

DIGEST

The subject of this thesis is R. Moshe ben Mordechai Basola's account of his travels in the Holy Land in 1521-1523.

Basola's account was examined with regard to key features of the genre derived from the study of Christian pre-modern travel literature; 1) narrative form, 2) the discovery of the other, 3) the presence of the narrator (balanced against) objective description. In addition, this study sought to understand the writer's motivations for creating such a work, as well as how the text was used by later generations. Two other travelogues written by Jews, the accounts of Meshullam of Volterra (1481) and Ovadiah of Bertinoro (1487-1490), were used as points of comparison. A full translation of Basola's account is included in the thesis.

Basola's account was found to share its narrative form, descriptions of sites visited, and accounts of miraculous occurrences with its contemporaries. However, Basola's narrative was much weaker in recounting the experience of otherness and in reflecting the author's personal experience. Additionally, it was dominated by objective description, much of it economic and commercial in nature.

Based on these idiosyncrasies, the author suggests that rather than coming to the Land of Israel on pilgrimage, Basola may have been sponsored by a patron seeking information on immigration or economic opportunities. Circumstantial support is found for Isaiah Zonne's suggestion that the patron may have been Asher Meshullam.

Lastly, a comparison is made between the published manuscript and the version published in 1785. Revisions included changing Italian words into Hebrew, deleting descriptions of places visited enroute to the Holy Land, deleting economic, commercial and travel information, and a further diminution of the experience of otherness. The resulting document was a more conventional description of a pilgrimage which readers could experience vicariously. Since the discovery and publication of the original manuscript in 1938, usage of Basola's account has shifted as it became a source of data for reconstructing 16th century Israel. Thus, Basola's travel account has proved his most enduring writing, providing generations of readers with the information they desire on the Land of Israel.

FROM RENAISSANCE TO ROOTS:

RABBI MOSHE BASOLA'S ACCOUNT OF HIS TRAVELS IN THE HOLY LAND

Martha A. Bergadine

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1996

Referee, Professor Susan Einbinder

יהושע בן פרחיה אומר: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר

(פרקי אבות 1.6)

In Dr. Susan Einbinder I have found both.

M.B.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Background of the Text	4
Chapter 2: Basola's Account Compared to Its Contemporaries	16
Chapter 3: Basola's Agenda and His Intended Audience	42
Chapter 4: Later Generations' Use of Basola's Account	59
Chapter 5: Conclusion	65
Appendix: A Translation of <u>מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה</u>	68
(English title: A Pilgrimage to Palestine by Rabbi Moshe Basola of Ancona)	
Bibliography	122

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review and Background of the Text

In recent years, scholarly writing on travel literature has flourished. A search of the Modern Language Association's (MLA) 1963-1980 data base revealed 35 works on the topic of "Travel Literature," six of which were included in a single volume of essays.¹ A second search covering the years 1981-November, 1995, revealed 1113 entries.² Also of note is the growth in the interpretation of travel literature as a means of shaping and promoting colonial and imperialist ideology. While there were no articles with this perspective recorded in the 1963-1980 MLA data base, a content analysis of the titles of 112 of the articles in the 1981-1995 data base found that 22% of the works on travel literature discussed the topic in a colonial/imperialist context.

It is likely that Edward Said's seminal book Orientalism was highly influential in creating this outlook. Said defines Orientalism as a composite of both an academic tradition and "a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" ³ Said reasons that this distinction is the starting point for "a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political

¹ Hayashi-Tetsumaro, Steinbeck's Travel Literature (Ball State University, 1980).

² The Modern Language Association's data base is divided into two sections, 1963-1980 and 1981-November, 1995, which can not be searched as one unit.

³ Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 2.

theorists, economists, and imperial administrators" who have created "elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on."⁴ While Said does site medieval travel writers, including Marco Polo and John Mandeville, as contributors to the literature from which the West's view of the Orient was shaped,⁵ he sets the "keynote" of the relationship between the Near East and Europe as the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798.⁶ Tellingly, Said notes the influence of a travel narrative on Napoleon's aspirations:

His (Napoleon's) idea was to build a sort of living archive for the expedition, in the form of studies conducted on all topics by the members of the Institut d'Egypt, which he founded. What is perhaps less well known is Napoleon's prior reliance upon the work of the Comte de Volney, a French traveler whose *Voyage en Egypt et en Syrie* appeared in two volumes in 1787. Aside from a short personal preface informing the reader that the sudden acquisition of some money (his inheritance) made it possible for him to take the trip east in 1783, Volney's *Voyage* is an almost oppressively impersonal document . . . For Volney after all was a canny Frenchman, and -- like Chateaubriand and Lamartine and quarter century after him -- he eyed the New Orient as a likely place for the realization of French colonial ambition.⁷

Thus, for Said, travel literature is a key contributor to the creation of the West's conception of "the Orient," a concept which is inherently colonial.

This understanding of travel writing as colonial in nature is taken up by other writers as well. Tzvetan Todorov is a fine example. While Todorov does

⁴ Said, pg. 2.

⁵ Said, pg. 58.

⁶ Said, pg. 42.

⁷ Said, pg. 81.

acknowledge pre-modern travel, he defines the first great wave of modern journeys as taking place at the end of the fifteenth and in the sixteenth centuries. Prior to this time, Todorov writes, the narratives that the public favored were fanciful ones such as Marco Polo's Book of Marvels and John Mandeville's Travels.⁸

In attempting to define the nature of contemporary expectations of travel literature, Todorov arrives at three criteria:

1. A tension between the observing subject and the observed object that results in a balance between personal narrative and objective description.
2. The situation in time and space of the experiences reported by the narratives. A "true" travel narrative describes the discovery of "others."
3. A certain distance between the author and reader -- a boundary of at least one generation -- but not so distant that the author and reader are different too different.⁹

These criteria lead Todorov to limit the genre to the writings of Europeans from the period of the Renaissance to 1950. While he is willing to stretch this definition a bit to include Marco Polo, Todorov's definition sees travel writing as a phenomenon of the Colonial Period.¹⁰

A minority of scholars do consider pre-modern travel literature. Unlike Todorov, who sees travel narratives a phenomenon arising in the Age of

⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, "The Journey and Its Narratives," The Morals of History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 60. It should be noted that while Mandeville's Travels is generally acknowledged to be a composite work drawn from other travel narratives and purely fictional works, Marco Polo's work is generally acknowledged to be a retelling of events in the author's life.

⁹ Todorov, pg. 67.

¹⁰ Todorov, pg. 69.

Discovery, Paul Zumthor identifies the genre in the Arab world as early as the tenth century.¹¹ Interest in these texts continued in Islamic culture until the seventeenth century, giving rise to the most famous, the narrative of Ibn Battuta which recounts his journeys in Africa and Asia in the 14th century. In the Christian world, the appetite for these sorts of texts was sparked by the curiosity about the Orient that resulted from the Crusades and the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. The Turkish threat of the 14th century, and the new commercial needs of the 15th and 16th centuries, continued to buoy interest. After this point, interest in narratives waned because of what might be termed the "compartmentalization" of knowledge created by the growth of specialties such as geography, history, and cosmography.¹²

While it is possible to trace the interest in travel narratives through history, Zumthor notes that they do not comprise a discreet genre.¹³ The texts include pilgrimages, missionary narratives, ambassador's reports, ships' logs, letters, and merchants' travel books. What does provide unity to the accounts is the experience of "otherness." Zumthor describes this as "a striving toward a rhetoric fit to account for displacements of the body and the particular emotions those displacements arouse."¹⁴ As a result, every travel narrative is comprised

¹¹ Paul Zumthor, "The Medieval Travel Narrative," *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 809.

¹² Zumthor, pg. 809.

¹³ Zumthor, pg. 811.

¹⁴ Zumthor, pg. 812.

of a double account; a narrative which is personal, and a description of what is experienced.¹⁵

Lastly, Mary Campbell has written on "exotic" or pre-modern travel writing, which she sees as implicitly a history of Europe's relations with "the Orient" and the New World.¹⁶ Campbell traces the development of travel writing beginning with the Peregrinations of Egeria in 400 C.E. and ending with Sir Walter Raleigh in the 16th century. Raleigh's Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana becomes the first work to represent travel literature as it is known today: a work that is fully narrative as opposed to an itinerary,¹⁷ is inhabited by its narrator, and is self conscious about presenting terms that neither inadvertently domesticate nor entirely alienate.¹⁸

While Zumthor and Campbell devote themselves to pre-modern travel narratives, in contrast to Todorov's definition of travel writing as a colonial, and therefore modern, phenomenon, there is a great deal of consistency in those factors that all three scholars see as providing unity to this disparate genre. These factors may be summarized as:

1. a narrative form (as opposed to the itinerary)
2. the experience of otherness/ the discovery of the other

¹⁵ Zumthor, pg. 812.

¹⁶ Mary B. Campbell, The Witness and the Other World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁷ Itineraries, for example the Antonine Itinerary and that of the Bordeaux Pilgrim, predate the Peregrinations of Egeria and continue to be written along side narratives. Egeria's is the earliest account that can be termed narrative.

¹⁸ Campbell, pg. 6.

3. the presence of the narrator (balanced against) objective description

None of these scholars considers Jewish writers in their analyses of travel narratives, although Campbell does note that The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela is the earliest extant account of travel to the Holy Land written by a European Jew.¹⁹ This lack of attention to Jewish writers is not caused by a dearth of material. J.D. Eisenstein's אוצר מסעות, the classic compendium of Jewish travel accounts, includes 24 selections, 14 of which were written prior to the 16th century.²⁰ Elkan Nathan Adler's Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages, which is based in part on Eisenstein, adds four more accounts from the 9th and 10th centuries.²¹ Thus, there is a fairly large body of pre-modern travel writing by Jews, most of it accounts of travel to the Holy Land.

While Jewish travel writing has not received the attention of gentile scholars, neither has it been a focus of Jewish scholarship. At the most, scholars like Eisenstein and Adler have collected the various accounts and published them in anthologies. Where short introductions are provided they tend to be historical or geographical in nature. The epitome of this historical/geographical orientation is A. Asher's two volume edition of The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin

¹⁹ Campbell, pg. 18.

²⁰ יהודה דוד אייזנשטיין, אוצר מסעות (תל אביב, 1969), תוכן המסעות.
(J.D. Eisenstein, Ozar Massaoth (Tel Aviv, 1969), table of contents. Hereafter referred to as "Eisenstein.")

²¹ Elkan Nathan Adler, Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987) table of contents.

of Tudela.²² Volume One provides a bibliography of known editions of the work, as well as the Hebrew text and an English translation. Volume Two is comprised of Asher's notes on the itinerary, which are almost as long as the original text and the translation combined, two essays by Leopold Zunz, one on the geographical literature of Jews through 1841, and a second on the geography of Palestine, and an essay by a Mr. Lebrecht on the Caliphate of Bagdad.

There are however, two notable exceptions to the tendency to anthologize and historicize Jewish travel writing. The first is Yosef Levanon's The Jewish Travelers in the Twelfth Century²³ which considers the writings of Benjamin of Tudela, Petachia of Ratisbon, and Jacob ben Nathaniel haCohen. While this work takes a predominantly historical, rather than literary approach, it is exceptional in its extended treatment of the subject, and its attempt to consider the three twelfth century accounts both individually and as products of a discrete time period.

A second exceptional piece on Jewish travel writing is Michael Signer's introduction to the reissue of The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela.²⁴ While Signer's essay does place Benjamin in his historical and cultural context, it goes beyond this by providing a sensitive reading that sees Benjamin as more than a wandering merchant. Instead, Signer views The Itinerary as "a contribution to

²² A. Asher, translator and editor, The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (New York: Hakesheth Publishing Co., [1932?]).

²³ Yosef Levanon, The Jewish Travellers in the Twelfth Century (Lanham, MD: University press of America, Inc., 1980).

²⁴ Michael Signer in The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela (Malibu, California: Joseph Simon Publisher, 1983).

the literature of consolation for the Jewish people.”²⁵ In this context, Benjamin is considered to be an emissary to far flung Diaspora communities, bringing hope to Spanish Jews at a time when their way of life and cultural world were under siege from the Berber invasions and continued Christian-Muslim warfare.

In spite of the historical efforts of Eisenstein, Asher, and Adler, and the more contemporary writing of Levanon and Signer, the narratives of Jewish travelers appear to be a topic that has received little scholarly attention. This is especially true with regard to the study of these texts as literature.

This thesis seeks to rectify the situation somewhat by applying the ideas that have been derived from the study of Christian pre-modern travel literature to a piece of Jewish travel literature, specifically מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה. Key issues that will be addressed are the narrator's experience of otherness and his own presence in the text, elements of travel narratives that emerged as common criteria based on the writings of Campbell, Zumthor, and Todorov. In addition, this study will try to understand the writer's motivation for creating such a work, as well as the way that the text was used by later generations of readers.

Two other travel accounts written by Jews will be used to provide points of comparison. These works, the travelogue of Meshullam of Volterra (1481)²⁶ and the letters of Ovadiah of Bertinoro (1487-1490),²⁷ while written 35-40 years

²⁵ Signer, pg. 26.

²⁶ Adler, pg. 156-208.

²⁷ Rabbi Avroham Marmorstein, ed. Pathway to Jerusalem: The Travel Letters of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura (Lakewood, New Jersey: CIS Publishers and Distributors, 1992).

prior are the closest contemporaries of the מסעות. It is hoped that by comparing these works certain literary features will be shown to be specific to the text rather than a reflection of the literary development of the time. Additionally, through comparing the accounts the unique and interesting idiosyncrasies of the מסעות will be made clearer.

While Rabbi Moshe Basola is fairly well known figure in the history of Italian Renaissance Jewry, the details of his life prior to his journey to the Land of Israel in 1521-1523 are sketchy. He was born in Pesaro in 1480 but spent his early years in Soncino where his father, Rabbi Mordechai Basola, assisted in the publishing of Yehoshua Soncino's edition of the Talmud in 1489.²⁸ As a youth, Basola's teacher was the kabbalist Rabbi Joseph ibn Shraga, who was considered to be one of the greatest kabbalists of his generation.

It is thought that Basola spent his early adulthood on his own, visiting various cities in the northeast of Italy. Indeed, in his travel journal he demonstrates a knowledge of five Italian cities by using them as points of comparison for sites in the course of his journey.²⁹ From a letter to a former pupil we know that he was supporting himself prior to his departure by teaching,³⁰ probably as a private tutor.

It is not known when Basola married, but he had at least one son and one

²⁸ ר. למדן, ר' שם באסולה -- חייו ויצירתו (עבודת מ.א.) (תל אביב, תשמ"ג), 4.
Hereafter referred to as "Lamden." Ruth Lamden's thesis is the most comprehensive work on the life and work of Rabbi Moshe Basola.

²⁹ Lamden, pg. 8. The cities mentioned are Fano, Rimini, Verona, Bologna, and Venice.

³⁰ Lamden, pg. 8.

daughter; his son Rabbi Azariel and his daughter's son Rabbi Moshe Basola Della Rocca were the teachers of Rabbi Judah Aryeh (Leone) Modena.³¹

After his return from the Land of Israel in 1523, Basola settled for a time in Fano, and then in Pesaro where he taught in the household of the banker Rabbi Moshe Nissim MiFoligno. It was during this time that he established a relationship with the Christian Hebraist Guillaume Postel, who in 1538 published an example of the Samaritan alphabet similar to that in Basola's travel journal in his Linguarum Duodecim Characteribus Differentium Alphabetum.³² In 1535, Basola's patron Rabbi Moshe Nissim MiFoligno persuaded Rabbi Azariel Dienna to formally grant Basola *smicha*.

At the end of the 1530's Basola took a position as Rosh Yeshiva and as head of the congregation of the "מערביים" (Ponentini) – the Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal – in the port city of Ancona.³³ He engaged in many of the debates of his time, the greatest of which being his opposition to the boycott of the port of Ancona organized by Dona Gracia Nasi in 1556. Later he returned to the Land of Israel, living in Tzefat until his death in about 1560.

In addition to some responsa, *drashot*, and letters, Basola left behind an account of his year and a half long journey to the Land of Israel. While Azariah de' Rossi identified a booklet written by Rabbi Moshe Basola that was in the possession of Samuel of Arles as the source of the Samaritan alphabet printed in

³¹ Lamden, pg. 8. Encyclopedia Judaica, "Basola, Moses ben Mordechai," (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), vol. 2 column 310.

³² Lamden, pg. 21.

³³ Lamden, pg. 30.

his מאור עינים in 1573-1575,³⁴ no significant portion of Basola's travel narrative was published until the 18th century. In Leghorn in 1785, Jacob ben Moses Hayyim Baruch published a book entitled שבחי ירושלים which was an anthology of various authors' writings about the Holy Land. Included in the work were *Zah (Tzach) ve-Adom* by Raphael Treves, which discussed the holy places in Jerusalem, *Imrei Kadosh* from the *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* of Samuel ben Hayyim Vital, and an account of the experiences of an anonymous "Italian traveler" to the Land of Israel in 1521-1523.³⁵ The account in שבחי ירושלים was edited, and these deletions included the concluding phrase of the text which would later prove a valuable clue to the author's identity. However, this expurgated material was not available to scholars, and the identity of the "Italian traveler" remained unknown through 10 subsequent editions and more than four hundred years.³⁶ It is interesting to note that in Leopold Zunz's bibliography of geographical literature he in effect counts the same piece of writing twice, suggesting that the account of the anonymous author published in שבחי ירושלים is the work of a R. Baruch. He also correctly infers the existence of an account written by Moshe Basola from the brief mention in מאור עינים, however Zunz misdates the account noting that Basola "visited Palestine at an advanced age."³⁷

³⁴ Azariah de' Rossi, מאור עינים (Mantua, 1573-1575), pg. קעא.

³⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica, "Jacob ben Moses Hayyim Baruch," Vol. 4 column 274.

³⁶ Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 4, col 274.

³⁷ Leopold Zunz, "Essay on the Geographical Literature of the Jews from the Remotest Times to the Year 1841" in A. Asher, editor The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (New York: Hakesheth Publishing Co., 1927), pg. 270, item 72 and pg. 275, item 77.

