresponded with Maimonides and appears in one of the latter's circular letters dated 1173: see above, n. 9, and Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 52-54. A Jew of Jerusalem mentioned by Benjamin is also attested by other sources: see *ibid.*, 139-40. Further examination of the Geniza documents discovered in a synagogue of Old Cairo is indispensable, yet outside the range of the present study.

⁴⁵ See above, pp. 159-161.

encountered linguistic problems in communication with local residents and had to rely on interpreters.

Benjamin's record of his journey was intended for a Jewish public, yet it also contains abundant and precious evidence on numerous matters not directly related to Jews and not found elsewhere. As noted above, he provides information on cities according to a more or less fixed pattern. He mostly begins by stating the distance from the preceding city he has visited, proceeds with the description of various geographic and urban features, dwells upon large buildings and shrines, which thoroughly impressed him, and records traditions related to them. His description of local political, social and cultural conditions, buildings, shrines and traditions is generally brief, except for a few of them. His occasional observations about political conditions are generally accurate. It is likely that many others have been erased by the editor who abridged his text.

Benjamin records that Tarragona „was built by Greek giants“ or „has giant Greek buildings“ (the text is not clear at that point), and refers to Barcelona as „a small and beautiful city lying on the seacoast“ (BT 1). He notes that there are two Jewish congregations in Marseilles, „one on the shore by the sea, the other in the castle above“ (BT 6), a description reflecting the political and territorial division of the city between the viscount and the bishop, respectively lords of the lower and upper city⁴⁶. He remarks that Genoa is surrounded by a wall, while Pisa has none, as noted earlier, that both cities have many towers and „that at times of strife“ the inhabitants „fight from the top of the towers with each other“. He adds that these cities are not governed by a king, but appoint judges to rule over them (BT 6-7). These features reflect the antagonism between urban „consorterie“ possessing fortified compounds with towers, as well as the consulate system of government in the two cities. They strike Benjamin who comes from a region governed by kings and feudal lords. He observes that „Capua is a fine city, but the water is bad and the country is fever-stricken“ (BT 11), a reference to malaria, and people come for cure to the hot-water springs of Pozzuoli, the ancient city being submerged (BT 11-12). Benjamin's story about the foundation of Pozzuoli reflects a Jewish source familiar to his

⁴⁶ Each congregation had its own synagogue: see D. L. Smail, *The two Synagogues of Medieval Marseille. Documentary Evidence*, in: *Revue des Études Juives*, 154 (1995), 115-124.

informants, the tenth-century „Sefer Yosippon“ written in southern Italy⁴⁷. He adds that the Christians in Salerno have a school of medicine (BT 12) and the inhabitants of Taranto are Greek (BT 14). He describes the water distribution systems of Antioch and Damascus (BT 16, 46-47) and dwells upon the water supply from cisterns in Jerusalem, Aleppo and the island of Kish in the Persian Gulf (BT 37, 50, 89)⁴⁸. In Jerusalem he notes the Templars and the double function of the Hospitallers as a military force and as an institution taking care of sick people in their hospital (BT 35).

Not surprisingly, Benjamin pays particular attention to Jews whose practices and liturgy differ from Rabbinic Judaism, namely, the Karaites in Constantinople, Cyprus, Ascalon and Damascus (BT 23, 25, 44, 48), a sect of heretical Jews in Cyprus (BT 25), and Samaritans or Kutim in the Holy Land and Iraq (BT 32-33, 44, 48). He collected information regarding the dwelling of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel in the oasis of Khaybar in the Arabian peninsula and in the mountains of Naysābūr in Iran (BT 72, 83). Yet, in addition, the „Book of Travels“ contains much ethnographic material regarding foreign people, their way of life, mores, religion and traditions. Benjamin is the first Westerner to describe the sect of the Ḥashīshīyyun or Assassins residing in Syria and Iran (BT 27, 76), founded in the last decades of the eleventh century, and to state their name correctly⁴⁹. He deals with the Druzes of Lebanon (BT 29), the Turkish Ghuzz (BT 83-84), the sun-worshippers of Malabar on the coast of the Indian Ocean, and the fire-worshippers of an unidentified country (BT 90-93).