In the 1930's in Jerusalem, Isaac Ben-Zevi saw a manuscript that was in the possession of Rabbi Isaac Bedahav. The text of this "Jerusalem manuscript" corresponded to the contents of שבחי ירושלים that had been written by the "anonymous Italian," and appeared to be the source of the excerpts included in published editions. Additionally, the final line of the manuscript contained a phrase which indicated that the author's name was "Moshe." Finally, the manuscript contained a copy of the Samaritan alphabet which matched that found in מאור עינים. Thus, Ben-Zevi was able to identify the "Italian traveler" as Rabbi Moshe ben Mordechai Basola. Ben-Zevi was also allowed to transcribe and publish the "Jerusalem manuscript," which appeared in 1938 as מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה (English title: A Pilgrimage to Palestine by Rabbi Moshe Basola of Ancona),³⁸ finally making the entirety of Basola's account available to readers. It was subsequently published in Hebrew in 1969 in Eisenstein's אוצר מסעות, however, except for a very brief excerpt included in Journeys to the Promised Land edited by Nachman Ran,³⁹ Basola's account has not been translated into English.

³⁸ יצחק בן-צבי, מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה (ירושלים: החברת לחקירת ארץ-ישראל ועתיקותיה, 1938).

(Isaac Ben-Zevi, A Pilgrimage to Palestine by Rabbi Moshe Bassola of Ancona (Jerusalem: The Jewish Palestinian Exploration Society, 1938). Hereafter referred to as "Ben-Zevi."

³⁹ Nachman Ran, ed., Journeys to the Promised Land (New York: Portland House, 1989), 90.

CHAPTER 2

Basola's Account Compared to Its Contemporaries

Moshe Basola's journey to the Holy Land was not, in itself, unique. Indeed, travel by Jews to the Land of Israel began at the time of the Babylonian Exile and has never ceased.

Italian Jews seem to have been especially frequent visitors in the Renaissance era. This is attributable to the relatively shorter distance between the Land of Israel and Italy, and the well established communications between the areas. Cecil Roth also notes what he termed a "love of, or rather yearning for, Palestine (that) was at all times extremely marked among Italian Jews."⁴⁰ Indeed, except for two periods, from 1427 to 1430 and 1467 to 1487, when the Pope forbade Italian sea captains to transport Jews to Palestine, there seems to have been a consistent stream of Italian visitors throughout the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴¹ Even with the ban in effect, Italian Jews managed to make their way to the Land of Israel via a more circuitous route.⁴²

Basola also not unique in leaving a written record of his travels. The earliest literary evidence of a journey to the Holy Land by a Jew are the Zion

⁴⁰ Cecil Roth, The Jews in the Renaissance (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), 30.

⁴¹ Roth, Renaissance, pg. 30

⁴² Meshullam of Volterra provides one example. When he went to the Land of Israel in 1481, he left from Naples, which was then under the control of Aragon. He did however, return to Venice, although it is not clear if he did so on an Italian ship. Ovadiah of Bertinoro also departed from Naples in 1487.

poems of Yehuda Halevi (c. 1140) who did not actually reach the Land of Israel. The first historical account is The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, who arrived in the Holy Land about 1170. Basola's account is thus part of an established tradition that continued down to his own day with the writings of R. Petachia of Ratisbon (1170-1183), R. Jacob ben R. Nathaniel haCohen (12th century), Meshullam of Volterra (1481) and the letters of Ovadiah of Bertinoro (1487-1490) and his student.

These last two accounts are the מסעות's closest contemporaries. Since they will be used here as points of comparison, the backgrounds of their authors and the circumstances of their composition are worth noting.

Meshullam of Volterra was a partner and later owner of his father's successful loan-bank in Florence. He also traded in precious stones. In 1481 he set out for the Land of Israel in fulfillment of a vow that he made when he escaped some unspecified trouble in Florence. He sailed from Naples to Egypt by way of Rhodes and traveled overland to Jerusalem, arriving in late July, 1481. He remained there about a month before returning to Venice in October. The account of this journey is contained in his travel narrative. Interestingly, he returned once again to the Land of Israel in 1487, journeying part of the way with Ovadiah of Bertinoro.⁴³

Rabbi Ovadiah Yerei was from the town of Bertinoro, near the city of Forlì in Italy. He is perhaps best known as the author of the classic commentary on

⁴³ Encyclopedia Judaica, "Meshullam ben Menahem da Volterra," vol. 16, col. 221

the Mishnah, which he composed after settling in the Land of Israel. Little is known of his early life except for the fact that his teacher was Rabbi Joseph Colon (the "Maharik"). While his age at the time he decided to leave for Israel is not known, his letters indicate that he already enjoyed some prominence. His reason for immigrating is also unknown. It has been speculated that he chose to leave Italy in objection to the Renaissance spirit that was permeating the Jewish community at that time. The fact that the Maharik left his position as the rabbi of Mantua in objection to these new trends, is often adduced in support of this reason for Ovadiah's immigration.⁴⁴ Ovadiah's account of his experiences is contained in three letters, one to his father, one to his brother, and one to a friend, covering the period from 1488-1489. In addition, a letter from one of Ovadiah's students (1495) has been included in the published editions. While Ovadiah's writing was not composed as a unified narrative, then as now, the letter was a common form for travel literature. In fact, the epistolary form was accepted and viewed as appropriate for formal accounts up until the 18th century.⁴⁵

As might be expected, Basola's account shares continuities with these other travelers' accounts. First, all three are narratives, rather than histories. Clearly, all three of these accounts are written in the first-person and detail the personal experiences of their authors. Travel literature is by definition written in a first-person narrative, or at least a second person narrative, as in a travel guide

⁴⁴Marmorstein, pg. 10.

⁴⁵Campbell, pg. 8.

5
("Thence you come to a pillar near the chamber of the Holy Sepulcher.") History is conventionally written in the third-person.⁴⁶

Additionally, all three of these works are narratives rather than itineraries or guidebooks. Itineraries are composed of lists of cities and places of interest and the distances between them. Sometimes they include prayers to be recited at holy sites. They are "in effect, verbal charts designed for the convenience of subsequent travelers."⁴⁷ While itineraries are sometimes written in the first person, they do not contain an account of the entire experience of their authors. Rather, in an itinerary, the focus is clearly that of pilgrimage, as indicated by the opening words of the itinerary of Samuel ben Samson (1211):

These words deserve to be written in order that we might know the places of the graves of our forefathers by whose merit the world exists.⁴⁸

While, the accounts of Meshullam, Ovadiah, and Basola vary in the degree to which they recount the author's personal experience, they present their authors' experiences as narrative rather than as simply a string of sites for later pilgrims.

In terms of content, the similarities between the accounts are, not surprisingly, most notable in terms of the sites described. For example, in describing the Cave of Machpelah, Meshullam of Volterra writes:

I saw the cave of Machpelah which is where the ground rises and it looks like this: the cave is in a field in the midst of Hebron and the Muslims have built a mosque upon it, as is their custom, and they

⁴⁶ Campbell, pg. 5.

⁴⁷ Campbell, pg. 27.

⁴⁸ Adler, pg. 103.

have made a wall over the cave and in it is a small window where the Jews pray and throw into it money and spices. I also prayed there. The Muslims honor the place very much and give thirteen thousand loaves every day to the poor in honour of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and especially in honour of Abraham; and they put the bread in mustard and tender veal such as Abraham gave to the angels, and in honour of Isaac they give venison and other delicacies such as he loved, and in honour of Jacob bread and a mess of pottage such as he gave Esau,⁴⁹ and this constantly everyday without fail.⁵⁰

Likewise, seven years later Ovadiah wrote:

I visited the Cave of Machpelah. It is covered by a large mosque. The Muslims treated it with great respect and come on pilgrimage from all the Muslim lands to worship there. In the cave itself, where the Patriarchs are buried, neither Jew nor Muslim may enter. Instead, the Muslims stand above the cave and lower lit torches through shafts. These torches burn there constantly. The Muslim pilgrims throw money into the cave through the shafts . . . Every day, they distribute bread and lentil, or some other legume, to the poor -- whether Muslim, Jew, or Christian -- in honor of our forefather Abraham.⁵¹

Basola's account, while echoing the earlier ones, is far more succinct, and he ascribes a different motivation to the Muslims' acts of charity:

I went to pray at the Patriarch's Tomb and where the Muslims have a large castle on the Cave of Machpelah with two gates opening out in four directions. And close to the gate adjoining the nobleman's house is a hole where I prayed. The Jews say that it reaches to the middle of the cave. Opposite it is the building in which they make the bread that they give for the sin offering of the Muslims every day, eight thousand loaves a day.⁵²

Likewise, all three authors offer descriptions of the Temple Mount/ Beit

⁴⁹ For the explanations of the foods associated with each patriarch see the following: Abraham, see Rashi to Genesis 18:7; Isaac, Genesis 25:27; and Jacob, Genesis 25:34.

⁵⁰ Adler, pg. 185.

⁵¹ Marmorstein, 48.

⁵² Ben-Zevi, 58.

Hamikdash. For example, Meshullam describes the Temple area as follows:

The Temple, may it be restored speedily in our days, is still surrounded by a wall. On the east side are the Gates of Mercy made of brass and embedded into the ground. The gates are closed and on the sides of the gates are Moslem graves. Opposite this is the site of the Temple of King Solomon and a Moslem building upon it. The huge stones in this building are a wondrous matter, and it is difficult to believe how the strength of man could have moved them into their present position. Near the sanctuary is a great vaulted building with pillars surrounding the large pavement which covers the Temple area. The circumference of the Temple seems about half a mile. On the west side of the pavement there is a place about three fingers high which is said to be the *Eben Shethiah*, and there is a great cupola beautifully gilded, about twenty or perhaps thirty cubits square. It is very high and the Ishmaelites have covered it with lead, and they say that this is doubtless the Holy of Holies. On the border of the Holy of Holies there is a place about two and a half cubits high, and at its four corners there are stones to get up to it. Here there is a well of running water and near it the cupola is built. The Moslems only go inside after bathing five times, and they do not approach a woman three days previously. Many Moslem servants in a state of purification are there and they light seven lamps inside . . . On the southern side, inside the temple area, there is a large and beautiful house also covered with lead called Solomon's College . . .⁵³

Ovadiah also wrote to his father concerning the *Beit Hamikdash*:

The Muslims come here from very distant lands to bow down at the site of the *Beis Hamikdash*, which they regard with great awe . . .⁵⁴ I asked about the *even shesiah*, the rock that marks the spot where the sacred ark had stood. Many people told me it is enclosed within a tall, beautiful, domed mosque that the Muslims built on the site of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and that no one is allowed to come before it. According to rumor, the site of the *Beis Hamikdash* contains great wealth, for all the kings who have ruled over Israel have built rooms there lined with gold. It is said that the present king built a beautiful structure of gold and precious stones without equal.

The site of the *Beis Hamikdash* today has twelve entrances. The entrance called the "Gates of Compassion" consists of two sealed, metal gates on the eastern side of the *Beis Hamikdash*. The bottom half

⁵³Adler, pg. 189.

⁵⁴Marmorstein, pg. 56.

of these gates is sunk into the earth. It is said that the Muslims wanted to pull them out a number of times, but were not able to do so.⁵⁵

Characteristically, Basola's description is more succinct:

When one stands on the summit of the Mount of Olives and looks toward Jerusalem, he sees all of the Sanctuary grounds; the courtyard and the gardens, and from the same side, i.e., in the east, the Sanctuary grounds have two sealed iron gates their ends sunk in the ground. They are called the Mercy Gates and they say that the grooms would enter through one of the them and the mourners through another. Close to the Sanctuary on the southern side is a building called Solomon's Midrash.⁵⁶

Similar descriptions of other tombs around Jerusalem and some of the tombs in the Galilee, are also found in all three accounts. Equally consistently, except with regard to the tombs in the Galilee, Basola downplays local customs associated with the sites, as well as failing to emphasize Muslim reverence. Such a lack of anthropological detail is characteristic of his work.

Another common motif in the accounts is mention of miraculous events. Miraculous stories occur, or are alluded to, in all three accounts, and the miraculous is constantly expected. Even where there are no specific wonders witnessed, their expectation must be addressed as in Ovadiah's letter to his brother.

You asked me about miracles that you have heard about that are supposed to occur at the site of the *Beis Hamikdash* and at the gravesites of the *tzadikim*. What can I tell you? I myself did not see any such miracles. Regarding the story you were told that there are burning candles in the *Beis Hamikdash* that go out on *Tisha b'Av*, I also

⁵⁵ Marmorstein, pg. 58.

⁵⁶ Ben-Zevi, pg. 55.

heard such rumors, but was unable to learn anything more definite.⁵⁷ And it goes without saying that the entire story of the Sephardi who found an old man wrapped in a robe inside the *Beis Hamikdash* is a complete fabrication. An intelligent person like you should be able to understand what is true and what is not.⁵⁸

This emphasis on the miraculous seems to reflect a key feature of the genre itself. In spite of the fact that Herodotus is regarded as "antiquity's most just and skeptical chronicler of the east,"⁵⁹ he still describes western Libya as full of "dog-faced creatures, and the creatures without heads."⁶⁰ Later works continuing down through the Middle Ages are populated with various grotesques, epitomized by the ants as big as dogs and the men with two faces in one head that are described in the eleventh-century Wonders of the East. Monsters are also present in later works such as the 14th century Mandeville's Travels.⁶¹ It is notable that the marvels and grotesques described appear "at the geographical limits of knowledge -- at the borders of the map, the farthest reach of the journey."⁶²

By the time Basola, Meshullam, and Ovadiah are writing, the belief in the grotesques fancied in the Middle Ages seems to have faded. However, the observation that the miraculous appears at the fringes of the known world seems

⁵⁷ A similar story is reported by Meshullam of Volterra. See Adler, pg. 190.

⁵⁸ Marmorstein, pg. 60.

⁵⁹ Campbell, pg. 51.

⁶⁰ Campbell, pg. 51.

⁶¹ Campbell, pg. 157.

⁶² Campbell, pg. 50.

most fitting to one type of marvel discussed in Ovadiah and Basola's accounts: that is, investigations concerning the Ten Lost Tribes and the River Sambatyon.

Popular interest in the Ten Lost Tribes was intense during the Renaissance, likely because they represented a lost autonomy in the popular Jewish imagination. Moses Schulvass writes that it was "unthinkable for an (Jewish) author to compose a book on geography without introducing the popular rumors regarding Jewish independence in unknown countries."⁶³ As an example of this marriage of science and myth, he cites Abraham Farissol's geographic work *Iggeret Orehot Olam*, which outlines the continents and the seas, the lands of the Old World, climates, methods of measuring latitude and longitude, details of the Mediterranean Sea and travel routes from Venice to various locations. The first part of the work then concludes with a description of the Ten Lost Tribes and their land.⁶⁴

Ovadiah, who expressed his skepticism concerning rumors of miracles at the *Beit Hamikdash*, nevertheless felt that the River Sambatyon was a suitable topic for a sermon which he reported to his father that he preached in Jerusalem.⁶⁵ In that same letter he reports hearing that the Jews of Ethiopia are at war with the mythical Christian priest-king Prestor John. In the letter composed to his brother, Ovadiah supplies more details that he has learned

⁶³ Moses A. Schulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance* (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1995), 308.

⁶⁴ Schulvass, pg 308. The second part of *Iggeret Orehot Olam* discussed the Portuguese geographic expeditions, the discovery of the New World, and the location of the Garden of Eden.

⁶⁵ Marmorstein, pg. 56.

through reputable reports from Muslim merchants. Specifically, he writes that:

... about a five day's journey from Aden through a desert is the famous Sambatyon River, which completely surrounds a land inhabited by Jews. This river shoots out rocks and dirt, and only rests on Shabbos.⁶⁶ No Jew ever leaves that land, for to do so would entail violating Shabbos. They have a tradition that the people within the circle of the Sambatyon are all the offspring of Moses, as holy as angels and sinless.

Then, beyond the Sambatyon, there are as many Jews as the sands of the sea, with their own kings and ministers. However, they are not as holy as those Jews surrounded by the river.⁶⁷

Once again, Ovadiah continues to discuss the Jews of Ethiopia, whom he himself claims to have seen, and their war with Prestor John.⁶⁸

Basola also discusses these topics in a special section of his composition entitled "Investigations Concerning the Ten Tribes and the River Sambatyon" which is appended to the end of his account. He bases his findings on his discussions with various individuals, including a Babylonian Jew who had heard reports from Muslims, an Ethiopian slave who belonged to a Jew, and a teacher of children in Tzefat who was originally from Aden. Basola offers reports of a land in the south where there are many Jews, exiles from both the First and Second Temple period, who are kings and nobles and who are at war with the "Indianim." In medieval times, India was often confused with Ethiopia and at least one medieval map bears the legends "India Egyptii" and "India

⁶⁶The Sambatyon is the river across which the Ten Lost Tribes were exiled by Shalmaneser. According to the Talmud, the river flows with great force, resting only on Shabbat (Sanhedrin 65b).

⁶⁷Marmorstein, pg. 68.

⁶⁸Marmorstein, pg. 69.

Ethiopie."⁶⁹ Also, Prestor John is referred to as "Prestor John of the Indies" in the report of the Portuguese mission which searched for him in Ethiopia between 1520 and 1526.⁷⁰ It is like therefore, that Basola's reference to being at war with the "Indianim" is a reference to the forces of Prestor John. Basola also reports that there are the remnants of the tribes of Issachar and Shimon. In this place, all the Jews are ministers and there is a king who rules them, and each has 50 or 60 servants whom he sends to war.⁷¹ That Basola twice mentions Jewish rulers who send their servants to war indicates the strong impression these reports of Jewish autonomy had on him.

Lastly, Basola recounts the following story, which he heard from a Moroccan judge in Tzefat whom he judges to be "exceptional in his generation, an expert in Talmud and kabbalah, righteous and pious."⁷²

(He) has three sons and the youngest is 16 years old. Two years ago, this youth was sitting on the roof alone and a white dove burst upon him. He caught it in his hand and saw written in square Assyrian writing on one of its wings "The Ten Tribes are coming." After he cried out, while he was holding the dove in his hand, he ran to show it to his father but he felt a hard slap on his hand so that he was forced to open his hand and the dove flew off and was not seen again. He went and told his father the story and his father inquired of him and questioned him and he swore that he had not lied. He consistently told the same story and did not change it at all. I have written it down just as I heard it from the father.⁷³

⁶⁹ Boies Penrose, Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance 1420-1620 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 12.

⁷⁰ The Prestor John of the Indies, transl. by Lord Stanley of Alderly (1881) revised and edited by C.F. Beckingham and G.W. B. Huntingford. (Millwood NY: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 36.

⁷¹ Ben-Zevi, pg. 89.

⁷² Ben-Zevi, pg. 89.

⁷³ Ben-Zevi, pg. 89. A parallel to this story is found in letter from R. Abraham Rephael

The interest generated by rumors of the Ten Lost Tribes and their reputed independence is clear from both Ovadiah and Basola's comments. It is also clear that their information regarding Jews from Ethiopia and Aden is mixed with the mythical River Sambatyon and Prestor John, at the geographical margin of the authors' known world.