Benjamin's report on Rome is especially long, clearly because of the connection between the city and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A. D. There are eighty imperial palaces in Rome „from the reign of Tarquinius down to the reign of Nero and Tiberius, who lived at the time of Jesus the Nazarene, ending with the reign of Pepin, the father of Charlemagne, who captured the land of Sepharad from the Muslims“ (BT 9)⁵⁰. The story reflects the continuity of Roman history, a

⁴⁷ On Benjamin's confusion of Pozzuoli and Sorrento and the submerged buildings of the former, see A. Toaff, *Sorrento e Pozzuoli nella letteratura ebraica del medioevo*, in: Rivista degli studi orientali, 40 (1965), 313-317, and Lacerenza, *Echi biblici* (n.1), 466-468.

⁴⁸ Cl. Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*, Paris 1940, 132.

⁴⁹ B. Lewis, *The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins*, in: Speculum, 27 (1952), 483.

⁵⁰ A. Varvaro, *Carlomagno in Spagna in Beniamino di Tudela*, in: Medioevo Romano, 9 (1984), 341-342; S.G. Armistead – J. H. Silverman, *Una tradición épico-carolingia en el Itinerario de Benjamin de Tudela*, in: Sefarad, 47 (1987), 3-7.

major component of western imperial ideology, yet also illustrates the absorption of Christian popular traditions by the local Jews. Benjamin adds that Titus was compelled to build a palace outside Rome because he failed to carry out the injunction of his three hundred counselors to capture Jerusalem in two years and, instead, waged war for three years. He identifies a sculpture in front of the Lateran palace as representing Samson holding a spear in his hand (BT 10-11), whereas the mid-twelfth century author of the „*Mirabilia urbis Romae*“, a text almost contemporaneous of Benjamin's visit in Rome, considers it a depiction of Saturn standing for the Nile⁵¹. However, the 'Jewish' interpretation of the sculpture was apparently also current in Rome at that time. It appears in the work of Magister Gregorius, author of the „*Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Rome*“, a text dated to the first decades of the thirteenth century, thus some forty years after Benjamin's passage through Rome⁵². There is an obscure passage in which Benjamin refers to a building identified as the Colosseum, divided into 365 sections „like the days of the solar year“ (BT 9)⁵³. Incidentally, he claims that the number of altars or chapels in the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was similar to the days of the year (BT 20), and that a wall of glass in the Great Mosque of the Umayyads in Damascus has apertures as numerous as the days of the year (BT 47). These references to the solar year, different from the Jewish and Muslim lunar year, offer further evidence of the impact of the Christian perceptions on those of Benjamin.

Benjamin's description of Constantinople is fairly long (BT 19-24). He was deeply impressed by the city's wealth, its rich citizens, and its cosmopolitan character. There are merchants and other people from numerous lands at court, at the hippodrome, and at the markets. The church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is the „seat of the pope of the Greeks, since the Greeks do not obey to the pope of Rome“, an indication that the local Jews were fully aware of the rift between the Roman and Byzantine

⁵¹ C. Nardella, *Il fascino di Roma nel Medioevo. Le „Meraviglie di Roma“ di maestro Gregorio*, Roma 1997, 16-18, on the dating of the *Mirabilia*; C. Nardella, *L'antiquaria romana dal „Liber Pontificalis“ ai „Mirabilia urbis Romae“*, in: *Roma antica nel Medioevo. Mito, rappresentazioni, sopravvivenze nella 'Repubblica Christiana' dei secoli IX-XIII*, Atti della quattordicesima Settimana internazionale di studio (Mendola, 24-28 agosto 1998), Milano 2001, 424-47, esp. 428-47, on the *Mirabilia* and Gregorio. See also next note.

⁵² P. Borchardt, *The Sculpture in Front of the Lateran as described by Benjamin of Tudela and Magister Gregorius*, in: *Journal of Roman Studies*, 26 (1936), 68-70; Nardella, *Il fascino di Roma nel Medioevo* (n. 51), 24-42, for the dating; text on 159.