Wonder stories take another form as well in these accounts; that is, tales of the miraculous that are associated with places of pilgrimage. These places sometimes include locations such as the *Beit Hamikdash*, as cited above, or the graves of the *tzadikim* (righteous ones).

Although certain sites, especially graves, in Israel, are popularly considered to be holy and are visited and venerated up to this day,⁷⁴ there is little support for this belief in Jewish primary sources. Indeed, the Mishnah (Kel. 1:6) does mention the ten degrees of holiness in the Land of Israel, however, this holiness seems to derive from the laws and mitzvot applying to a place rather than because of events that took place at the site or because of who is buried there. This differs from Muslim and Christian thought in which a site is hallowed by the event which occurred there. Therefore, while the custom of visiting graves seems to be of old Arabic origin, it is likely that the Jewish practice of venerating certain graves arose under the influence of Christianity. Trabot to R. Abraham in Perugia, circa 1523. The letter is published in *Roads to Zion*, edited by Kurt Wilhelm. (New York: Schocken Books), pg. 29.

⁷⁴For example, a map entitled *מצבות ובתי כנסת קדומים בגליל העליון*, copyrighted in 1988, was purchased by the author during the summer of 1995.

and Islam.⁷⁵

It is thought that during the Middle Ages, under Christian and Muslim influence, the idea of the departed as intercessors and the concept of grave sites as places of efficacious prayer attained significance in Judaism.⁷⁶ The earliest evidence for this veneration of gravesites is that of the tenth century Karaite scholar Sahl b. Matzli'ah who complained: "How can I remain silent when some Jews are behaving like idolators? They sit at the graves, sometimes sleeping there at night, and appeal to the dead; 'Oh! Rabbi Yose ha-Gelili! Heal me! Grant me children!' They kindle lights and offer incense . . ."⁷⁷ Further evidence of the popularity of visiting gravesites is offered by the number of itineraries which were compiled beginning in the Middle Ages to guide pilgrims. These attained wider distribution after the invention of the printing press. Narrative travel accounts also typically include mention of gravesites.

Basola's account is no exception to this trend of describing the tombs of the *tzadikim*. Indeed, the part of his narrative that resembles an itinerary is a concentrated description of tombs in the Galilee.⁷⁸ While it is true that this concentration of information is partially due to the fact that the graves of the *tzadikim* tend to be located in one geographic area, Basola consciously sets off this section of his account by stating at its beginning, "Now I shall write all the

⁷⁵Encyclopedia Judaica, "Holy Places," vol. 8, col. 920.

⁷⁶Encyclopedia Judaica, "Itineraries," vol. 9, col. 1148.

⁷⁷Encyclopedia Judaica, "Holy Places," vol. 8, col. 922.

⁷⁸See Ben-Zevi, pg. 45-50.

places of the *tzadikim* (righteous ones) and prophets' monuments (where) I prostrated myself and prayed on their graves."⁷⁹ He also provides a list at the end of his account which lists the locations of graves by city.⁸⁰

In most instances Basola describes the location and appearance of the grave. In several, Basola offers reports of miraculous events that are associated with a tomb. For example, Basola writes of R. Judah bar Ilai's gravesite:

On the grave there is an almond tree, withered these three years. And there is a big field of olive trees dedicated to the Pious One, may his memory be a blessing. They say that a certain Ishmaelite woman climbed on the tree over the grave to pick almonds. The other women said that she should ask permission from the Pious One, but she spoke insultingly and fell from the tree. All her limbs were broken until she dedicated the gold bracelets that were on her arms to the Righteous One, which turned into olive trees. Afterward, the others made donations until now there are 400 olive trees. This took place about 60 years ago.⁸¹

Ovadiah's student reported the same story, albeit in a somewhat more elaborate fashion, in a letter that he wrote, 25 years prior.⁸² The student, however, claimed to have talked to the woman who fell from the tree herself, thus raising some doubts as to the accuracy of Basola's dating of the event.

Other miraculous events reported include sweet water that flows from no apparent source in the tomb of Hillel the Elder,⁸³ and the marble cover of the

⁷⁹Ben-Zevi, pg. 44.

⁸⁰Ben-Zevi, pg. 79.

⁸¹Ben-Zevi, pg. 45.

⁸²Marmorstein, pg. 82.

⁸³Ben-Zevi, pg. 46.

tomb of R. Elezar ben Arach, which mysteriously reappeared on the grave the morning after it was taken by some Muslims intent on using it as a millstone.⁸⁴ These stories have parallels in the 12th century account of Petachia of Ratisbon, thereby testifying to the at least 400 year long tradition associated with these sites.⁸⁵

The inclusion of miraculous stories in travel accounts creates the problem of veracity for authors writing in Basola's period. Mary Campbell explains that fiction functions as a "sabbatical" from information and that the most obvious device to signal this freedom is the introduction of the impossible, for example a magic ring or one-eyed giant. The problem is that travel writing presents marvels that in any other context would signal the fictional.⁸⁶ The response to this problem is the customary claim to veracity with which medieval travel narratives open or close or both.⁸⁷

Interestingly, at the end of Basola's account just such a truth statement occurs. It reads:

Concerning most things that, (I wrote) "they say"
So people won't say Moses
made it up.⁸⁸

Through this statement it appears that Basola is providing the key -- the phrase

⁸⁴Ben-Zevi, pg. 49.

⁸⁵Adler, pg. 87 and 88.

⁸⁶Campbell, pg. 147.

⁸⁷Campbell, pg. 147.

⁸⁸Ben-Zevi, pg. 91.

יש אומרים – to indicate those instances where he himself has not witnessed a marvel and is reporting hearsay. This distinction between actually witnessing an event and hearing testimony of it from others is clear in his report of the miracles associated with the tomb of Hillel:

The cover of Hillel's grave is tilted a little and so are a few of the others and a person (can) put his hand in it and there is sweet water in it. I drank from it and it is a marvel. The water comes there from nowhere and further, because it's collected there, how does it (remain) fresh for drinking? And greater than this, everyone testifies (מעידים) and swears (נשבעים) that when a large congregation enters there and prays, immediately the water increases and pours to the ground, but when I was there it was not thus. Also, they say (אומרים) that another miracle was done in it, when a large Jewish caravan comes and everyone lights lamps in the cave and around it, if a woman who is impure from menstruation enters it, immediately all of the lights are extinguished. They swear and testify that it is the truth. But I did not see it.⁸⁹

Here Basola carefully distinguishes between a marvel that he himself experienced (i.e. drinking the water), and those that others have asserted but he himself has not witnessed (the increase in the water and the extinguished candles).

In spite of Basola's attempts to linguistically mark those miraculous accounts of others, he still seems eager to include them and he certainly does not exclude them simply because they are hearsay. Further, he is very willing to accept the accounts of some sources if he judges them to be trustworthy. For example, when Basola reports the account of a certain R. Moses that yearly on the evenings of 18 Sivan and Shavuot a pillar of cloud appears over the grave of R. Judah ben Betera, he buttresses the account by asserting "he (R. Moses) swore

⁸⁹Ben-Zevi, pg. 47.

to me that he saw this with his eyes . . . and this Jew who spoke with me appeared to me to be a good, innocent, and upright man who would not deceive."⁹⁰ Basola thus seems to want to identify occurrences which he himself has not witnessed, while at the same time desiring to accept others' accounts and include them in his work. Paul Zumthor has noted that the medieval reportage had preferred hearing to sight as a basis for evidence because of the dominance of orality. Hearsay was authoritative, at best sight could confirm somethings. However, from the 14th to the 16th centuries sight gradually came to replace hearing as a source of knowledge.⁹¹ This theory must be applied with caution to Jewish society because the higher level of literacy among Jews may have lessened the authority accorded to oral reporting. However, it may be that Basola, in addition to being sensitive to the expectation of the miraculous which permeated the Jewish culture of the time, was also caught up in the remnants of this shift from hearing to sight, acknowledging what he himself has not witnessed, but remaining sympathetic to the testimony of others.

While there are marked similarities between Basola's account and those of Meshullam and Ovadiah, namely the narrative form and the content related to sites and miraculous events, the accounts do differ with regard to key aspects of the genre.

The first is the experience or discovery of the "other," an attribute so key

⁹⁰ Ben-Zevi, pg. 88.

⁹¹ Zumthor, pg. 817.

that Zumthor sees it as the unifying concept of the genre.⁹² While Basola does have a sharp eye for some things, notably those related to economics and commerce, he does not have an anthropologist's inquisitiveness. His comments about the Muslim inhabitants of the land are similar to those quoted regarding the Cave of Machpelah in which he mentions their "sin" or describes their role in some miraculous occurrence (e.g. falling from the tree, stealing part of a tomb).

This absence of detail can not be due to Basola's lack of exposure to Muslims. We know, for example, from his description of a mishap that he traveled with Muslims on at least one occasion.⁹³ Further, Arabic words filter into his vocabulary; Basola calls a caravansary a "*khan*"⁹⁴ and the camel handler, which he calls "בעל גמלים" earlier in his account, is referred to by the word "*mokri*."⁹⁵ Still, there is no discussion of the customs or practices he may have observed.

This lack of description is in stark contrast to the observations of the Muslims in Alexandria offered by Meshullam:

When a man marries a wife he gives her a dowry and from thenceforth he is only obligated to feed her, eating and drinking alone, but not clothing, for she must dress herself from her own money and also, when she has children, she is bound to feed them and when she is expecting a child he must not touch her, therefore they marry twenty-three wives and there are Ishmaelites who have twenty sons and

⁹²Zumthor, pg. 812.

⁹³Ben-Zevi, pg. 42.

⁹⁴Ben-Zevi, pg. 65,

⁹⁵Ben-Zevi, pg. 69.

daughters born in a single year.⁹⁶

While not quite as rich as Meshullam's descriptions, Ovadiah also offers observations about the Muslims in Jerusalem:

As for the Muslims, their sages still hold the opinions that Maimonides mentions in his *Moreh Nevuchim*. (I:71) One cannot find even a single Muslim who curses God or speaks against Him, as the Christians do. If not for the fear of God, in fact, it would be impossible to live among them. This is because the government here is so ineffective and disorganized. And besides, the Muslims have absolutely no fear of what little government does exist. . . . (In court) false witnesses are quite common among both the Christians and the Muslims. The Muslim courts do not cross-examine witnesses, and witnesses do not even have to testify under oath. The courts believe and act on their testimony. If such laws existed in Christian countries, people would swallow each other alive.⁹⁷

Even more curious than Basola's lack of description of the Muslims he encountered is the fact that he does not offer detailed observations of the Jewish communities he visited. His description of the Jewish community of Sidon is typical:

There are about 500 households and about 20 are Jewish, with most of them Arabicized Jews. But they are good and welcoming to visitors, something that isn't always so in the places I passed through. There is a small, pretty synagogue. I rested there on Shabbat. . . The market day is Thursday.⁹⁸

Again, Basola's account is sparse compared to the rich observations offered by Meshullam and Ovadiah. Meshullam offered the following,

⁹⁶ Adler, pg. 159.

⁹⁷ Marmorstein, pg. 53.

⁹⁸ Ben-Zevi, pg. 40.

somewhat slanted account of the Jews he encountered in Jerusalem:

The Muslims and also the Jews of this place are pigs at their eating. They all eat out of one vessel with their fingers, without a napkin, just as the people of Cairo do, but their clothes are clean . . . All men and women and children, Jews as well as Muslims, have these customs. They sleep in their clothes.⁹⁹

Ovadiah offered similarly detailed, although less ethnocentric, observations, such as this one of the Jews of Alexandria:

This is how the Jews in all Muslim lands eat on Shabbat. They sit in a circle on mats. There is no table. Instead, a small tablecloth is spread out on a mat, on which are placed many varieties of local fruits. . . The wine, it must be said, is exceptionally strong – particularly in Jerusalem – and they add no water to it. After everyone has drunk his fill, a large bowl filled with vegetables and meat is brought in. Everyone takes what he wants out of the bowl. The people eat very quickly and quite sparingly. At Rabbi Moshe's feast, we were brought peaches soaked in sugar, fresh ginger, dates, raisins, almonds and a coriander seed confection. With each of these fruits we drank a cup of wine . . . I drank with him and felt intoxicated.¹⁰⁰

The one Jewish community which Basola does describe in some detail is Jerusalem. Yet even here he focuses on liturgical and educational matters and the ordinances of the community. He lists the names of leading citizens, but they remain merely that.

It is unfortunate that Basola does not provide us with rich anthropological detail. He clearly notes *'eydot* in a community distinguishing between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Arabicized, and Moroccan Jews, so these differences must have been apparent and of interest to him. Yet he does not describe them,

⁹⁹Adler, pg. 195.

¹⁰⁰Marmorstein, pg. 30-31.

beyond this mention or a count of their households.

On a personal level, he does not give us any real sense of the individuals he encountered. There are no children in his account and only one woman who aids him when he is injured. He never names or describes his traveling companions and we only know of them because of his occasional use of the common plural or because of his discussion with a mishap. In sum, the people Basola encounters, both Jews and Muslims, remain two dimensional, if indeed they are visible at all. He does not share his discovery of "the other" with his readers.

The second key feature of the genre which differs between Basola's account and those of Meshullam and Ovadiah is the balance between the presentation of the narrator's personal experience and his "objective" description of the events and sites encountered on the journey. Every travel narrative, in effect, comprises a double account of the narrative and the descriptive, with one sometimes predominating, and at times, the other.¹⁰¹

Basola's account is heavily weighted toward reportage. If others are barely visible in his narrative, then it is just as true for Basola himself. While he writes in the first person, he only rarely enters his account as a living person. His description of the beginning of his trip from the Galilee to Jerusalem is typical: "On Tuesday, the 3rd of Kislev, I put my feet to the road to walk to Jerusalem, the Holy City, may it be rebuilt and reestablished speedily and in our day, amen. I was in a village called 'Yakook' and adjacent to it I saw the tomb

¹⁰¹Zumthor, pg. 812.

of Habakkuk."¹⁰²

There is no sense of Basola as "hero" or "adventurer," as there is in Meshullam's descriptions of his many narrow escapes, of which the following is typical:

We left Hebron on Tuesday, the 28th July, and went in the company of two good and honoured mamelukes . . . and with them there was a bastard whose intention it was to kill us. His name was Ali and he was a Muslim. At nightfall we reached a village called Halibi (sic), and that bastard went into the village and induced three robbers, companions of his, to rob us on the journey . . . He brought us in a circle to a place ten miles from Hebron . . . and the cursed man led us by ways which nobody had passed before into a great woods. . . and he left us and went and called, and when the mamelukes saw this they went after him . . . and they brought him back, and R. Joseph, the dragoman, went after them in stealth in order to hear their words, and I and Raphael, my companion, were left alone in the middle of the wood, and the dragoman heard Ali say, "Let me do this because I have three companions with whom I have spoken at night in Halevi (sic), and we will kill them and take their horses and all that they have got and divide equally, because they are very rich and who will seek them at our hands." Then the mamelukes replied, "Do not think so, for it is our duty to guard them, for the Lord of Niepo (sic) of Hebron has entrusted them into our hands, and it is for us to account for them." . . . When the mamelukes saw that Ali would not listen to them they said to him "Choose one of two things: either die here, for we will slay you, or come with us, because we do not wish you to call your companions . . . If you come with us we swear by the life of our king that we will not betray your secret to anybody"; and for this reason he returned against his will. . . God protected us from the hands of that betrayer, and robber, and we gave to the mamelukes each a ducat instead of to the villain, and anyhow, we paid no tax because of the roundabout journey we made, for there are seven toll houses between Hebron and Jerusalem."¹⁰³

While Ovadiah may not have been quite the adventurer Meshullam was, his

¹⁰²Ben-Zevi, pg. 50.

¹⁰³Adler, pg. 186.

letters still contain his personal reflections. When Ovadiah writes, "Unfortunately, however, the people regard my speeches primarily as entertainment. They praise my sermons but do not really change,"¹⁰⁴ or that upon arriving in Jerusalem, "I became a burier of the dead . . . because there are not enough people to carry a coffin or accompany a funeral procession,"¹⁰⁵ he reveals a sense of personal involvement and introspection that is lacking in Basola's account.

In fact, the individual Basola emerges only twice in his account, once when he expresses his happiness at living in a rented room in Jerusalem, and once when he is at his most human, suffering an accident:

Tuesday, before dawn we traveled to Tzefat and when the sun rose I was on the camel on top of the load saying *zemirot* (psalms) and preparing to lay tefillin. We passed through a big valley and there was a large nut tree, and three camels were tied one after the other and I was on the middle one. A branch of that same tree hit my face and caused me to fall backwards to the ground and my head hit on the ground hard, followed by my spine, so that I was stupefied from a blow to the brain and all my bones separated from the blow to the spine. It was such a hard fall that my breastbone was also uncovered and I was as if dead for half an hour. I began the "Vidui" / confession several times but I wasn't able to say it and with great effort I said the "modeh ani/I thank" prayer.¹⁰⁶

Yet, even here Basola retreats from the personal, and turns his misfortune into a didactic opportunity. He continues by recounting the miracles he merited that day, beginning with the fact that he didn't die in the fall and including the

¹⁰⁴Marmorstein, pg. 69.

¹⁰⁵Marmorstein, pg. 50.

¹⁰⁶Ben-Zevi, pg. 42.

miracle that the third camel didn't trample him.¹⁰⁷

The strongest indication of Basola removing himself from the text is found in a curious silence about his life in Tzefat. After his visit to Tiberius, Basola reports that he returned to Tzefat in Iyar, 5282 (May, 1522).¹⁰⁸ He briefly mentions a trip to Far'am to visit the gravesite of R. Judah Nesi'a. The narrative then picks up again with Basola leaving Tzefat to travel to Beirut in Shevat, 5283 (February, 1523), approximately nine months after his return to Tzefat.¹⁰⁹ Basola is silent about this time gap and offers no glimpses into his life.

Such a consistent diminution of the self, and the desire to correct any intrusions of the self, indicate that the traveler himself was not supposed to figure centrally in his narrative. Indeed, the account of Basola's journey remains characterized by description and two dimensionality.

This technique of reporting is put to good use, however, in the case of economic information. While both Ovadiah and Meshullam provide economic information regarding trade, tolls, and prices, neither offers Basola's detail. Indeed, even at his journey's very beginning, Basola records the cargo loaded onto his ship in Venice:

The ship was 70 cubits long and approximately 18 cubits wide. I saw them load most of the goods while I was in the יבירה.¹¹⁰ There were

¹⁰⁷ Ben-Zevi, pg. 42.

¹⁰⁸ Ben-Zevi, pg. 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ben-Zevi, pg. 76.