⁵³ For the identification with the Colosseum, see Adler, *The Itinerary* (n. 1), II, 6, n. 6.

churches. Incidentally, he remarks that the caliph of Baghdad is „appointed over the religion of the Ismaelites“, i. e. the Muslims, „like the pope over the Christians“ (TB 54). Benjamin’s depiction of the rich interior of Hagia Sophia contains some correct information, although he did not visit it. He cites the titles of several high imperial officials, yet his information about them is rather confused⁵⁴. He reproduces the contemporary western topos of the effeminate Greeks unable to fight and, therefore, hiring foreign mercenaries⁵⁵. Benjamin observes that the Jewish physician from Egypt who attends to Emperor Manuel I is allowed to ride a horse in the streets of Constantinople (BT 23-24), which sharply contrasts with the lowly social condition of the local Jews⁵⁶. The authenticity of the statement is indirectly confirmed by the Coptic writer al-Makari, who reports that a similar honor was bestowed upon the Egyptian Melkite cleric and physician Anba Sabas ibn al-Layth, who apparently came to Constantinople in 1117 to be consecrated patriarch of Alexandria and during his stay in the city treated Emperor Alexios I for his illness⁵⁷.

Benjamin is often prone to exaggeration, as in his description of the clothes, all in silk, worn by the inhabitants of Constantinople. It is obvious that neither he nor his Jewish informants, except for Salomon the Egyptian, the physician attending to Manuel I, had access to the imperial Blachernae palace, the construction of which Benjamin wrongly ascribes to Manuel I, who made important additions to it between 1146 and 1160⁵⁸. Benjamin’s fanciful description of the palace’s fabulous adornment contains the assertion that „no candles are required there by night, since everyone sees by the light emitted by the [numerous] gems“ decorating the palace (BT 21-22). Similarly, his description of the Great Mosque of the Ummayyads in Damascus, which he clearly did not enter, abounds in

⁵⁴ J. A. Ochoa, *El imperio bizantino en el viaje de Benjamín de Tudela*, in: G. Busi (Ed.), *Viaggiatori ebrei. Berichte jüdischer Reisender vom Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart*, Atti del Congresso europeo dell’AISG (San Miniato, 4-5 novembre 1991), Bologna 1992, 87-88, 92-93.

⁵⁵ On that topos, see M. Carrier, *Perfidious and Effeminate Greeks: The Representation of Byzantine Ceremonial in the Western Chronicles of the Crusades (1096-1204)*, in: *Annuario. Istituto Romeno di cultura e ricerca umanistica*, 4 (2002), 47-68.

⁵⁶ On their condition at the time of Benjamin’s visit, see below, p. 159.

⁵⁷ K. Ciggaar, *An Egyptian Doctor at the Comnenian Court*, in: Νέα Ἱώμη. Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche 2 (2005) = Ἀπελοκήτιον. Studi di amici e colleghi in onore di Vera von Falkenhausen, Roma 2005, II, 287-302, esp. 290, 300.

⁵⁸ For this dating, see P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180*, Cambridge 1993, 117; on the additions, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 126-28.

fanciful descriptions (BT 47), and this is also the case of the lake located in the luxurious garden of King William II in Palermo, on which „ships overlaid with silver and gold“ sail (BT 108-109).

Alexandria is also extensively treated. Outside the city there is a large structure, „the academy of Aristotle“, built by Alexander the Great. Benjamin records the well-known story regarding the mirror on the famous pharos or lighthouse, which by reflecting the sun set enemy ships on fire before they reached the shore, and its destruction by a Greek (BT 103-104). The story appears in earlier Arabic sources⁵⁹. A tradition regarding the tomb of Daniel in Susa similar to the one reported by Benjamin (BT 74-74) and Petaḥyah is already recorded by the tenth century Muḩaddasī: ⁶⁰ A thorough investigation of local popular traditions in Arabic and Persian literatures is likely to yield more interesting parallels or variations of that kind.

The ‘Book of Travels‘ asserts that one can see the submerged buildings of ancient Tyre. However, since no such remnants have been found it has been suggested that the story derives from two sources: the confusion of Şor (Tyre) with Şir, the presumed eponymous founder of Pozzuoli, the submerged buildings of which could be seen, and the influence of biblical prophecies regarding the destruction of Tyre. Whether Benjamin was responsible of the confusion or an editor remains an open question⁶¹.

Alongside many accurate observations Benjamin also provides some confused versions of the information he obtained. He claims that Corfu belongs to the kingdom of Sicily (BT 15), whereas in fact it was occupied by the forces of King Roger II from 1147 to 1149 only, after which it was recovered by Byzantium. The section of the account dealing with biblical sites connected to the exodus of the tribes of Israel from Egypt contains erroneous information about Christian sites (BT 107). Benjamin states that „a large convent belonging to the great monks called Syrians“ is located on top of Mount Sinai, whereas in fact the monastery is at the foot of the mountain and was held by Greek monks. Benjamin further states that „at the foot of the mountain [there] is a large town called Tur Sinai“, which in

⁵⁹ A. J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty years of Roman Dominion*, Oxford 1978, 393-396.