¹¹⁰ Meaning of the word is uncertain.

wool clothes in every color and a great deal of קרישיאי.¹¹¹ However, there were only a few black garments because in Syria they do not wear black, except for the mourner. Also, yellow is not the custom. But there was black velvet and smooth silk from Lyon. Much coral, haberdashery, much paper, tin, lead, copper, mercury, wooden implements, decorated and marked boxes, porcelain utensils (and) tin tableware.¹¹²

At every stop along his way, Basola mentions the quality, variety, and cost of food, the market day, and which coins are used there. He reports on taxes and tolls. In several instances, he gives specific information on the types of trade or commerce with which one could make a living. For example, regarding Tzefat he writes:

The land is encouraging to commerce, whether in stores of wool clothing or haberdashery, or perfumery. There are many Jewish stores of these three types. And they bring the haberdashery and the perfumes from Damascus and sell them in the city. When a ship arrives they go to Beirut to buy clothes and other things. There are also many Jews who travel among the villages and peddlers selling haberdashery, so that their houses are filled with every good thing. In addition to this there is profit in buying spun cotton and wax and cyclamen when they are cheap and selling them at the appropriate time. Also there are Jews who sell fruit, vegetables, oil and cheese and other things in the market. And for one who wants to do business in grain, new wine, and pure oil, everything is according to the season. In general, the land is much more commercial than Italy because the Ishmaelites would rather buy from the Jews than from others. One who does not have funds to invest in commerce needs to have a trade, and there are four good trades in all the Land of Israel: the weavers, the goldsmiths, the cobblers and the tanners. Also builders. One who has the strength to work for hire in one of these trades is paid well. The tailor also earns his keep. However, people are not found hiring themselves out as a teacher or to serve in a house or a store, and casting themselves on public welfare is impossible because there is so

¹¹¹ Meaning of the word is uncertain.

¹¹² Ben-Zevi, pg. 28.

much poverty.¹¹³

Such commercial detail is not an isolated incident in Basola's report. Indeed, sometimes his economic information is overwhelming, as in an almost page long discussion of currency exchange values.¹¹⁴

Given Basola's personal absence from the narrative and the emphasis on economic information and the description of the sites visited, the descriptive outweighs the personal in Basola's account.

When Basola's narrative is compared with its closest contemporaries, its commonalities and idiosyncrasies are brought to light. All three of the accounts examined clearly fit the description of the genre as first person narrative. Additionally, all three share descriptions of sites visited and even to some degree the economic information reported on, for example, tolls. Miraculous occurrences are also present in all three accounts. However, Basola's narrative is much weaker in recounting the experience of otherness and describing the customs of the Jews and Muslims encountered. Lastly, while it does reflect a few of the author's personal experiences, Basola's account is dominated by objective descriptions of economic conditions and sites. Based on these idiosyncrasies, it may be possible to postulate Basola's motivation for undertaking his journey and his composition, and his intended audience.

¹¹³Ben-Zevi, pg. 43.

¹¹⁴Ben-Zevi, pg. 36.

CHAPTER 3

Basola's Agenda and His Intended Audience

Mary Campbell has written that, "There are two conventional reasons for writing an account of the Holy Land: because men want to hear about it that cannot go there and because the author is an eye witness."¹¹⁵ This statement clearly applies to all the accounts considered, but it also leads to further questions: what led Basola to be an eye witness, that is, why did he travel to the land of Israel; and who was the audience that wanted to hear about his journey? Unfortunately, Basola does not explicitly state the answer to either of these questions. However, it may be possible to tease out some clues from his text that would provide a foundation for a hypothesis. One thing is for certain; Basola's use of Italian words for commercial and maritime terms, and his transliteration of them into Hebrew letters, clearly indicates that he was writing for an Italian Jewish audience.

The most obvious explanation for Basola's journey would be pilgrimage. Indeed, he supplies information on holy sites and graves that would prove useful to those who came after him. Further, the prophecy that appears at the beginning of his account, might also indicate a religious motivation.

Ruth Lamden argues for just such a motivation in her master's thesis. She reasons that Basola's journey was influenced by the messianic longing of the times which was heightened by the Ottoman conquest of the Holy Land. As

¹¹⁵Campbell, pg. 143.

more specific evidence, she cites the prophecy that appears at the beginning of his account, attributed to R. Abraham Zacuto.

Lamden bases her argument on the following line of transmission which makes is theoretically possible for Basola to have been aware of the prophecy before setting off on his journey. R. Abraham Zacuto arrived in Jerusalem in 1513, and possibly passed on his prediction to his brother-in-law, R. Abraham Ha-Levi, who had arrived there previously. In 1517, R. Ha-Levi completed נבואות הילד נחמן (*Nevu'at ha-Yeled Nachman*) which explicated prophecies from the 13th century. In the body of his text, R. Ha-Levi offered predictions similar to R. Zacuto's and supported by citations from Zacuto's work משפטי האצטגנין (*Mishpatei ha-Itztagnin*). Ha-Levi's commentary received wide circulation at the time. Therefore, it was "possible," Lamden reasons, "a copy of the commentary, with the addition of the excerpts from R. Abraham Zacuto's משפטי האצטגנין reached the hands of the kabbalistic circles in Italy before R. Moshe Basola set off on his journey."¹¹⁶ She postulates that the messianic fervor and hope for redemption connected to the prophecy encouraged Basola to undertake his journey.

I do not find this line of argument to be convincing. First, it is entirely possible, as Lamden herself admits, that Basola became aware of the prophecy while he was in Jerusalem and brought it back to Italy with him.¹¹⁷ After all, Basola lists R. Abraham Ha-Levi as one of the leaders of the Jewish community

¹¹⁶ Lamden, pg. 14.

¹¹⁷ Lamden, pg. 16.

in Jerusalem and likely met him during his visit there.¹¹⁸ Secondly, Lamden offers as support for her thesis that Basola himself wrote an abstract of the commentary of R. Ha-Levi that was published in Venice in 1617.¹¹⁹ However, this was published posthumously and could have as easily have been written after Basola's journey as before.

Additionally, the prophecy itself raises questions as to whether it would have motivated Basola to set off for the Holy Land. Lamden notes a text that otherwise parallels the one Basola quotes at the beginning of his account and which begins as follows:

From the judgement of the great astrologer, the sage, R. Abraham Zacuto, may his memory be a blessing, he said that (in) the year 5270 (1510) on the night of the 14th of Kislev, the moon will be eclipsed and this indicates devastation in the east . . . until the year 5284 passes . . . the one who escapes from it will be able to say "Today I was (re)born" . . . and these are the birth pangs of the messiah . . .¹²⁰

The prophecy then continues as it does in Basola's account. Lamden reasons that Basola omitted the part of the prophecy that pertains to years that had already passed.¹²¹ However, this raises the questions of why Basola would be motivated to undertake a journey on the basis of a prophecy whose initial prediction had proved false.

Lastly, examining the portion of the prophecy which Basola himself brings raises questions about whether it would motivate him to behave as he did. The

¹¹⁸Ben-Zevi; pg. 63.

¹¹⁹Lamden, pg. 15.

¹²⁰Lamden, pg. 14.

¹²¹Lamden, pg. 15.

prophecy predicts that in the year 5284 (1524) Israel would be redeemed. The prophecy also predicts great wars finally culminating in the coming of the Davidic messiah in 5289 (1528).¹²² Conceivably, such a prophecy might encourage one to depart for the Holy Land in 1521 in order to be closer to the scene of the coming redemption. However, if this was the motivation for undertaking his journey, why did Basola then return to Italy in the spring of 1523? Since he had already stayed in land of Israel for 18 months, why not remain there for another six until the coming redemption? Or, why not depart for the Holy Land closer to the predicted time of the redemption?

In sum, I do not find Lamden's explanation for Basola's undertaking his journey to be convincing. It is more likely that he encountered R. Abraham Ha-Levi and his prediction during his visit to Jerusalem and appended the prophecy to the beginning of his account upon his return.¹²³

If not for religious reasons, then why might Basola undertake such a journey? The contents of his account may offer some clues, since it is likely that his subject matter was shaped by what he perceived the expectations and interests of his audience to be. For example, in his letter to his father, Ovadiah writes, "When I was in Naples a year ago, you wrote to me and asked that I tell you all about all the Jewish communities that I visited on my way to the land of

¹²²Ben-Zevi, pg. 27.

¹²³This seems to have been Ben-Zevi's opinion as well and based on this he dates the composition of Basola's account to before 1524. See Ben-Zevi, pg. 22. It is clear that Basola reworked his account after completing his journey. See Lamden, pg. 9, note 20 for a full listing of the places in Basola's account which indicate that he edited his material after returning to Italy.

Israel. In this way, at least, I will be able to 'make good-tasting things for you, as you have loved.'¹²⁴ Ovadiah then continues his letter, which is filled with richly detailed observations of the communities he visited.

Although, Basola is not as explicit as Ovadiah, the contents of his account reveal three major themes: the miraculous events and legends associated with the tombs of the *tzadikim*; economic and commercial information; and practical advice for potential settlers in the land of Israel. Notably, his account lacks detailed descriptions of the people he encountered on his journey, and his reflections on his personal experience are scanty.

As discussed above, the theme of miraculous stories and occurrences seems to be a common feature of the genre. It also appears to be highly reflective of the 16th century Jewish mindset, which was characterized by messianic hopes and longing for redemption. While Basola offers interesting observations and stories on this subject, this aspect of his narrative is not markedly different from its closest contemporaries, and probably does not offer any further insight into his motive, than to indicate a religious interest that was common at the time.

Basola's failure to describe other people whom he met in his travels and his diminution of himself as narrator, indicate that these themes were not the central thrust of his account. Their absence also serves to focus his account even more sharply on those areas in which his travelogue is distinct: economic and commercial information, and practical advice.

In contrast to the pilgrimage oriented travel of the Middle Ages, 16th

¹²⁴Marmorstein, pg. 15.

century travel literature in general is characterized by its commercial orientation.¹²⁵ Further, commercial and practical information is seen as the province of the merchant as Campbell has explained saying, "In the real world of the merchant it is the quotidian that matters."¹²⁶

Both Meshullam and Ovadiah offer information on prices, taxes, and tolls. In the case of Meshullam, this is not surprising since he was a merchant, trading in precious stones and making loans throughout his journey.¹²⁷ But neither traveler is as lavish with regard to economic information as Basola, who was not a merchant but rather a scholar/teacher. His focus on economic matters becomes even clearer when, in addition to discussing the tolls a traveler must pay or the produce of a certain village, he provides lengthy passages on various currency exchange rates:

Most of the gold is used in the form of many different coins, and written on each one is how many "bisante" it is worth. By one bisanto is meant 12 marci "sexto Ferrareso" (a Ferraran coin). The Venetian ducat is only equal to 12 marcelo in exchange (currency); however, for goods, it is worth 13. The gazi marchelo is used like the others, and a new Venetian coin is worth a marcelo. They also use the Quattrine called "Croce," four of them equal to one Marchetto, and 40 marchelo.¹²⁸

Further, it seems that much of the economic information and advice Basola offers is not directed to casual travelers but to those undertaking a more permanent stay in the land of Israel. This is evident when he describes Tzefat,

¹²⁵Campbell, pg. 7.

¹²⁶Campbell, pg. 91.

¹²⁷Adler, pg. 202, 203.

¹²⁸Ben-Zevi, pg. 34.

outlining the job prospects for various sorts of craftsmen.¹²⁹ He also discusses how one can establish a business in Damascus as well as the moneylending practices there.¹³⁰ In the appendix, where he offers practical advice to travellers, he further suggests good areas for seating on the ship depending on whether one has a small or large household.¹³¹ Avraham David, specifically citing the travel information appended at the end of Basola's account, sees Basola's information as oriented toward those Jews who are interested in immigrating or visiting the land of Israel.¹³²

In several respects, e.g. ways to make a living in the Holy Land, the information Basola provides is most closely paralleled by the letter written by Ovadiah's student.¹³³ It is telling then, that after discussing the cost of living for a year, the logistics of renting a place to live, and the taxes that are incumbent upon residents, Ovadiah's student concludes his letter by saying, "I would like to write more to you about the practical things I have learned, such as how to find a ship to sail on, and everything else that someone coming to Jerusalem has to know."¹³⁴ It is likely that what Ovadiah's student has stated explicitly, his desire

¹²⁹Ben-Zevi, pg. 44.

¹³⁰Ben-Zevi, pg. 66.

¹³¹Ben-Zevi, pg. 92.

¹³²אברהם דוד, עלייה והתיישבות בארץ-ישראל במאה ה־ט"ז (ירושלים: ראובן מס בע"מ, 1993), 14.

(Avraham David, The Immigration and Settlement in the Land of Israel in the 16th Century (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, Ltd., 1993). Hereafter referred to as "David."

¹³³See, for example, Marmorstein, pg. 89 on earning a living in Jerusalem.

¹³⁴Marmorstein, pg. 93.

to provide information to those immigrating to the Holy Land, is implicit in Basola's writing.

It would seem, then, that Basola has written his account to provide a report of economic and commercial opportunities in the land of Israel, rather than composing his personal reflections on a pilgrimage experience.

Basola's journey to the Holy Land in 1521-1523 did not prove to be a permanent immigration. His return to Italy after a lengthy stay raises the question of whether he undertook his journey on his own or whether he was encouraged and supported by someone seeking information on economic or immigration opportunities in the area. Political circumstances in both the land of Israel and in Italy, especially Venice, make the time appear especially ripe for seeking out such opportunities.

Basola's travels began just five years after the Ottoman conquest of the region in 1516. In contrast to the final period of Mameluke rule, which had been marked by disorganization and instability, Ottoman rule brought both stability and order, eventually yielding economic and agricultural improvements. As the area grew in strategic, geopolitical, and economic importance, the Ottoman government tried to encourage and strength settlement in the region.¹³⁵ As a result, immigration to the land of Israel was facilitated and the door was opened for an influx of Iberian Jews who had found refuge in other cities in the Ottoman Empire. Many of them would eventually find their way to Tzefat, which was destined to thrive as a spiritual and economic center beginning in the second half

¹³⁵David, pg. 12.

of the 16th century. Thus, Basola visited the land of Israel at the very beginning of a new era in its history.

While the situation for Jews in the land of Israel was improving under Ottoman rule, it was beginning to deteriorate in Venice. While there is evidence that Jews had ties to Venice as early as the 14th century,¹³⁶ since the expiration of the Venetian Jews' charter in 1397, they had been formally prohibited from living in Venice and had established their communal headquarters in Mestre, a town on the mainland directly across from Venice.¹³⁷

They resided there until 1508 when war broke out between Venice and the League of Cambrai, an alliance formed against the Republic by Pope Julius II, Emperor Maximilian, and King Ferdinand of Spain. Venice was flooded with refugees, including the Jewish bankers of Mestre who were allowed to return under the provisions of their charter and who were well received because they brought much needed capital with them. In 1509, the town of Agnadello fell, resulting in another influx of refugees.

By 1511-1514, Venice had overcome most of her military problems, but the Jews remained, scattered throughout the city and enjoying great freedom. The authorities tolerated them because the credit they extended was essential to the economy and because they could be used as a lightning rod to deflect mass hostilities created by domestic problems which included plague and a rash of

¹³⁶Riccardo Calimani, The Ghetto of Venice (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1987), 5.

¹³⁷Calimani, pg. 9.

fires. In 1514, the Senate authorized the opening of nine Jewish second-hand shops in exchange for a fee of 5000 ducats, and new Jewish business enterprises started to grow up alongside the traditional moneylending establishments.

Just when it appeared a period of stability had begun, a counter reaction occurred with some of the Venetian nobles giving their support to Fra Zulian Maria di Arezzo, one of the most virulent anti-Jewish preachers. As a result, in March, 1515, the Senate received a proposal requesting that all Jews be confined to the *Giudecca*. The Jewish leaders objected to the choice of location because they considered it dangerous and suggested an alternative. After heated argument the Senate failed to reach a decision.

Only one year later, a violent attack was launched against the Jews by Zaccaria Dolfin, who accused them of iniquities including the illegal building of synagogues and corruption of the State. He suggested that they be confined to the *Ghetto Novo*, the New Ghetto, where there was a foundry that had fallen into disuse. In spite of Jewish leaders' objections that the site was too isolated and that they had just made heavy investments in their recently opened second-hand shops, the plan for the ghetto was overwhelmingly approved by the Senate. The decree required that the Jews all live together in the ghetto and that gates be built to confine them. The gates were to be opened in the morning and closed at midnight by four Christian guards paid by the Jews. The enclosure was completed with high walls and all windows and doors were walled up. The Jews also had to pay two boats to continually patrol the canals surrounding the ghetto, and progressively severe penalties were established for any Jew found

outside the ghetto after midnight; first and second offenses were punishable by a fine, a third offense was subject to a heavier fine and two months' imprisonment.

The idea of granting the Jews a residential quarter was an old idea dating back to the fourteenth century. Originally, this had been considered a great privilege,¹³⁸ but it had been disregarded. Now that it had become a reality due to less benevolent motivations, the Jews regarded the plan with fear and suspicion.¹³⁹

After the establishment of the ghetto, during the Easter seasons of 1518 and 1519, the air was filled with the accusations of anti-Jewish preachers who attacked both the Jews and the authorities' alleged laxity in dealing with them. In 1519, with the Jews charter set to expire, a precarious period of negotiation began, and by summer there was new talk of expulsion.¹⁴⁰ While there seem to have been very ambivalent opinions in the Senate, all the speakers verbally opposed the Jews in an effort to avoid being accused of weakness. While some no doubt wanted to banish the Jews from Venice on the grounds of "goodness and piety," others were simply eager to take over their moneylending businesses themselves.¹⁴¹

In the end, the precarious financial situation of the Republic lead to the renewal of the Jews' charter. Rather than impose a tax burden on all the citizens,

¹³⁸ Calimani, pg. 7.

¹³⁹ Calimani, pg. 33.

¹⁴⁰ Calimani, pg. 34.

¹⁴¹ Calimani, pg. 35.

it was decided to heap the entire burden on the Jewish community by offering a ten year charter in exchange for a tax of ten thousand ducats and a loan interest rate set at 15 percent.¹⁴² Jewish leaders were forced to acquiesce.

Thus, in the five year period from 1514 to 1519, Jewish fortunes in Venice had shifted considerably, from enjoying relative freedom and the opportunity to establish new businesses, to confinement in the ghetto in 1516, to finally being forced to pay an exorbitant tax burden in return for the charter of 1519. It appears then that just as the outlook for Jews in Venice grew darker, prospects in the Ottoman controlled Holy Land appeared to brighten. These historical events also suggest that Basola's trip was undertaken with an eye toward identifying promising areas for immigration should the Jews' situation in Venice deteriorate further.

Might then a Venetian Jew who was aware of the situation in both Venice and the land of Israel have been willing to support Basola's journey as a way of obtaining information on economic and immigration prospects? A patron's financial backing for a scholar in his employ to undertake such a journey, while not to my knowledgeprecedented, seems a plausible extension of the privately employed scholar's role. Additionally, while the tension between the scholar's intellectual independence and his economic dependence on his patron was present in every relationship of this sort,¹⁴³ a statement survives from a

¹⁴²Calimani, pg. 36.

¹⁴³Robert Bonfil, Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 204.

contemporary which describes Basola as "The rabbi (who is ready) to assist (whomever hires him)."¹⁴⁴

It is not necessary to attribute to Basola entirely materialistic motives. His journey might have been the result of converging motivations: Basola's desire to visit the Holy Land and his willingness to report on economic conditions, combined with his patron's desire to finance the journey in exchange for information of interest.

While there is no direct evidence linking Basola to a specific patron who encouraged and supported his journey, the existence of such a backer has been previously suggested. Isaiah Zonne has asserted that Basola did indeed undertake his journey at the request of a backer, observing that during his travels Basola "visited the most important markets of the east and reported on the commercial conditions in them." He claims, "It is almost certain that he did this at the command of one of the Venetian bankers, R. Asher Meshullam."¹⁴⁵

While Zonne offers no more specific proof that this, and while there is no direct evidence of a linkage between Basola and Asher Meshullam, it must be acknowledged that Asher Meshullam played a critical and influential role in the Venetian Jewish community and was therefore extremely aware of its precarious position.

Asher Meshullam (known in Italian as Anselmo del Banco), a wealthy Jew

¹⁴⁴Schulvass, pg. 279.

¹⁴⁵

ישעיהו זונה, "לתולדות קהילת בולונייה בתחילת המאה הת"ז,"

Hebrew Union College Annual 16 (1941): מ"ד note 13.

who owned several loan banks in Venetian territories, arrived in Venice in 1509, having fled from Padua. Cecil Roth, considered him to be the founder of the reconstituted Jewish community that was formed by the refugees from the War with the League of Cambrai.¹⁴⁶ He acted as spokesman for the Jewish community and was responsible for securing its charters.

The first major crisis he faced occurred in 1512, when he was caught in a heated conflict with the Venetian Senate, which demanded 10,000 ducats from the Jews. Refusing the terms under which the loan was requested, Asher Meshullam and other Jewish leaders were thrown in jail in an attempt to induce them to reconsider. In return, the Jewish bankers threatened to close their pawnshops and leave town. Finally, a year later, Asher Meshullam's terms were accepted with certain modifications, and the Jews were permitted to lend against collateral in exchange for a tax of 6500 ducats a year.¹⁴⁷

Four years later, Asher Meshullam faced an even greater threat when the plan to confine the Jews to the ghetto was approved. When warning of the dangers of isolation and reminding the authorities of the Jews' heavy investments in their newly opened second-hand shops did not result in the abrogation of the decree, he desperately tried to buy time by proposing that the decision be suspended until Venice had won back her mainland possessions, at which time the Jews would be happy to return to the mainland.¹⁴⁸ Schulvass

¹⁴⁶Roth, *Renaissance*, pg. 17.

¹⁴⁷Calimani, pg. 32.

¹⁴⁸Calimani, pg. 32.

5
L
writes that, "... Anselmo del Banco conducted his battle like a true renaissance man. He argued against the ghetto on moral grounds and hinted at the same time that the Jews might leave the city. Even after the ghetto had become a *fait accompli*, he still tried to secure the right of unrestricted residence at least for himself in exchange for substantial sums of money."¹⁴⁹ However, his efforts were to no avail and in July, 1516 Asher and his brother Chaim were forced to move into the ghetto.

At the same time, a new decree was enacted that established the wages of the ghetto patrol boatmen and the *Cattaveri*, the government officials appointed to control Jewish money lending and residence in Venice. The Jews were, of course, responsible for paying these wages and Asher Meshullam found himself in a delicate position: he was personally responsible for guaranteeing and advancing the taxes and fees owed by the entire Jewish community, while he in turn had to apply to the community for reimbursement of the money advanced.¹⁵⁰

In 1519, further burdened by the exorbitant taxes imposed on the community in exchange for a new charter, Asher Meshullam asked for time to consult with the mainland communities, but in the end was forced to give in. He is reported to have observed on that occasion, "When will struggles with power, power wins out."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹Schulvass, pg. 42.

¹⁵⁰Calimani, 34.

¹⁵¹Calimani, pg. 36.

Thus, it is clear that from the time he sought refuge in Venice in 1509 until shortly before Basola's departure in 1521, Asher Meshullam was personally and financially responsible for the Jewish community's welfare in Venice, and had a clear vantage point from which to view its rising and falling fortunes. While he was able to retain his own wealth, he was not able to retain the freedom of residence he had enjoyed. Interestingly, in response to a demand for further money in 1526, Asher Meshullam replied that the Jews would rather leave Venice than pay. However, the Jews' charter still had three years to run and in 1528 a compromise agreement was reached which allowed the Jews to remain.¹⁵² It is not clear, however, what role Asher Meshullam had in reaching this compromise.

In addition to his influential role in Venice, it appears that Asher Meshullam was also a prominent patron of Jewish life in Jerusalem. Basola notes that Asher Meshullam had donated money to the Jerusalem congregation in order to "sponsor" the Sabbaths when the Torah portions "Vaera" and "Bamidbar" were read.¹⁵³ Interestingly, while Basola spent approximately eight weeks in Jerusalem (from 11 Kislev to 1 Shevat, 5282), he only mentions one Sabbath in particular; that which was sponsored by Asher Meshullam. Further, it appears that Asher Meshullam had contacts with scholars in Jerusalem even before Basola's journey. A letter sent to "an anonymous patron in Italy" from the yeshiva in Jerusalem begins with what is likely word play on the name "Asher

¹⁵²Calimani, pg. 37.

¹⁵³Ben-Zevi, pg. 85.

Meshullam":

אשרי האיש, אשרי המאושר, ואושר ישלם, ומשולם יושלם, שם ושלוש, יבושר שלום.
מאדון השלום.¹⁵⁴

While it must be admitted that there are no established direct links between Basola and Asher Meshullam, Isaiah Zonne's assertion does have circumstantial support in that Meshullam's status as a leader of the Venetian community and his contact with the Jerusalem community put him in a unique position. He was completely aware of the demands upon the Venetian Jewish community and its sometimes precarious position. At the same time he had contact with the Holy Land at a point when it was poised to offer Jews new economic and immigration opportunities under the Ottoman Empire. It is possible that Asher Meshullam's curiosity and financial resources, combined with Basola's desire to undertake a journey to the Holy Land and report his findings, resulted in the account we have before us today.

¹⁵⁴ אברהם יערי, אגרות ארץ ישראל (רמת-גן: מסדה, 1971), עמ' 162.

CHAPTER 4

Later Generations' Use of Basola's Account

Basola's narrative was not published until 1785, when it was anthologized by Jacob ben Moses Hayyim Baruch along with other works on the Holy Land in שבחי ירושלים. This collection enjoyed great popularity because of its lively description of holy sites.¹⁵⁵ However, the text of Basola's account in the anthology was not the same as his original, which would only come to light 250 years later. Examining the differences between the 1785 version and "Jerusalem manuscript" published by Ben-Zevi provides insight into how subsequent generations of Jews have understood travel literature about the Holy Land.

It is not surprising that the changes are focused on those areas identified as key to travel literature: the places visited, the portrayal of the "other," and the expectation of the miraculous. Modifications also occurred in areas that are more specific to Basola's narrative, namely his use of Italian and his focus on commerce.

Basola's account is clearly the product of an Italian Jew. Even in the 1785 version's Italian provenance is clear in that the author mentions departing from Venice and compares locations to sites in Italy. However, in the 1785 version many of the words Basola uses for commercial or maritime terms have been changed into Hebrew. For example, "galea" is replaced by "ספינה" (boat or

¹⁵⁵Encyclopedia Judaica, "Jacob ben Moses Hayyim Baruch," vol. 4, col. 274.

ship),¹⁵⁶ "merceria" by "סחורה" (commerce),¹⁵⁷ and "trafaco" by "משא ומתן" (trade),¹⁵⁸ making the text more accessible to non-Italian speaking Jews.

The sites visited are a key component of travel literature and the changes to the later edition of Basola's account serve to narrow its focus. While Basola wrote about the locations he visited enroute to the Holy Land, the later edition simply substitutes a list of place names. Thus, Basola's descriptions of Pula, Corfu, Zante, Famagusta, Tripoli, and Beirut are missing from the 1785 version, and his detailed narrative begins with his arrival in Sidon.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, Sidon is the first location in which there is mention of a holy gravesite, that of Zebulun. Thus the focus of the edited narrative is the Holy Land itself, with its border defined by a holy site.

This focus on the Land of Israel as a holy site rather than a land of mundane trade is further reinforced by the deletion of some of the lavish commercial information included in the manuscript. Much of this is lost by the deletion of the descriptions of the cities enroute to the Holy Land. Also lost is the information on currency, including information on the money used in the Land of Israel, which is contained in the description of Tripoli. Further, while trade in certain cities is still described in the 1785 edition, the discussion is sometimes condensed. For example in the case of Tzefat, the discussion in the 1785 edition

¹⁵⁶ Ben-Zevi, pg. 28. 1785 version, pg. 15b.

¹⁵⁷ Ben-Zevi, pg. 43. 1785 version, pg. 16b.

¹⁵⁸ Ben-Zevi, pg. 66. 1785 version, pg. 21b.

¹⁵⁹ 1785 version, pg. 15b.

emphasizes the fertility of the area and also offers advice concerning those trades at which one can make a living, but the discussion on commercial details, e.g. peddling door to door, and which goods to buy cheap and sell high, has been deleted.¹⁶⁰

As a result of the changes in the sites described and the amount of commercial information offered, the 1785 version's focus has been shifted further to the Land of Israel as a place of holy sites and Jewish settlement.

Many wonders reported to have occurred are still recorded in the 1785 version. However, those miraculous events that were time bound have been deleted. Therefore, while the story of the water flowing at Hillel's tomb and information on the Ten Lost Tribes and the River Sambatyon remain in the narrative, the prophecy with which Basola began his manuscript, his description of his search for a messianic pretender in Tzefat, and the story of the dove which heralded the return of the lost tribes have been deleted. No doubt, these prophecies were excised because they failed to come to pass. Still enduring value was found by later readers in the miraculous stories of the tombs of the righteous and in the dream of Jewish autonomy encouraged by reports of the Lost Tribes.

Lastly, while Basola did not fully share his discovery of the "other" with his readers even in the manuscript, the 1785 version offers even few mentions. The only specific mention of a woman, the widow from Ferrara who aided him after his fall from a camel,¹⁶¹ is entirely cut. Instead, the 1785 version states that

¹⁶⁰ Compare Ben-Zevi, pg. 43-44, and 1785 version, pg. 16b.

¹⁶¹ Ben-Zevi, pg. 43.

"I (Basola) found a bandage and a cure."¹⁶² Further, in describing the fall itself, Basola's original mentions "two evil Jews" who were with him and abandoned him.¹⁶³ These Jews are not mentioned at all in the later version. Finally, where Basola comfortably uses the name "Jesus" twice in describing sites associated with his life, the later version refers to him only as "the man" (גברא), linguistically distancing this Jewish text from even a mention of the Christian figure.¹⁶⁴ As a result, the world which is described in the 1785 version, loses some of what little discovery of the other there is and becomes even more two dimensional.

In sum, the changes described serve to focus the 1785 version on the Land of Israel as defined by holy sites and the miracles associated with them. Through this it becomes a place which exists in isolation, connected only by the thinnest chain, a list of place names, to Europe, and populated only by two dimensional figures; the narrator himself, Ishmaelites in general, Jews in general (but not evil ones), and Jewish communal leaders who, while mentioned by name, had died two hundred years before.

The result of these revisions was a more conventional description of a pilgrimage. However, this was not a pilgrimage that readers were intended to undertake themselves. It is notable that the list of the tombs of the righteous, reminiscent of an itinerary and a helpful piece of information for one actually

¹⁶²1785 version, pg. 16b.

¹⁶³Ben-Zevi, pg. 42.

¹⁶⁴Compare Ben-Zevi, pg. 51 and 55, and 1785 version, pg. 18b and 19b.

undertaking a pilgrimage, has been deleted from the 1785 version. So too has the information provided for those undertaking a voyage to the Holy Land. These deletions seem to indicate that while the edited narrative was intended to describe a pilgrimage, it was intended to provide a vicarious pilgrimage for readers. By facilitating this new reading, these changes likely contributed to the text's popularity, if not its very survival.

It is ironic to note that there has once again been a shift in readers' use of Basola's account. Since Ben-Zevi's publication of the manuscript, the descriptions of populations and economic circumstances have been the focus of scholarly attention and a source of data for reconstructing 16th century Israel. A key example of this, is Avraham David's use of the account as a primary document in his study of Jewish settlement in the 16th century Holy Land עלייה והתיישבות בארץ-ישראל במאה הט"ז. Journal articles in קתדרה and the Encyclopedia Judaica also reveal a similar use of Basola's account.¹⁶⁵

It might strike us as ironic that we should think more of Basola's economic sense today than of his descriptions of holy places. But if this is indeed the case it

¹⁶⁵ אברהם דוד, "ידיעות נוספות על פרעות ביהודי צפת בשנת 1517", קתדרה 158 (תמוז תשל"ח, יולי 1978): 193.
דוד תמר, "על יהודי צפת בימי הכיבוש העות'מאני", קתדרה 11 (ניסן תשל"אפריל 1979): 183-181.
מינה רוזן, "מעמד המוסתערבים והיחסים בין העדות ביישוב היהודי בארץ-ישראל נמשלהי המאה הט"ו עד שלהי המאה הי"ז", קתדרה 17 (תשרי תשמ"א, אוקטובר 1980): 91-90.

Encyclopedia Judaica, "Safed," Vol. 14, col. 627.

may only reflect how much we come from a culture which shares these interests and is aware how powerfully they can affect what we call art.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In Iyar 5320 (May, 1560), at the age of eighty, Basola once again set out for the Holy Land, accompanied by his nephew R. Mordechai de'Ato. This second journey would prove to be a permanent immigration rather than a temporary sojourn.

Circumstances both in Italy and the Land of Israel had changed in the years since Basola's first visit. In 1553, just a few years before his final immigration, the Pope had ordered all copies of the Talmud confiscated and burned.¹⁶⁶ The Jewish ghetto in Rome was established in 1555 with the issuing of the Papal Bull *Cum nimis absurdum*.¹⁶⁷ In 1556, 24 Portuguese New Christians were executed by the Inquisition in Ancona, the city in which Basola served as Rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva. The resulting boycott of the port, led by Dona Gracia Nasi and opposed by Basola, finally failed, but not before economic damage was inflicted on the members of his congregation.¹⁶⁸

While Jewish life in Italy was threatened with decline, the situation in the Holy Land improved under Ottoman rule. Especially notable is Tzefat, the Galilean town, in which Basola settled after his return to Israel. In the forty years

¹⁶⁶ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "Italy," vol. 9, col. 1123.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 69.

¹⁶⁸ Cecil Roth, *Dona Gracia and the House of Nasi*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1977), 142ff.

since Basola's visit, the town flourished with its Jewish population more than doubling from the 300 households that Basola himself reported to 719 in 1555/56.¹⁶⁹ The newcomers made Tzefat a center for textile production, with their products rivaling those of Venice. Additionally, the Jews of Tzefat traded in oil, honey, silk, and spices.

In addition to its commercial growth, Tzefat also thrived spiritually, becoming the center of Jewish mysticism. Its 16th century residents included the kabbalists R. Joseph Caro, R. Moses Trani, R. Moses Cordovero, and R. Isaac Luria.¹⁷⁰

As was the case in his prior journey, Basola may have been encouraged to undertake this second journey at his advanced age because of the conditions in Italy and the promise of economic and spiritual prosperity in the Holy Land. Lamden, again implies that he was influenced by the prophesied redemption of Israel, which he predicted would occur in 5335 (1575).¹⁷¹ However, given that he was already eighty years old, it is unlikely that Basola expected to live another 15 years until the actual redemption was slated to occur. It is likely, given his age, that his desire to return to the Holy Land was that shared by countless other Jews before him: the wish to die and be buried in the soil of Israel.

Basola did indeed arrive safely in Tzefat, and Leone Modena has provided some information about the reception he received upon his arrival:

¹⁶⁹ David pg. 110.

¹⁷⁰ These kabbalists immigrated to Tzefat in the following years: Trani, 1518, Cordovero, 1524, Caro, 1536, and Luria, 1569. See David, pg 151ff.

¹⁷¹ Lamden, pg. 75.

I heard (regarding) our teacher R. Moshe Basola, may his memory be a blessing, who was the Rosh Yeshiva in Ancona all his days (and) a great expert in kabbalah, (that) when he left Ancona for Tzefat, may it be rebuilt and reestablished speedily in our own day, amen, almost all the sages of Tzefat came to receive him, because they had heard of his fame, and among them came R. Cordovero, may his memory be a blessing, he was then a young man,¹⁷² and he (Cordovero) kissed his hand."¹⁷³

Basola is reported to have died a short time after his arrival in Tzefat. His nephew returned to Italy in May of the following year.

R. Moshe Basola played a role in many of the disputes which involved the great Jewish leaders of his time. Some of his responsa, *drashot*, and letters are extant, although some still remain in manuscript. Yet it is not his rabbinical writings that have been widely read. Rather his account of his travels to the Holy Land, which was not even attributed to him until 400 years after its composition, has touched the greatest number of readers. It has provided generations of Jews with the opportunity to learn about the Holy Land, to experience a vicarious pilgrimage, to gain information about the Land of Israel in the 16th century, and most recently to perhaps experience the exotic dislocation of viewing a place which the reader knows through the eyes of a Renaissance rabbi. With his account, Basola has provided us with not so much a window through which to view the Land of Israel, but a mirror which reflects its Jewish reader and his relationship to the Land.

¹⁷²Cordovero would have been about 38 years old at the time. See David, pg 202.

¹⁷³Lamden, pg. 76.

APPENDIX

A Translation of מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה (English title:
A Pilgrimage to Palestine by Rabbi Moshe Basola of Ancona)

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers of Ben-Zevi's edition.
Special thanks to Dr. Adam Kamesar and Dr. Maria Romagnoli Brackett for their
help in translating the Italian.