⁶⁰ J. Obermeyer, *Die Landschaft Babylonien im Zeitalter des Talmuds und des Gaonats. Geographie und Geschichte nach talmudischen, arabischen und andere Quellen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1929, 213-214.

⁶¹ Lacerenza, *Echi biblici* (n. 1), 462-470.

fact was a small settlement called Tūr situated on the Red Sea coast some 50 km. west-southwest of Mount Sinai⁶².

Benjamin's displays a keen interest in economic matters. He notes Jewish craftsmen in several manufacturing branches: silk workers involved in the manufacturing of silk textiles and the tailoring of silk garments in Byzantium, dyers in Brindisi, Jaffa, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Lydda and other places, as well as those working on commission among the Druzes, tanners in Constantinople, and glassmakers in Antioch and Tyre. In addition, he mentions merchants in Constantinople and Jews owning sea-going vessels in Tyre, an unusual feature in the twelfth century (TB 30). His acquaintance with trade is illustrated by abundant data, and his use of the Castilian term „feria“ (BT 67) in that context is noteworthy⁶³. In addition, he devotes short observations to specific commodities, namely, glass vessels manufactured in Antioch and Tyre (BT 26, 30), high-grade sugar produced in the vicinity of Tyre that people from all lands come to buy (BT 30), mastic grown in Chios (BT 25), ginger, the growing and collection of pepper (BT 91), pearl fishing (BT 89-90), and coral found near Trapani in Sicily (BT 109). Like Marco Polo more than a century later, he refers to Tibetan musk (BT 75, 82), an extremely costly substance secreted by the male musk deer that was used in medicine and as basis for perfumes⁶⁴. He also pays particular attention to silks. Except for sugar and glassware, these were all light and costly commodities that suited the activity of a merchant temporarily established at successive places and moving around with little freight costs.

Benjamin reports the building of „ships called galleys“ in Genoa, which according to him has command of the sea (BT 7). He notes that the inhabitants of Amalfi are „merchants who trade and do not sow or reap, but buy everything for money because they dwell upon high hills and lofty crags, yet have an abundance of fruit“ (BT 13), by which he means that they produce no grain⁶⁵. Strangely, there is no indication that Amalfi is involved in maritime trade. Benjamin notes that Trani and Messina are ports in which pilgrims wishing to visit Jerusalem gather in order to sail to Acre (BT 14, 31, 108). Incidentally, he also pays attention to Christian

⁶² The twelfth-century account of Jacob ha-Cohen goes even further astray, since it states that a mosque stands on Mount Sinai: ed. Grünhut (see above, n. 13), 14.

⁶³ See above, p. 143.

⁶⁴ See D. Jacoby, *Marco Polo, His Close Relative, and His Travel Account: Some New Insights*, in: *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 21 (2006) 201-203.

⁶⁵ On the growing of vines and fruit trees in the territory of Amalfi, see M. Del Treppo – A. Leone, *Amalfi medioevale*, Napoli 1977, 17-33.

pilgrimage to Saint-Gilles (BT 5) and to Muslims going to Mecca (BT 55). He writes that „there is no harbor like [Tyre] in the whole world“ and refers to the iron chain blocking its entrance at night, yet the same feature is missing in his description of Acre (BT 30-31)⁶⁶. He notes the numerous nations whose merchants are active in Constantinople and in Alexandria, yet his claim that each nation had its own funduq or caravanserai in the Egyptian port is not confirmed by other sources and may be discounted⁶⁷. According to the British Library manuscript he states that the yearly revenue of the Byzantine imperial treasury from Constantinople amounts to 20,000 hyperpyra or gold coins, yet according to another manuscript this was the daily income (BT 22). Whatever the original version, both figures were at best popular estimates and both are implausible⁶⁸.