(27) I found among the judgements of Zacuto the sequence of the end.
In the year 5284, in that same year, Israel will say "Behold, this is our God. We
hope in Him and He shall deliver us," and then there shall be an astral
conjunction as there has never been and it indicates very great troubles to the
west and that the sea shall enter and flood some of the lands of the Christian
world. Happy is the one who waits and shall reach this year in repentance and
with good deeds. Then in that year redemption and salvation shall come to
Israel, even though there will still be wars and confusion in the world until the
year 5289. Then there shall be a conjunction of Aquarius and Pisces like that in
the days when Israel entered the Land in the days of Joshua and in the days of
Ezra. Then there shall be two eclipses and Mars will be with Saturn and Jupiter
in that same conjunction, which indicates great wars like that of Gog and Magog
and the Messiah son of Joseph will be murdered, but because Venus is close to
them salvation for Israel shall sprout on that day and the Messiah son of David

shall come.

(28) In the name of the Lord God of Israel I entered a galley on Tuesday the 17th of Elul 5281. *Blessed are you when you go out (Deut 28:6)*. May the Lord because of His mercy bring me to my destination in peace and return me to my home in peace and fulfill concerning me the verse *The Lord will guard you going out and your coming in (Ps 121:8)*. The ship was 70 cubits long and approximately 18 cubits wide. I saw them load most of the goods while I was in the ייב"ה.¹⁷⁴ There were wool clothes in every color and a great deal of קרישיאי.¹⁷⁵ However, there were only a few black garments because in Syria they do not wear black, except for the mourner. Also, yellow is not the custom. But there was black velvet and smooth silk from Lyon. Much coral, haberdashery, much paper, tin, lead, copper, mercury, wooden implements, decorated and marked boxes, porcelain utensils (and) tin tableware.

On Friday, on Shabbat, in the 15th hour we left Venice and went all day and all night with the usual wind until the twelfth hour of Shabbat. Then the strong wind came against us and there was a storm on the sea and we stood awake until the 21st hour of the day and then the wind and the sea calmed and grew quiet and we were drawn near to the shore of (the) land. All night we traveled with the wind that came from the land until the sun came out Sunday the 22nd. On it

¹⁷⁴ Meaning is uncertain.

¹⁷⁵ Meaning is uncertain.

(that day) we reached Pula in safely.

Pula is an ugly, long and narrow city with few people relative to its size.

(29) There are pretty houses in it and outside the city there is a spring with good water and close to the spring there is a large round building built with very wonderful arched windows. It is called "l'arena." They say that it was Orlando's castle. A half a mile from the other side of the city is a another building. They say that it was the house of his beloved and that there was a cave from one (building) to the other and the two of them were made by demons, and that there are around these about 300 chest-type vaults and that there are still bones in a few of them. The gentiles are of good temperament and do not despise/humiliate the Jews, even if they (the Jews) do go about in the color green. The food is plentiful and cheap and the bread is black but its taste is not bad. And thus it is in Corfu and Zante. The coin is spent there as in Venice.

Traveling with the captain's ship from Pula was a long and wide ship just like the other. It is called the conserva (an accompanying protection ship). On the captain's ship the appointed leader of both ships is in charge; at his command they stop and go. The captain's ship preceded the conserva to Pula by eight to ten days after which they traveled together always without parting.

We left Pula on Tuesday the 24th in the 15th hour with a good, medium wind, with God's help, and on Wednesday it was a pleasant day (weatherwise). Also

5
on Thursday and the majority of our travel was at night with a wind which was drawn from the land.

On Thursday, at about dawn, we reached opposite Lissa and 100 miles from Pula. There I saw two mountains called "scogli" in the midst of the sea and "Sclavoni"¹⁷⁶ live there and two of them came from the second mountain, called "St. Andreas," in a dinghy to request small change in God's name. Friday and Saturday the wind was good and on Sunday morning we reached Sesano 100 miles from Corfu and close to nightfall we arrived 18 miles from Corfu. Then the sea became as narrow as a river with mountains on either side. There is a place that is not wider than a mile and with the help of all we were able to arrive in Corfu in peace. Monday night was the eve of Rosh Hashana 5282 and Corfu was 700 miles from Venice.

Corfu has a fortress very great in length and width and there all the stores have all kinds of things and in the citadel most of them are Jews. Their houses are ugly and narrow and recently many of the Jews' houses were torn down in order to make a double wall and in the meantime, because of our many sins, a large beautiful synagogue was destroyed. Because of their trouble in the place many (31) Jews have left to live in the fortress. All the community is approximately 200 households and they have three synagogues, one in the fortress and two inside. Most of them are Greek and a few of them are Sicilian. There are two very strong

¹⁷⁶Ben-Zevi notes that this is the name of a people, possibly slaves.

fortresses on a reef of two rocks.

There the Turkish "aspero" is used.¹⁷⁷ Twenty-three of them are equal to a Venetian ducat. And the marcelo is equal to 100 tornese, that is, four aspero and four tornese, because each aspero is worth 24 tornese. These are the Venetian bogattino, and they also use a new Venetian coin but there is a difference of ten tornese to the marcelo. On the day of the Fast of Gedaliah we traveled from there and we went slowly without wind and thus it was all Thursday, but at the beginning of Friday evening a good, strong wind came and we traveled all night and with the morning light we reached the large mountains called Cefalonia on the left, two miles from Zante and with God's help we arrived at Zante in the 24th hour on Friday the fifth safely.

(32) Zante is 200 miles from Corfu and it is a narrow fortress almost a mile long. The houses are humble and ramshackle and there are about 30 Jewish households and one synagogue. There everything is cheap, especially the plentiful fowl and ducks. Coins are used there just as in Corfu. Above, on the top of the mountain is a large, very strong town and the dwelling of the governor is there. Also above there are pretty gardens with all kinds of vegetables. In the evening at the end of Shabbat we traveled from Zante and on Sunday, the seventh, we passed opposite Modon, 100 miles from Zante. They say that there it is half the journey from Venice to Beirut. On Monday, the

¹⁷⁷ A small Turkish coin.

eighth, the weather was fair. We traveled a little but on Tuesday evening there was rain and a bad wind from midnight on. On Tuesday morning, Erev Yom Kippur, we were opposite a mountainous island called Cerigo. In the midst of the sea there (there are) large circular "scogli." This is 200 miles from Zante. Then a strong north wind came out and forced us to go on high seas and to circle around the island Candia. All Yom Kippur and that night there was a strong wind and also a stormy wind on the sea, but we weren't afraid because the ship is sure in a storm. On Friday, the 12th, we were at the top of the (33) second of the islands from Canadia called Canea. It is 550 miles from there to the top of the island of Cyprus which is called Albaf (Baffo Cipro - Paphos) and this the Bay of Estelia. We went on it all Saturday and on Sunday land was not seen, but the wind was strong and on Monday morning, the first day of Sukkot, we were opposite Albaf, 100 miles from Famagusta. On Wednesday, the 17th we reached Famagusta at dawn safely, praise to God, may He be blessed. They say that from Zante to Famagusta is 1000 miles in a straight path for those entering the canal of Rhodes, but the roundabout way, which we went, was an additional 300 miles.

Famagusta is a big city like Fano and it has fortified walls and two large, strong, beautiful gates, and pretty houses within it and the square of the city in front of the court of the ruler is pleasant, and the castle is beautiful in accord with the place. The meat, lambs and castrated billy goats are very cheap and very nice. Also eggs and fowl are good and plentiful and there are pomegranates and grapes and types of vegetables. However, the bread was expensive then

5

because of the locusts which spread there that year, but when I returned both the bread and grain was very cheap and many of the people of the ship bought wheat there to bring to Venice. There, also in Corfu and Zante, a Jew won't touch the bread or any foodstuff until he buys it because the Greeks won't eat or drink (that which has been touched by) the Jew. The Jews there are few and evil, about 12 households. They are hateful and quarrelsome and (34) most of them drink wine made by Christians. They are Sicilian and there is a nice, well-ordered synagogue with a Sukkah in front of it. There I ate and also slept on the ground all the intermediate days of Sukkot and I shall bless Adonai for He is good.. Most of the gold is used in the form of many different coins, and written on each one is how many "bisante" it is worth. By one bisanto is meant 12 marci "sexto Ferrareso" (a Ferraran coin). The Venetian ducat is only equal to 12 marcelo in exchange (currency); however, for goods, it is worth 13. The Gazi marchelo is used like the others, and a new Venetian coin is worth a marcelo. They also use the Quattrine called "Croce," four of them equal to one Marchetto, and 40 marchelo. The majority of the wells are not good for drinking but there are many carriers of good water for half a marchetto per soma (a donkey load). There is a place there to which many ships carried the dust of the Land of Israel and the rulers were buried there in earlier days and it is called Campo Santo. This is a sign that all acknowledge the holiness of God, may He be blessed.

(35) We traveled from there on Sunday night, the night of Hoshana, but because there was word that Turkish patrol ships were at sea, they took 200 mercenaries

on board and also two light ships accompanied us and, praised to God, may He be blessed, we went without injury and we arrived in Tripoli in safely on Monday, Shmeini Atzeret, which was September 23, 5282 (1521). On August 23 we left Venice. This is a complete month of days moving and staying in the places mentioned.

Tripoli is praiseworthy with vines, figs, and pomegranate. There are those who say that it dates back to the Land of Israel or that it is from China, but the truth is not thus. The houses are pretty inside and there are springs in all the marketplaces and in most of the houses, and it is lovely with gardens and orchards, lemons, and peaches, a half a mile from the shore of the sea. The air is not good for one who is not accustomed to it. Also the water is not so healthy. The "plazzi" are covered with stores on both sides for everything, and פרוטרוי¹⁷⁸ are pretty, fixed up beautifully like those of Venice. Generally, it is full of every good (thing) and the least expensive in Syria. There begins the currency (36) that goes out in all Israel (Eretz Hatzvi). There used to be Meidini, 65 of which equalled one Venetian ducat, or 150 dirhams. Now there is a new coinage, according to which each Meidino, called a "qat'a" in Arabic, equals five dirhams, and 30 qat'a are equal to one Venetian ducat. Ten qat'a are worth 50 dirhams, which is a state-issued ducat, as each Venetian ducat is worth three issued in Damascus. Only four coins are usable in all these countries, namely, the copper prutah called "plus," and the qat'a, which is equal to 20 pluses, i.e.,

¹⁷⁸Meaning is uncertain.

5

five dirhams, and the royal ducat, which is worth 28 qat'as or 140 dirhams, and the Venetian (coin) called "Kovrosi," worth 30 qat'as or 150 dirhams. The Jews in Tripoli are about 100 households, Sicilian, Sephardim, and Arabicized. Most of them are familiar with a foreign language and have stores for every foodstuff and merchandise. Every adult male pays approximately a gold ducat. It is the poll tax. There is no other tax or yoke there except that every store pays seven dirhams per month to the street guards and to the guards who light the lights in the streets and provide excellent protection. The law is thus in all the Land of Israel. (37) White wax is made there, and a rotolo is six Venetian pounds, which is worth 60 dirhams. Everything is sold by weight, even the fruit, and it is thus in all the Land of Israel. The fowl are a little expensive and the geese are hard to find. The meat of castrated goats is very good, eleven dirhams for a rotolo and it is almost 10 marchelo and it is like this in all the Land of Israel. They have only one permanent synagogue. All the Jews from the ship paid four dirhams in Tripoli, whether a man or a woman, even the children; for every chest or bundle, whether or not they were packed, one paid 10 dirhams. As for the customs tax, it depends on the value (of each cargo), approximately a "Beirut." Therefore the merchants don't bring their goods ashore, but they do business on the ship. This is also because the layover is short -- only four or five days.

I went out from Tripoli on Monday, 9 Tishri, in the afternoon in a company walking to Beirut. We stayed the night in a place called "Pitron Castle." It is big and one-third of the way. We laid there in an exposed place for that is the

5

custom. On Tuesday, Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan, we went out successfully and we arrived near a river called "Avraham." They say that it is from the days of Abraham Our Father, peace be upon him, and its waters are cold and very sweet. (38) Across it there is an exceedingly beautiful marble bridge like the one in Rimini. We stayed there, while it was still daylight, in the valley and the Lord caused a torrential rain that night and we were lying uncovered on the ground without a tent. It is one-third of the way and with the morning light we traveled from there. Five miles from Beirut there is a high, curved bridge. They call it the river "Elchelv." There used to be a stone dog on a wheel made with magic there, for when there were robbers on the sea or in that city it would cry out loudly. But the robbers threw it from there and it is still below the river. There all the Jews pay a tax of 10 dirhams. That tax is called "kofer" and there are many of these in all of the Land of Israel on the roads. I reached Beirut on Wednesday evening safely. Every adult male Jew that disembarks from a ship in Beirut pays 70 dirhams, which is like half a Venetian ducat, but the women and the children don't pay anything. Likewise those who come from Tripoli by a land route don't pay anything. In Beirut one does not pay a toll on chests or movable property if they are not merchandise and books do not have a toll at all.

(39) The merchants pay a tax of 10%, and the clothes and hats and everything that is equal to a ducat or more they pay 6%. The goods that they buy to take to Venice are much silk, it is their principal merchandise, and also many spices,

cyclamen,¹⁷⁹ and spun cotton. Cotton which is not spun the ships will take, but the galleys won't take anywhere. They also take oranges, camelot,¹⁸⁰ cotton cloth called "Botani," wax, musk, raisins and precious stones.

Beirut is a large town near the sea but there isn't much commerce there except at the time of the ship. Then the cost of living is high, but the place is pleasant, also its surroundings are pretty with trees, lemons, quinces, and many olives. Right next to it on the way to Sidon, is a plain filed with pine trees, they are "Pinii." Three miles walk there is a spring of very good water and wells. The Jews are Sicilian there, about 12 households, and there is a single important man who represents them before the ruler. His name is Abraham Castro. He stands in the toll gate in charge of all matters of the toll and it is done according to his will.

(40) From there I went out on Friday, the 10th of Marcheshvan, and I arrived in Sidon near nightfall. It is a day's walk on the plain along the shore of the sea. Most of the way one pays three kofer (travel taxes), each one 10 dirhams because it is 30 dirhams from Beirut to Sidon. Sidon was once great but now it is small, part of it is sunk in the sea and part of it is a ruin. There are about 500 households and about 20 are Jewish, with most of them Arabicized Jews. But

¹⁷⁹ I have translated סקלמוניא"ה as "cyclamen" because of the similar pronunciation in Italian ("ciclaminio"). Another possibility, suggested to me by Dr. Tamar Frank, is that the word refers to scammony, a medicinal plant used as a purgative. See S.D. Goitein, Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 55, note 11.

¹⁸⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this is a patterned silk or a cloth made of different kinds of threads.

they are good and welcoming to visitors, something that isn't always so in the places I passed through. There is a small, pretty, synagogue. I rested there on Shabbat and *I (shall) thank the Lord for He is good (paraphrase of Ps. 54:8)*. There the market day is Thursday.

A quarter mile from the city I saw the grave of Zebulun. In the beginning it was between two large columns with a carob tree but the lord of the Ishmaelites built a building with a dome at the tomb there is a marker covered with a black cloth and lamps before it in honor. The two columns are still there, one inside and seen through the window and one outside the house. Next to that same monument there is an old big building, the arches. They say that it was Solomon's school. In front of it is a well with good water. One draws from it with a wheel full of buckets. After Shabbat ended I went out from there to go to Tzefat, eight miles from Sidon. There is the Tzarfat of Elijah,¹⁸¹ may his memory be a blessing, on the top of the mountain, and thus it is called still. Next to the sea there was a city but because of the pirates they went up to the mountain to dwell there. On Sunday we passed (before) Tyre although (41) it is not the direct route to Tzefat (because) the camel wrangler wanted to go by that route because it is entirely a plain and the route from there to his house.

Most of Tyre is submerged in the sea. They say that it was a very great city and all the houses and markets were built on the water as in the case of Venice, and

¹⁸¹See I Kings 17:9. According to Rashi "Tzarfat" is the name of a city.

the gentiles call it "Old Venice." Another time I was there and I circled around it because it is large and there are big, ancient buildings in it and also churches built in the days of the Romans built as are the monasteries of Italy.

A mile from there is a village called Ma'aliya and there are pipes there that would draw water from there to Tyre underneath the ground. There I paid 10 dirhams as a kofer. Monday night, we stayed on the top of a high mountain next to a certain village and at the morning watch we walked and arrived at a village called Malyah at meal time. The camel wrangler wanted to stay there because his house was there.

Tuesday, before dawn we traveled to Tzefat and when the sun rose I was on the camel on top of the load saying *zemirot* (psalms) and preparing to lay tefillin. We passed through a big valley and there was a large nut tree, and three camels were tied one after the other and I was on the middle one. A branch of that same tree hit my face causing me to fall backwards to the ground and my head hit on the ground hard, followed by my spine, so that I was stupefied from a blow to the brain and all my bones separated from the blow to the spine. It was such a hard fall that my breastbone was also uncovered and I was as if dead for half an hour. I began the "Vidui"/confession several times but I wasn't able to say it and with great effort I said the "modeh ani/I thank" prayer. I wrote this to remember the mercy of the Omnipresent One, blessed be the Lord, for the several miracles that were done for me. First, that I didn't die from that hard

blow when I fell backward. Second, that the camel behind me didn't trample me with its feet. Third, that the Ishmaelites had the ability to kill me but took my money saying "Because of the blow (he is) dead because the soul doesn't remain in him." And the two evil Jews who were with me went with them more than two miles ahead me, and I remained alone with two Ishmaelites, and who would tell them what to do? But they, with the Lord's compassion for me, dealt well with me and bandaged my ribs and put me on a camel and brought me to Tzefat, a journey of 12 miles. The whole time I was groaning from the pain of my breast bone and (I) covered it with my belt because the breastbone was broken and there was no doctor for my injury. I was traveling and crying and praying and thanking. When I arrived at the city no one took pity on me. Even though I cried out and implored (43) no one paid attention and I was wandering around until the Lord brought me to a certain widow from Ferrara and she made a bandage and treated me. Blessed is the Lord whose mercy has not abandoned me and Who redeemed my soul from descending into the grave.