Benjamin's travel account contains some reliable information on economic matters not found in other contemporary sources. He encountered Byzantine and Egyptian merchants in Barcelona and Montpellier during the first stage of his journey, around 1160, and rightly states that „[men] from all nations are present there [in Montpellier] for trading with the help of the Genoese and the Pisans“ (BT 1-2, 2-3). Indeed, Byzantine and Western traders sailing in that period between Constantinople and southern France depended upon Genoese and Pisan carriers⁶⁹. Benjamin also offers evidence for merchants from Morocco in Montpellier and Alexandria (BT 3, 106)⁷⁰, from Genoa in Halmyros, Thessaly, in the period between 1160 and 1163 (BT 18), and, as noted above, from Spain in Constantinople. Their presence around that time is indirectly confirmed by thirteenth-century sources regarding the existence of a Spanish and Pro-

⁶⁶ On the chain in Acre, see D. Jacoby, *Crusader Acre in the Thirteenth Century: Urban Layout and Topography*, in: *Studi medievali*, 3a serie, 20 (1979), 13-14, repr. in: D. Jacoby, *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion*, Northampton 1989, no. V.

⁶⁷ D. Jacoby, *Les Italiens en Égypte aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles: du comptoir à la colonie?*, in: M. Balard – A. Ducellier (Eds.), *Coloniser au Moyen Age*, Paris 1995, 78-79.

⁶⁸ See M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450*, Cambridge 1985, 173-174.

⁶⁹ Saint-Gilles appears as a center of Christian pilgrimage, Benjamin fails to mention its trade and fairs, on which see W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge*, Leipzig 1885-1886, I, 185.

⁷⁰ Morocco instead of Algarve or Portugal as in Adler's translation: see D. J. Wasserstein, *Does Benjamin mention Portugal?*, in: *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 24 (1979), 193-200. There is abundant evidence for the connections of Moroccan Jews with Egypt in S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1967-1993, I.

vençal quarter in the city⁷¹. His short references to the manufacturing of silk textiles and the tailoring of garments in Byzantium are of considerable importance. He is the only source mentioning the production of silks in twelfth-century Thessalonica and his note about Thebes attests to the rapid recovery of the local silk industry after the deportation of local workers to Palermo, ordered by King Roger II of Sicily in 1147. He also refers to the compulsory delivery of silk textiles and garments to the imperial court, confirmed by other sources⁷².

Benjamin collected information regarding regions he did not visit and stories related to them. A sizeable section of that nature is devoted to lands east of Iran, namely, central Asia, India and the Far East. To some extent his interest in these regions was related to the quest for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Yet it was also and presumably mainly stimulated by economic factors. Benjamin distinctly mentions Tibet, which he locates east of Samarkand (BT 57, 62, 75, 82) and China (BT 94)⁷³, more than a century before Marco Polo, and speaks of the perils besetting navigation in the China Sea. Merchants stationed in major markets and acting as middlemen for goods circulating between eastern and western Asia were his main informants about these regions. He encountered them in Baghdad, which was also the seat of the exilarch whose authority extended over the Jewish communities of these regions, according to Benjamin, and in Işfahān, where “men of Israel in the land of Persia“ told him about people and lands east of their country (BT 83). It is likely that he also obtained information in the island of Kish, a meeting place of traders from India, Yemen and Iran (BT 88-89), as well as from Egyptian Jews trading with Yemen and India⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Jacoby, *Benjamin of Tudela in Byzantium* (n. 20), 182.

⁷² Inaccurate translations of the relevant passages regarding these two cities and Constantinople have led to erroneous interpretations of the specific work performed. See now D. Jacoby, *Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 84-85 (1991-1992), 466, 487 no. 196, repr. in: D. Jacoby, *Trade, Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean*, Aldershot 1997, no.VII. See also Jacoby, *Benjamin of Tudela in Byzantium* (n. 20), 183-184.

⁷³ The spelling „Tobot“ instead of „Tibet“ derives from a misreading of the letter yodh, easily transformed into waw, and „Sion“ appears instead of „Sin“, an obvious slip. These are just two examples of the numerous erroneous transcriptions of place names in all the manuscripts.

⁷⁴ See S. D. Goitein, *From the Mediterranean to India: Documents on the Trade to India, South Arabia, and East Africa from the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, in: *Speculum*, 29 (1954), 181-97; S.D. Goitein, *From Aden to India. Specimens of the Correspondence of India*

Benjamin's acquaintance with trade and merchants is also illustrated by some of his remarks regarding the Jews of Pera, the suburb of Constantinople. He reports that the Jewish tanners, who spill on the streets the malodorous liquids deriving from the processing of hides, are responsible for the animosity of the local Greeks toward their Jewish neighbors. In fact, however, at the time of Benjamin's visit in Constantinople Greek anti-semitism was of a more general nature and not related to the exercise of specific crafts, as attested by Byzantine contemporary sources⁷⁵. The blame cast upon the craftsmen clearly reflects the social bias of the local Jewish elite composed of merchants toward a section of the community involved in the lowly occupation of tanning. By recording it Benjamin displays his identification with the attitudes of these merchants and offers a glimpse of his own mentality.

Benjamin provides assessments of Jewish population for numerous communities in round figures, unless the number is inferior to ten⁷⁶. These figures have been interpreted in various ways: as referring to individuals, to men aged thirteenth or more and thus considered adults participating in liturgical functions, to taxpayers, or to households⁷⁷. The scrutiny of the data bearing upon Egyptian localities for which additional information subsists yields ambiguous and unconvincing results⁷⁸. The figure of 300 Jews in Billbays must refer to the total Jewish population, since Benjamin visited the city within three years after its capture by King Amalric of Jerusalem on 4 November 1168 and the slaughter or enslavement of its inhabitants⁷⁹. The renewal of Jewish settlement appears to have been swift,

Traders of the Twelfth Century, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 23 (1980) 43-66; Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (n. 37), 175-229.

⁷⁵ D. Jacoby, *Les Juifs de Byzance: une communauté marginalisée*, in: Ch. A. Maltezos (Ed.), *ἽΟι περιθωριακοί στό Βυζαντιο (Ἰδρυμα Γουλανδρη – Χόρν) (= Marginality in Byzantium [Goulandri-Horn Foundation])*, Athinai 1993, 146-51, repr. in: D. Jacoby, *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean*, Aldershot 2001, no. III. One version of Petahya's account also stresses the difficult conditions of the Jews in Byzantium: Grünhut, *Sibw*, 36.

⁷⁶ The figures differ sometimes widely from one manuscript to the other, and their reliability has been questioned. Note that Benjamin's figure for Damascus is „around 3,000“ (BT 48), whereas Petahyah of Regensburg, who visited the city somewhat later, has „around 10,000“ (28; Adler, English trans., 85).

⁷⁷ A minyan or ten adults is cited in BT 50.

⁷⁸ E. Ashtor, *The Number of Jews in Mediaeval Egypt*, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 19 (1968), 12-13, suggests that the figures apply to individuals in certain places and to tax-payers in others. It is hard to believe that Benjamin used two different criteria for his evaluations.

⁷⁹ See above, p. 138.

yet it is unlikely that it would have involved three hundred households in such a short time even if some of them had managed to flee before the arrival of the Frankish army⁸⁰.

Benjamin's figure of „about 400“ for the island of Chios (BT 25) has generated numerous discussions, since Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos had granted in 1049 the head tax paid by fifteen Jewish families to the monastery of Nea Moni on the island. Did these families represent the total number of Jews living in the island at that time, did their number grow more than twenty-five times within little more than a century, or does Benjamin mention individuals? This appears to have indeed been the case, the Jewish population of the island having increased both by natural growth and by immigration⁸¹.

Some conjectural considerations regarding Thebes may provide an indication about the nature of Benjamin's population figures. At the time of his visit, in 1161 or 1162, the city functioned as a regional administrative center. It was located in the midst of a relatively fertile area enjoying agrarian expansion, was the residence of a landed local elite; a major producer of silk textiles, and an important regional market. All these factors created favorable conditions for urban and demographic growth⁸². There is no data regarding the city's population, yet somewhere between 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants seems plausible for a major Byzantine provincial city. Benjamin speaks of 2,000 Jews in Thebes, the largest Jewish population in any twelfth-century Byzantine city except for Constantinople. If the figure represented households, it would have amounted to some 8,000-10,000 individuals. Benjamin would not have failed to stress that they constituted a large section of Thebes' population, had this been the case, and the editor of „The Book of Travels“ would have undoubtedly acted likewise. Since no such observation appears, we may safely discard the hypothesis that the figure represents households. In sum, it is likely that Benjamin's assessments stand for individuals. Still, one may wonder

⁸⁰ E. Ashtor, *The Number of Jews in Mediaeval Egypt*, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 18 (1967) 23-26, arrives at the same conclusion for other reasons without mentioning the events of 1168.