Tzefat is in the upper Galilee, in the land of Naftali. The town is strong on the top of a mountain and surrounding the mountain of the town are four mountains, two of them entirely Ishmaelite, and two of them all the slopes are the houses of Jews. There are more than 300 households and three synagogues; one of the Sephardim, and one of the Moriscos (Moroccan Jews),¹⁸² and one of the Westerners which they call the Keneset of Elijah, may his memory be a blessing,

¹⁸²Kurt Wilhelm, Roads to Zion, (NY: Schocken Books), 29.

because it is ancient and they have a tradition that Elijah used to pray in it. The city is full of good (things) and excellent food like abundant grain, new wine and pure oil and it is inexpensive to buy everything in season. If the oil and produce are were not so abundant that they can export it from there to Damascus and other places it wouldn't be worth anything. All types of good fruit are found there and that which is not there is brought from Damascus. The land is encouraging to commerce, whether in stores of wool clothing or haberdashery, or perfumery. There are many Jewish stores of these three types. And they bring the haberdashery and the perfumes from Damascus and sell them in the city. When a ship arrives they go to Beirut to buy clothes and other things. There are also many Jews who travel among the villages and peddlers selling haberdashery, so that their houses are filled with every good thing. In addition to this there is profit in buying spun cotton (44) and wax and cyclamen when they are cheap and selling them at the appropriate time. Also there are Jews who sell fruit, vegetables, oil and cheese and other things in the market. And for one who wants to do business in grain, new wine, and pure oil, everything is according to the season. In general, the land is much more commercial than Italy because the Ishmaelites would rather buy from the Jews than from others. One who does not have funds to invest in commerce needs to have a trade, and there are four good trades in all the Land of Israel: the weavers, the goldsmiths, the cobblers and the tanners. Also builders. One who has the strength to work for hire in one of these trades is paid well. The tailor also earns his keep. However, people are not found hiring themselves out as a teacher or to serve in a house or

a store, and casting themselves on public welfare is impossible because there is so much poverty. Because of this, no one without a trade or a fund should set out from Italy, lest he fall into regret and turn back. The discerning will understand.

Now I shall write all the places of the righteous ones and the prophets' monuments (where) I prostrated myself and prayed on their graves.

Blessed is the Lord that I merited this.

So may He cause me

to see

the building of "Ariel"¹⁸³ and redemption

come to Zion. Amen. May God do thus.

(45) On Tuesday, the 21 of Marcheshvan, 5282, I entered the building built on the grave of Hosea ben Beeri, and it is at the far end of the Jewish graves from Tzefat. The learned Sadqa the Karaite who was in Damascus built a pleasant, decorated structure on it and a lamp burns there continually from the donations of those who come to prostrate themselves. Across from it is another sealed cave. It is said that the grave of Beeri's father was there. I was in Ein Zeitoon, a village a mile from Tzefat, and there are about forty Jewish households there, all of them Moroccan. In the synagogue there are 26 Torah scrolls. At a distance of a bow's range from the village there is the monument of R. Judah bar Ilai and R. Yose,

¹⁸³ A name for either the Temple's altar or the city of Jerusalem.

his son. On the grave there is an almond tree, withered these three years. And there is a big field of olive trees dedicated to the Pious One, may his memory be a blessing. They say that a certain Ishmaelite woman climbed on the tree over the grave to pick almonds. The other women said that she should ask permission from the Pious One, but she spoke insultingly and fell from the tree. All her limbs were broken until she dedicated the gold bracelets that were on her arms to the Righteous One, which turned into olive trees. Afterward, the others made donations until now there are 400 olive trees. This took place about 60 years ago.

Thursday, the 23th, I rode to Meron, a village a half a day from Tzefat. Half of the way there there is a village called Qayyumiya. Near it along the way is the grave of the son of R. Yose of Yodkart whose father punished him because he brought the figs (46) when it was not their time as is mentioned in the chapter "Order of these fasts" (Taanit 24a) The Ishmaelites call him "Al-ma'tush."

Meron is a fertile and good place with good water springs, but there are no Jews living there. There I saw the cave of R. Simeon bar Yohai and his son, may peace be upon them. It is sealed. There is no place to enter it. Above on the cave are two beautiful drawings one facing the other just before the entrance, of R. Simeon bar Yohai . After that I walked on the slope of the mountain to the side of Meron. There is the cave of Hillel the Elder and his students. It is a large, beautiful cave made with vaults on the sides. In each vault there are three stone coffins with high covers and there are 18 coffins in the cave. That of Hillel is opposite the opening. Also outside the opening when you enter into the

mountain there are two vaults with one coffin on the right and one on the left. The inside of the cave is (so) wide that more than 300 people can stand in it. The cover of Hillel's grave (47) is tilted a little and so are a few of the others and a person (can) put his hand in it and there is sweet water in it. I drank from it and it is a marvel. The water comes there from nowhere and further, because it's collected there, how does it (remain) fresh for drinking? And greater than this, everyone testifies and swears that when a large congregation enters there and prays, immediately the water increases and pours to the ground, but when I was there it was not thus. Also, they say that another miracle was done in it, when a large Jewish caravan comes and everyone lights lamps in the cave and around it, if a woman who is impure from menstruation enters it, immediately all of the lights are extinguished. They swear and testify that it is the truth. But I did not see it. After this, I walked to the mountain that is opposite this. Shammai and his wife are there. On the top of the mountain is a building of very large stones, Each wall (is made) from one stone. The stone that is on them for a roof is 7 cubits long and 4 cubits wide and half a cubit thick. One can't image how that stone was put (there) with human hands. In this building are four hollowed stone coffins seen through a window which was there. Below the building is a nice cave with 11 crypts around (it) in which the students were. Above it in the village is the synagogue made by R. Simeon bar Yohai. The entire facade still stands. Then I returned that day to Ein Zeitoon and at dawn (48) I went to Tzefat because Friday was market day there. Sunday, the 26th, I rode with a certain Jew to make a circuit to see all the Upper Galilee and the righteous ones

who are (buried) in it. We came to Amuka, a place described by its name ("valley"). We ascended a very tall mountain and after that descended into a valley and there is a village of about 60 households but there are no Jews there. Adjacent to the village is (the tomb of) Yohanan ben Uziel. There is a marker of stone built upon it. After that there is a large border of stones around it and a terebinth which is unique in its thickness and width of branches and its beauty. From there we went to Navratin. There R. Jacob of Navuri and R. Eleazer of Modiim are next to each other. We turned towards Dalta where R. Ishmael son of R. Yose is in the midst of a garden and above on the top of a mountain is R. Yose his father. There is no building upon them, only a pile of stone. From there we went to Alma. It is a large village in a fertile plain full of every good thing and the Jewish community is about 15 households and a synagogue. There I prayed at a grave and afterwards I went to all the graves of the righteous that were there. Above on the mountain in the middle of the field is R. Judah ben Tema, a monument built and sealed, and above him to the side of the mountain is a big cave with a cave inside and his students were buried there. (49) On another side of the cemetery is R. Eleazar ben Azariah and there is a tree on his grave of the type called "oak" and they make oil from it. A little ways from there to the side of the road is R. Eleazar ben Hycanus, a nice monument on his grave, which is in a vineyard. Close to him on the road is R. Eleazar ben Arakh, and his tomb is of marble with a large cover of stone on it. They say clearly that about 40 years ago the Muslims took this cover to make millstones and many people carried it to a far place, but in the morning they found it on the grave. Everyone

Everyone testified to this. Next to him is R. Yose the Priest and a border of stones is around (his grave). About a mile from there on the side of the second mountain is the cave of the Babylonians. There are R. Hamnuna and Rabbah bar Huna that are mentioned in Moed Katan (25a). It is small and lovely and there are eight crypts in it. We walked to a place called Ras El Chamar and on the top of a tall mountain is R. Zimra with a monument built on him, and from this place a person can look out on all the Galilee because of its great height. From there I walked to Gush Chalav, it is called Elyoosh. There on the road opposite the village are Shemaiah and Avtalion, two monuments next to each other. Also there are the sons of Sennecheriv, one above the village and one on the road a little ways from Shemaiah and Avtalion. After that we went to the village of Baram. It is a large village. Obadiah the Prophet is there, a large border for a monument and below it the cave. Adjacent to this is a ruined building. Nothing remains except two gates and on the lintel of the small gate is engraved in square writing "May the Lord grant peace in this place (50) and in all the places of Israel." And they said to me that on another stone that fell was written "Do not be surprised by the snow that comes in Nissan. We have seen it in Sivan." And they say this was the school of Obadiah. Above in the village was the synagogue that R. Simeon bar Yohai made. Its wall still stands before us with the gates. He built 24 synagogues in the Galilee. A little bit further from this are Esther the Queen, a pile of stone and an oak tree for a monument and near her there is another tree with a stone heap. It is the grave of R. Phineas ben Yair. I was in Achbara. R. Yannai and his two sons R. Dostai and R. Nehorai are there.

They are in a cave in an orchard and in front of the cave is a spring with sweet water. But the cave collapsed and no one is able to enter it. The orchard is very pleasant, all of it (it is full of) peaches and lemons and it is mentioned in Moed Katan. Above in the village is a ruined synagogue. There are still two walls three cubits high and made of large stones. R. Simeon bar Yohai made it.

On Tuesday, the 3rd of Kislev, I put my feet to the road to walk to Jerusalem, the Holy City, may it be rebuilt and reestablished speedily and in our day, amen. I was in a village called "Yakook" and adjacent to it I saw the tomb of Habakkuk, may peace be upon him, a nice monument and a structure built on his marker. Behind it is the village of "Chatiya" and Jethro is buried there and the Ishmaelites built a mosque¹⁸⁴ over him. This is half of the way from Tzefat to Kefar Kani and I arrived at Kefar Kani in the evening safely, with the company of many Jews from Tzefat, who came for the market day, which is Wednesday. It is a good place, (51) everything is available there inexpensively and there is great profit for the Jews. There is a community of about 40 households. Thursday, in the morning I went to the grave of Jonah ben Amittai the prophet, a mile from Kefar Kani on the top of a tall mountain in another village. There is a large, distinguished building built on his marker. It is under the control of the Ishmaelites (so) one needs to pay four or five dirhams to the guard, also to put oil in the lamp. I entered it to pray. After that, down the mountain on the other side (there is) a nice little cave. R. Simeon ben Gamaliel is buried there. That

¹⁸⁴Basola uses the derogatory word מִסְגָּד rather than the more usual מִסְבָּד.

day, in the evening, I rode to Shechem and I lodged that night in a village called "Nazareth", a parasang (4 miles) from Kefar Kuni, the place of Jesus the Nazarene. They say that there there is a bathhouse of hot waters that his mother immersed in. We slept on the land under a large dome. Three hours before the day break, we traveled from there and we went all day and passed through a great valley like the Campagna Verona¹⁸⁵ and I paid the village tax in two places, 36 dirhams per person, and at sunset we lodged in a valley until after midnight and we went on at dawn and arrived in Shechem safely. Friday is market day. There (52) I paid a village tax of 20 dirhams.

Shechem is a large city, but full of ruins because of its great age, but it is very populous and the land is favored with many springs and fruit and everything is inexpensive. The community there is about 12 Moroccan households. I was there all Friday and Shabbat. On Shabbat I walked to the monument of Joseph the Tzadik, almost a mile from the city, below Mount Gerizim and Mount Ibal on the plain. It is placed between two large, tall columns, an cubit and a half from the ground (in height) and in front of it is a pretty stone floor because the Samaritans built a structure upon it a few times but it fell and the floor remained. I saw Mount Gerizim and Mount Ibal close to the city. Mount Gerizim is in the south and Mount Ibal is in the north and the plain is between them. There are many trees and springs on Mount Gerizim. But Mount Ibal is desolate of anything. On the lower part of Mount Gerizim there are Samaritan

¹⁸⁵Basola is referring to the Jezreel Valley.

5

graves and they perform their worship and sacrifice the Pascal offering. (53)

They have there the image of a dove as is mentioned in the first chapter of Hulin (6a). Sunday I traveled from Shechem and I lodged under a dome in a village whose name is Sinzel (Sinjel). Enroute I paid a village tax of 10 dirhams. On Monday, 11 Kislev, 5282, at mincha time, I arrived in Jerusalem, the Holy City. There I tore (my clothing) and also wept over the city, ruined and desolate of all her children. In the city there is a city tax of 2 dirhams. On Sunday, I paid a certain Jew 17 dirhams to guide me to a few places.

Jerusalem is on a single mountain across from the Mount of Olives and there is a deep, narrow valley between them. It is the Valley of Jehosophat. I went down into it and at one entrance there is a large hole, where there appears to be some kind of a cave. They say that there the mouth of Gehenna was opened for the future to come on the day that Gog comes. (54) Below this are the Israelite graves on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, full (the slopes are full with Israelite graves) and a few are on the incline of the mountain of Jerusalem. A half a mile below them are the waters of Shiloach and there are many beautiful gardens on the plain there, watered by those waters, and it comes out from the Mount of Jerusalem and it is not known where they come from. They say that it came to the Temple. On the summit it appears that there is a building that was once beautiful with arches. They say that there King Solomon, may peace be upon him, would mint coins. At the bottom of the Mount of Olives I saw the cave of

Zechariah the prophet. (It is) very nice. All of it is hewed by one stone cutter from the surrounding mountain and made with 12 columns and its top is pointed, all of it one piece. Next to it is a pit. They call it the Pit of Bigtan. They say that the young women of Israel flung themselves there at the time of the Destruction. There are two nice caves there, one encircled with crypts and one with benches. And below them is a wide tower with a pointed top. It is the Yad Absalom which is mentioned in Samuel.¹⁸⁶ Above this, close to the top of the mountain is the cave of the prophet Haggai. There are large caves there, in length and in circumference. Above the caves, the cave of the prophet Haggai, may peace be upon him, and below his students and others besides them. On the summit of the Mount of Olives is a large building, and there inside the beautiful tower is the prophetess Huldah in a tomb of marble. Also there one needs to pay the Muslim guard four dirhams to enter and to pay (for) oil to light because there are lights there always.

When one stands on the summit of the Mount of Olives and looks toward Jerusalem, he sees all of the Sanctuary grounds; the courtyard and the gardens, and from the same side, i.e., in the east, the Sanctuary grounds have two sealed iron gates their ends sunk in the ground. They are called the Mercy Gates and they say that the grooms would enter through one of the them and the mourners through another. Close to the Sanctuary on the southern side is a building called Solomon's Midrash. Outside of Jerusalem, on the southern side, is Mount Zion.

¹⁸⁶II Samuel 18:18.

The Nagid¹⁸⁷ told me that there is also in Jerusalem a place of the Jews, it is from Mount Zion up to adjacent to the Sanctuary and opinion was decided thus and this is the true interpretation of the verse "Mount Zion, summit of Tzafon" (Ps 48:3). On Mount Zion there is a place for priests which looks like an Italian convent. And connected to it is a closed house with an iron door. They say that David and Solomon, may peace be upon them, are buried there. And close to there is another sealed house with an iron door. Also they say that all the kings of the house of David are there and the Muslims do not permit any one to enter these two places. On the same side there is a village built and fortified and a wide low tower called Migdal David. The sepulcher of Jesus is in Jerusalem to the west of two churches opposite each other and a market passes between them and a plaza in front of one of the churches. On the first day of Chanukah I rode to Rama six miles from Jerusalem. I paid the village tax of six dirhams. There is a large castle built on steps on the tomb of the prophet Samuel, may peace be upon him. (56) They say that it is a Roman building and at the end of the house there is a dwelling for the Jews that pray in it and light lamps to honor the prophet, may peace be upon him, because they have a tradition that behind the wall that they pray toward there is a cave and the grave of the prophet. The caretaker, who holds the key goes there every Monday and Thursday to light lamps and everyone who goes there gives him four or five dirhams. And this is the building on the top of the mountain; as its name indicates, it is very high and opposite it a mile away is the top of another mountain almost as high as it and

¹⁸⁷ R. Isaac Ha-Kohen Sholal.

5
this is what is meant by "From the heights ones sees"¹⁸⁸ because from there one sees for a long way and this is encircled by Mount Efraim. On the slope of the mountain there is a mikva carved into the mountain about 3 x 3 cubits, paved with stones, and spring waters enter it through an opening. They say that Hannah, may peace be upon her, immersed there. And they say that she is buried with her son and her husband Elkanah as well. Upon my return I saw the cave of the Sanhedrin two miles from Jerusalem. It is a cave with a large opening and inside it there are crypts on three sides and in the middle there is a small opening and there is a single cave. Four are found here in addition to the one that is below and all of them are hewn in one mountain. On Sunday, Rosh Chodesh Tevet, 5282, I left to go to Hebron and on the road five miles from Jerusalem is the tomb of Rachel, our mother, may peace be upon her, and the marker on the gravestone has been rebuilt and there is a domed structure over the marker with four columns and from there to Bethlehem is a mile and this some distance. In Bethlehem (57) I saw a convent for priests, unlike any in Italy, with a shiny marble floor and 12 tall and thick columns in facing rows. They have rooms and upper stories and gardens inside it. In Bethlehem there are many gentiles called "cristiani della cintura." They constitute more than half the city. They wear a blue turban wrapped around their heads and there are many of them in Jerusalem. They are a majority in Nazareth, and close to Tzefat is a village called Yaron, where they are half the population, and in Damascus very many of them are found, and also in Beirut. They are gentiles who have been

¹⁸⁸This phrase is a quote from I Samuel 1:1.

settled there from ancient days, and their religion differs slightly from that of the gentiles in Italy. Bethlehem is not encompassed by a wall. There is an old wall only on one side.

Three miles from there I saw three very deep pools, each one as long and wide as a road in Fano. They say that they are Solomon's as is mentioned in Ecclesiastes. Also there is a large spring there with a building in front of it to water the cattle as for example there is close to Pesaro. At one in the night I arrived in Hebron.

(58) From Jerusalem to Hebron is 22 miles or more. In the morning after I prayed in the synagogue -- they have in the courtyard, in which eight or nine householders dwell, and they have a synagogue there -- I went to pray at the Patriarch's Tomb, where the Muslims have a large castle on the Cave of Machpelah with two gates opening out in four directions. And close to the gate adjoining the nobleman's house is a hole where I prayed. The Jews say that it reaches to the middle of the cave. Opposite it is the building in which they make the bread that they give for the sin offering of the Muslims every day, eight thousand loaves a day. Close to by I saw a very large mikva with four large square columns and it is deep and wonderful with a stone ladder that goes down into it. They say that it was the bathhouse of our mother Sarah, may peace be upon her.

Opposite Hebron, on the summit of a the mountain, is the tomb of Jesse, the

5

father of David, with a pleasant building. It has a small window that goes below into the cave. They say that once they threw a cat into it and it came out of the hole that is in the Cave of Machpelah and there is half a mile between them. The Tomb of Avner is in the middle of Hebron. They Muslims built a mosque on it. I returned to Jerusalem on Tuesday, the third.