⁸¹ Most recent treatment by N. Oikonomides, *The Jews of Chios (1049): A Group of Excusati*, in: B. Arbel (Ed.), *Intercultural contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean. Studies in Honour of David Jacoby*, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 10 (1995), 218-225, also published as a separate volume, London-Portland 1996.

⁸² See Jacoby, *Silk in Western Byzantium* (n. 72), 471-488.

whether the single Jews registered in several localities lived there on their own or with their respective family.

What motivated Benjamin to travel? His journey was undertaken privately. He was not sent on a mission by a ruler. This may have been the case of Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb, the Spanish Jewish traveller born in Tortosa who around 965 carried out a long journey in western, central and eastern Europe, possibly on an official intelligence mission for the Umayyad caliphate of Spain⁸³. Nor did Benjamin travel on behalf of a Jewish community, as often done for the collection of money or the ransoming of captives. His journey was not directed toward the gathering of evidence on Jewish communities, since he refrained from passing through numerous localities of southern Italy, Greece, the Aegean, Asia Minor and Egypt in which they were established⁸⁴. Not surprisingly, he followed commercial routes, except in the Holy Land and in Iraq when he went to visit holy sites and the tombs of sages.

Benjamin deals at length with the traditions and miracles related to these places, like two other Jewish travelers of the twelfth century. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was clearly the aim of Jacob ben Nethanel⁸⁵. Petaḥyah of Regensburg appears to have displayed broader interests and traveled more widely in the Middle East than the latter, yet his true intentions have been obscured by the stress on holy sites and on the miraculous in his journey's account, which may be partly ascribed to one or several editors⁸⁶. Admittedly, Jacob ben Nethanel, Petaḥyah and Benjamin shared the same reverence for the sacred sites of the Holy Land, and they all report the polemical responses of the local Jews to the Latin appropriation of these sites and to the new Christian traditions regarding them that had emerged in the wake of the crusader conquest⁸⁷. However, pilgrimage was not

⁸³ A. Miquel, *L'Europe occidentale dans la relation arabe d'Ibrāhīm b. Ya'qūb*, in: *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 21 (1966), 1048-1064.

⁸⁴ For Egypt, see Ashtor, *The Number of Jews in Mediaeval Egypt*, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18 (1967), 11-14, and *ibid.*, 19 (1968) 12-13.

⁸⁵ On the focus of Jacob ben Nethanel, see Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 184-191.

⁸⁶ David, *Sibuw*, 252-53, suggests that Petaḥyah was mainly interested in collecting information on the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel in connection with the expected advent of the Messiah, yet this seems to be far too restrictive, especially if one takes into account the abridgement and editing of the account, on which see above, pp. 141-142.

⁸⁷ E. Reiner, *A Jewish response to the Crusades. The Dispute over Sacred Places in the Holy Land*, in: A. Haverkamp (Ed.), *Juden und Christen zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge*, Sigmaringen 1999 (Vorträge und Forschungen XLVI), 209-231.

Benjamin's initial goal⁸⁸. Had that been the case, he would have sailed directly from Italy to the Holy Land and avoided a long and costly detour via Constantinople. Nor can his extended stay of some four years in the Holy Land be solely explained by his intention to visit numerous holy sites. The „Book of Travels“ does not give these visits prominence and does not present them as meritorious acts. It would seem, therefore, that only after arriving in the Holy Land did Benjamin decide to prolong his stay in the country for unexplained reasons. Finally, Benjamin was not wandering from one center of Jewish learning to the other in search of famous rabbinical scholars, like the students he encountered at Lunel and Posquières in Provence (BT 3-5)⁸⁹. It is noteworthy that the „Book of Travels“ devotes far more space to Mesopotamia than to the Holy Land, although Benjamin stayed much longer in the latter region. This appears to reflect the editor's focus. He was primarily interested in the flourishing Babylonian communities, their centers of learning, and their holy sites, and, therefore, omitted from Benjamin's complex itinerary in the Holy Land details that he considered cumbersome and superfluous.

Benjamin's information about Jewish leaders, eminent scholars and merchants, as in Constantinople, implies that he was acquainted with the elite of the Jewish communities that he visited. It has been suggested that Benjamin was interested in the size of the communities to assess the potential of hospitality they could offer to travelers like him, and that he recorded the names of their leaders to whom one may turn for material assistance⁹⁰. However, the number of Jews did not provide any indication regarding the wealth of the community, which rather depended upon the local social structure and occupational distribution. Local residents may have offered lodging and board to Benjamin, or he may have received communal accommodation and allowances for some time, as was customary in these communities⁹¹. How-

⁸⁸ On Jewish pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the twelfth century, see Praver, *The History of the Jews* (n. 13), 128-49, and Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (n. 37), V, 18.

⁸⁹ See below, note 91. On students traveling over long distances to attend rabbinical schools, see J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Pilgrimage, and the Christian Cult of Saints: Benjamin of Tudela and His contemporaries*, in: A. C. Murray (Ed.), *After Rome's Fall. Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History. Essays presented to Walter Goffart*, Toronto-Buffalo-London 1998, 346.

⁹⁰ Shatzmiller, *Jews* (n. 89), 347. This seems to me too narrow an explanation, which derives from the author's belief that Benjamin was mainly concerned with pilgrimage and holy shrines.

⁹¹ Benjamin notes that there „are rich and charitable men, who lend a helping hand to all that come to them“ at Montpellier, and that at Lunel foreign students attending the local

ever, it is excluded that he should have lived on communal charity for long periods of time. Rather, it may be safely assumed that he engaged in trading, as suggested by his keen interest in economic matters and in specific goods, in order to finance his journeys and his residence in various cities, which in some of them extended over several months and possibly even years. However, trading along the way does not imply that Benjamin left Tudela on a commercial journey, which would have entailed a return home after one or two years, as was customary. The exploration of markets may be discounted as an incentive to travel since he followed customary and well-known commercial routes, except when going to specific holy sites and shrines. Incidentally, as illustrated by various sources, pilgrimage and trade were occasionally combined⁹². Benjamin's curiosity, illustrated by his open-minded approach to the material and human environment he encountered, and the quest of adventure may have acted as powerful incentives to travel. In sum, Benjamin appears to have been motivated by a conjunction of factors, yet the precise reasons for his extended journey elude us.⁹³ In any event, his travel account was not conceived as a guide-book either for pilgrims, travelers or merchants, although it could be used to some extent by all of them.

This brief study of Benjamin of Tudela's „Book of Travels“ is far from exhaustive. It nevertheless reveals that the book is a rich and multifaceted source of the twelfth century, even in the shortened and edited version of the original account. It proves to be trustworthy and at times even of crucial importance, especially when presenting evidence deriving from personal experience or not found elsewhere. Yet the book is also a precious testimony to the author's and the period's mentality. At times Benjamin displayed a critical approach. The Jews of Rome told him that the two columns of St. John of Lateran supposedly brought from the

Talmudic school receive financial assistance and are clothed by the community as long as they study“. See also contemporary assistance to travelers for an unlimited period in Narbonne: Shatzmiller, *Jews* (n. 89), 347. On Jewish communal support for travelers in Egypt, see Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (n. 37), II, 135-36.

⁹² *Ibid.*, I, 54-56 V, 18.

⁹³ Shatzmiller, *Jews* (n. 89), 343-345, contends that Benjamin and Petahyah shared the same approach, namely, the purpose of their journeys was pilgrimage to holy shrines. At first glance this may seem to have been the case for the latter, yet is excluded for Benjamin for reasons explained above. The substantial difference in approach and perspective between their travel accounts cannot solely be explained by the intervention of their respective editors.

Temple of Solomon „sweat“, or rather exude tears on the 9 Ab, the day on which both the First and Second Temple of Jerusalem were destroyed, according to Jewish tradition, yet the way he reports that story suggests that he doubted its veracity (BT 10). Still, like his contemporaries displaced in a foreign space and social environment, Benjamin constantly perceived „mirabilia“ beyond the realia of places, structures and people he sighted. Although coming from a different cultural milieu, the „Mirabilia urbis Romae“ and the „Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Rome“ offer interesting parallels to the „Book of Travels“. Like his contemporaries, Benjamin was considerably impressed and even fascinated by the display of princely riches, pomp, ceremonial and festivities, whether in the past or in the present. Like them, he was avid of historical knowledge, traditions and stories to strengthen his religious faith and his understanding of reality. Like them, he was overly credulous. There was no boundary between fact and fantasy, which freely and constantly intermingled and merged in his mind. In sum, Benjamin of Tudela was a true child of his time.