I was near Jerusalem in the cave of Simeon the Righteous. I circled Jerusalem, the Holy City, and the Sanctuary, may it be rebuilt and established speedily and in our days. But even though Jerusalem is a ruin and desolate, a tiny bit of its perfect beauty is (59) still recognizable in the pleasant houses and markets. It has four covered markets: one for the Ishmaelites, sellers of wool and linen garments, and one for the Jews, most of them textile and spice merchants, and one for vegetables, and one for various foods and all fruits. And there is another nice market all of which is cotton stores and at the entrance to this market is a gate to the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary has 12 gates on the west and north sides, but there is no gate on the east side which is outside of Jerusalem opposite the Mount of Olives, only the Mercy Gates, which I mentioned, which are locked and no one opens them. On the south side there is a house attached to what they say was the School of Solomon. At one gate on the north side I saw a large ditch, deep like a pool. They call it Birk-al-dam. There are those who say that the blood of the sacrifices was poured into it, because it is in the wall of the Sanctuary. But there are those

who say that it is called that because it was filled with the blood of those slain by Nebuzaradon following the killing of Zechariah as is mentioned in Perek Hanezikin (Gittin 57b). The western wall that remains is not all of the western span, only one part, a length of 40 or 50 cubits. On the lower half of the wall, the stones date to Solomon, as can be seen by their size and age, but the upper half is new.

(60) In Jerusalem, the holy city, I rented a room in a large house called the House of Pilato and I dwelt in a high upper story, and from there I could see all the Sanctuary up to the middle of the courtyard. There is no house in Jerusalem (from which) one can see so much as this. God has brought it to my hand. (From) there, every morning at dawn, I prayed the requisite prayer facing the Sanctuary, before I walked to the synagogue. Praised is God who has merited me for this.

In Jerusalem there are six gates and their doors are locked at night. One is called Bab-el-shevt because there the tribes would enter on their pilgrimages. One is called Bab-el-amud and near it is the cave of Tzedikiah who walked to Jericho as is mentioned in the words of the sages, may their memories be a blessing, in Perek Chelék.¹⁸⁹ Many Jews told me that they had walked a mile into it and it is as tall as a horse and rider with a spear in his hand. One is called Bab-el-Katon,

¹⁸⁹ The reference to Perek Chelék in Sanhedrin 23a is not correct (although Tzedikiah is mentioned here). The cave is mentioned in Eruvin 61b.

where they have the cotton market and there are three gates toward the Zion (i.e. the west) side. At one of them, there is a Jewish guard who opens and closes it. There is one lone synagogue in Jerusalem¹⁹⁰ and it is beautiful with four pillars, the length of the column (61) is 63 feet and its width is 28 and within the temple is a room with more than 60 Torah scrolls around it. They pray toward the east, facing the Sanctuary. The synagogues's only light is from the opening that is in the west and a small window in it. Also during the day they use the lamps that they light throughout for light. The congregation is of all types. There are 15 Ashkenazi householders but the majority are Sephardim and the Arabicized are Moroccans, dwellers in the land from early times. The Maghrebi's came from Berber (North Africa). Together, there are about 300 households, not counting the widows, who number more than 500 and who are amply provided for and do not pay any tax or burden. The community is supported by them (the rich widows) because upon their death, they (the community) takes everything if there is no heir and from this most of the public needs are fulfilled.

There are more than 200 souls who receive tzedakah and much tzedakah comes to them from Egypt and Turkey and from other places. But the poor Ashkenazim are not included in this because support comes to them from Venice.

The head of all the prominent men who are in Jerusalem is the Nagid our

¹⁹⁰ This is the Ramban Synagogue

honored master and teacher Isaac Sholal, who is crowned with the crown of Torah and the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship and wealth and the crown of a good name. From righteousness that he does for the poor and learners of Torah, he is exalted over them. Our master and teacher David ibn Shoshan, a doctor and Head of the yeshiva for Sephardim, and with him the honored and humble man our master Avraham Ha-Levi, who composed the "Mashreh Kitrin" ("Untier of Knots") they are joined by eight or nine Sephardim and they would learn then "Yom Tov" (Tractate Beitzah). Our honored master and teacher Israel (see note) is Head of the yeshiva for the Ashkenazim and with him is our honored master and teacher Peretz who came now from Germany and they are learning Baba Metziah. They gather there four or five of the Arabicized Jews and R. Yehuda from Corbeil, he is Sephardic, and R. Shlomo from Camarino, 12 or 13 altogether. Each sage judges in Jerusalem for one year. At that time there was a certain judge called R. David Aroch who was salaried and there is a judge from the Arabicized Jews, named R. Yitschak, who presides permanently. Also there is an honored person who teaches halachah in his house to youth and he is blind. And there is an honored person who is the children's teacher named Yosef Midrash. Each sage reads the Rambam (Maimonides) for one month in the synagogue after morning prayers and all the members listen to his voice and afterwards go to the yeshiva.

Jerusalem is a mile long and about half a mile wide and the sanctuary is like a small village.

(64) On Monday, Rosh Chodesh Shevat, after noon, I left Jerusalem, the Holy City, and I struggled on the road for five days until Tzefat because the roads were in poor condition because of the heavy rains that came then. And also, during my return I passed by way of Shechem and prayed twice at the grave of Joseph the Righteous. When I was six miles from Shechem, I saw Mount Shomron. It is a very beautiful in size and height and incline (but) truly it is completely desolate. There is not even a single house on it, or a single tree. Just desolation. On Monday, the 8th, I arrived safely in Tzefat. Wednesday, the 10th, I left Tzefat to go to Damascus, with God's help. Eight miles from Tzefat I crossed the Jordan on a stone bridge called Gesher Yaakov. They say that Jacob, our father, may he rest in peace, crossed there when he returned from Charan, and it (the Jordan) is very narrow there and afterwards it widens and continues and enters the sea of Tiberius and leaves there and continues from north to south. And in Jerusalem, on the summit of the Mount of Olives, it is seen and it is more than a mile wide there. From the Jordan to Damascus all of it is a very long, wide lowland plain. There are four khans -- that is the place in which the caravans lodge (caravansaries) and they are like a secured village and there are six miles between each and one pays three kofer, on the bridge 15 dirhams and with two others 10 dirhams each. Friday after midday, the 19th, I arrived safely in Damascus, a city twice as big as Bologna, with a rampart and a wall around it (66) and it is strongly fortified with a moat around it and also there is a strong fortified city. There are many beautiful markets in it. Each market of commerce

is roofed above and is full of people busily bargaining. All of the trades and more commerce are found there than in Venice and in particular the silk trade is great. The women also profit greatly through it and anyone who wants to make an effort and engage in commerce can provide the members of his household with plenty, even if he has limited funds, because profit is found in everything. There are those who start a clothing store with only one hundred ducats and the Venetians will also give him clothes to sell for a lump sum and the remainder is his. There are those who make haberdashery or perfumes. There are those who take things from a store and walk through the city selling. On any (given) day, the trading and the gathering of the people in the market is greater than in the big fair in Italy. Therefore, one who has a small fund and is trustworthy and has credit from the Ishmaelites and the Venetians with profit in everything he turns to and the wealthy one will increase through buying merchandise when the price is low and putting it in storage until the time when it is expensive. Also there are moneylenders to the Venetians charging less than 2% interest per month and in a time of need, they will charge more. Some of them take collateral. Among the Samaritans, a person can find some one, or Mu'alam Sadqa, and pay a fee to pledge for them but a wise man will keep his eyes open.

(67) The land is completely praiseworthy with regard to food and fruit and all delicacies of a king and a person may find all delights there. And the volume of the exports is approximately equal to that of Venice. The houses are pretty with gardens and fountains inside and each marketplace has a public fountain. There

are two rivers outside the city, next to each other. They are the Amana and the Parpar and in another place outside the city there is a building in which Gechazi¹⁹¹ is buried and there is the place of the lepers and they are holy in the eyes of the Ishmaelites and so too are the insane. Close to this building outside on the bank of the river is a long grave. They say that it belongs to Na'aman.¹⁹² In the midst of the city, a place of commerce, is the House of Rimmon,¹⁹³ a wonderful building. The interior of the courtyard is twice that of the square of Saint Mark. The entire floor is polished marble and the foyer is surrounded by great columns, some of them gilded. No one may enter inside, only the Ishmaelites, but it has four gates and from there one may see (in). There are about 500 Jewish households there and three synagogues built with beauty and splendor: one for the Sephardim and one for the Moroccans and one for the Sicilians. In each one of them a sage reads a little from Maimonides to them every day in the morning after prayers. They are R. Yitzchak Chaver for the Sicilians, and he is a distinguished doctor, and R. Yitzchak Mas'ud for the Sephardim, R. Shem Tov Alpharni for the Moroccans. But there is no yeshiva, only a teacher for children. Each one takes thirty or forty students. Further, there is a synagogue at the edge of the city called Eoneb. A mile from Damascus there is a place called Gover. There is a congregation of about 60 Moroccan households with (68) a very pleasant synagogue, (the like of which) I have never seen in the world, built with

¹⁹¹Elisha's servant. See II Kings 4:12.

¹⁹²See II Kings chapter 5.

¹⁹³See II Kings 5:18.

a foyer with six columns to the right and seven to the left and at the entrance to the synagogue there is a pretty cave. They say that Elijah, may his memory be a blessing, hid there, and that the synagogue is there from the days of Elisha. And in it is a stone on which they say he anointed Hazael. Later R. Eleazar ben Arakh rebuilt it and that place is so awesome, according to many people who told me, enemies have never ruled it and many miracles were performed in it and in any time of trouble the Jews gather in it and are not harmed.

(68) Once again a Na'ib (lieutenant governor) came to Damascus to judge the land and so in Jerusalem, the Holy City, and also in Tzefat, the leaders were removed because of their evil deeds. I stayed in Damascus half of Shevat, the month of Adar I, and Adar II until Wednesday, the 5th of Nissan 5282. With anticipation I awaited the ship the Kashtatia but it did not come. Also they knew nothing of the ship Della Mora. When I realized this I chose to go by way of Turkey, had it not been that most of the Jews who cared for me (69) advised me that I should not go because the way was dangerous and because of the expense and length of the journey. They said I would be more longer on the road than waiting for the ship and that it was better for me to remain quiet and calm until the time of the ship and then go safely. And so I listened to their advice and I agreed to celebrate Passover in the Land of Israel. I left Damascus on the day mentioned and I made Shabbat at the crossing of the Jordan because the camel wrangler wanted to remain there on Friday. On Sunday, the 9th of Nissan, I arrived in Tzefat safely and I rented a house in Ein Zeitoon and I stayed there.

During the intermediate days of Passover I went to Kefar Anan, in the lower Galilee, one day's journey from Tzefat. There is a community of about 30 households of Arabicized Jews there. Most of them are of priestly descent and they have a synagogue. The place is very fertile and full of all (sorts of) good (things) and a well of good water. There I prayed at the tomb of R. Abba Halafta. It is on a plain and there is a large tree on his grave. There is no marking of the grave. It is only recognizable by a little border of stones around it. Close to him are his two sons in two stone coffins with the covers next to each other. The one that is a little bigger is R. Yose and the other is R. Simeon. And this is well (70) known to be true for this 40 years ago a claim was made between the Ishmaelites living in Kefar Anan and the people living in Faradi, which is a village a parasang away from Kefar Anan, regarding the matter of the spring that comes from Faradi to Kefar Anan. Everyone told us that the villagers of Faradi wanted to divert the flow of the water that originated inside their borders and came to Kefar Anan. Their claim to possession was that the source of the spring comes out of their land; the villagers of Kefar Anan had no legal proof, just a claim to possession by virtue of having held it so long. The people of Kefar Anan lost in court but R. Abba Halafta came in a dream to a Jew from Kefar Anan and said to him, "Search my tomb and you will find a copper box containing a written record of my purchase (telling) of how I bought the spring from Nahum Ish Gamzo, and no person may divert the flow of the water to irrigate his field until I water mine first. You take the document and show it to the king and after

that return it to its place." They did so: they searched his tomb and found it and brought that written document before the king of Egypt¹⁹⁴ and the people of Kefar Anan were successful in their claim. (71) Everyone swore that this was the truth and many people remembered this story.

A short distance from R. Abba Halafta's site is the tomb of R. Jacob the father of R. Eliezar ben Jacob Kay Naki. There is a mound of stones on his grave as a marker and there was a large oak tree there which fell and there is still a heap of branches from the tree. No person touches it. They say that one time an Ishmaelite loaded a donkey with the wood and the donkey walked around in a circle, and he was not able to drive it away from there until he unloaded the wood.

Close to him in a sealed cave is his son R. Eliezar. There is a large building built in front of it and there one enters to pray. Above it is a cave. In it are R. Chanina ben Akshi and his students. I entered it to pray. There are five crypts and in each there are five tombs each inside the other. The entrance of the cave has a stone door which can be shut.

When I walked to Kefar Anan I passed by way of Faradi, and I prayed at the grave of Nahum Ish Gamzo. It is in a field close to Faradi marked by a large pile of square stones, recognizable that it is a very ancient thing because its stones

¹⁹⁴ The Land of Israel was under Mameluke control at that time.

have become dust. Returning we went a different way walking along the side of the spring until we arrived at its source which comes out of the mountain, to see it. Afterward we detoured to (72) Meron because there were many Jews going to the festival at the tombs of the righteous ones there. Also, on Monday, 24 Nissan, I returned to Meron with ten people who went regularly every month to pray at the cave of Simeon bar Yohai. Then I prayed also at the grave of R. Tarfon and at the grave of R. Yose ben Kisma. The two of them are below the mountain in a field facing the opening of the synagogue that is on the top of the mountain and from there it appears, and on the two of them a heap of stones for a marker, but R. Yose's (has) a large almond tree in the middle of the pile and in the middle between this and this about 100 cubits and above next to the village is the grave of R. Yohanan the Sandal Maker, close to the cave in which they tan skins. On the 15th of Iyar, which is called Second Passover, they make a big caravan in Meron. There were more than 1000 souls because many come from Damascus with their wives and children and most of the community of Tzefat and all the community to al-Baqi'a. It is a village that has the cave in which R. Simeon bar Yohai and his son were hidden for 13 years as is mentioned in the portion "Bema madlikin" (Shabbat 33b) and the spring is still there. But the carob tree is not (there). (73) Also they come then to Meron from all around. We stayed there two days and two nights celebrating and rejoicing and prayed at the markers of the righteous ones which are there, as were mentioned. After this all of us went to Tiberius and we stayed there four days to bathe in the hot springs of Tiberius and to pray at the graves of the righteous ones which are

there.

Tiberius was a great city with its lake and wall as is mentioned in the words of the sages in the first chapter of Megillah (6a). Now it is a ruin and desolate (with) exposed black stone as if it was burned with fire and no one is able to go there because of danger from the Arabs, except when there is a caravan with the protection of the Na'ib (lieutenant governor) of Tzefat for which each person pays four dirhams. The sea is wide there, about 12 miles, and the water is good for drinking. These are the waters of the Jordan and there is no water to drink there except this, but it cools off a little, and if a person lets it stand for a day in a vessel it becomes cool. There are many date palms there. There is still a village there where 10 or 12 Ishmaelite householders live.

The hot springs of Tiberius are more than a mile from the city and we camped in tents close to them on the shore of the sea. There are two buildings close to each other. One enters one of them to sweat. Boiling water comes out its walls from the mountain and is poured out onto the ground. (74) No one is able to touch it because of the heat of the water. One who sits in that building is caused to sweat a great deal more than from the heat of the light because they call it "furnace." Even though the exit is open and there is no door, a person can only bear the great heat of the steam with difficulty. I stayed inside half an hour to sweat and then I went down to the sea in the place that they go down to. These waters are mixed in the sea and there the water is a little warm and I bathed in it.

5

The second building has water coming out of the wall that is as hot as the first and it enters a large pool which was built there from stones and people jump in and stay in a little while but they come out because they are not able to bear the heat of the water for a long time. Also there are people who can't stay in it at all, but they wash themselves with the same water by pouring it over themselves with vessels. I did thus. They said that these bathhouses promote health and strengthen the body and are good for sciatica and for the pain of the limbs and many things.

On Sunday, 24 Iyar, we went, all the community as one, men and women, to pray at all the markers of the righteous ones which are there and there is more than a mile between each of them. First we went to the marker of R. Yohanan. There is a flattened area of black stones on his grave and close to him on the side is the tomb of Rambam (Maimonides). Close to him opposite it is the tomb of Rav Kahana. The (75) three of them like a sort of triangle. From here we went a mile further to a domed cave and the side that is below is cracked. There are two crypts to the right and three to the left and two opposite the crack. Jochebed and her two daughters-in-law Zippora and Elisheva are there and unknown others. From there we went to the top of another mountain, where the cave of R. Hiyya is with his sons; and with them is Rav Huna as is mentioned in Moed Katan (24a). It is a little cave and the crypts are sealed. We went down to the slope of the mountain, where the cave of R. Akiva of the 10 martyrs is. The mouth of the

cave has fallen (so) it is impossible to enter it. On that same mountain, they say that, 24,000 of his students are buried as is mentioned in Yevamot (62b) We returned to the place of our camp, each man under his tent on the shore of the sea. Close by there is a marker of upright stones on the plain and there they gather to pray evening and morning. They say that one named R. Meir is buried there, who swore not to sit until the messiah comes; thus he was buried standing. However, this is not R. Meir of the Tannaim. Next to the Tiberius hot springs on the slope of the mountain is buried R. Jeremiah. His marker is small black stones. I already mentioned that all the stones of Tiberius are black. They say that it was entirely burned when it was captured from the Caesar who executed the ten martyrs. On the top of the highest mountain of all an old building can be seen. They say that there was the castle of the daughter of Caesar who lusted for the beauty of R. Ishmael. Also the Ishmaelites have a mosque with a high white tower. (76) They say that the wife of R. Akiva, the daughter of Kalba Savua, is buried there and they call her "Madame." On Tuesday evening we left there and with the morning light we arrived in Achbara and rested there until evening. When the sun went down we arrived in Tzefat safely.

After many days I went to Far'am. There is the cave of Honi the Circlemaker and his wife, Abba Hilkiyah his grandson, and Hanan ha-Nehba. From there I went to Avnit, there is the nice cave of R. Judah Nesi'a and his students as is mentioned in Avodah Zara (37a).

Midway through Shevat 5283, I traveled from Tzefat then went to Beirut because there was a great Venetian ship there that had come loaded with chestnuts, and I boarded it to return to my house in peace and I sailed on it to Cyprus to the place called Limsol. There I remained 15 days because they were loading the ship with cotton. Then came the announcement that the ships had come and I rode on a horse to Famagusta to find a ship to see (77) if there was a Jewish man from Italy on them or if there was a letter for me. When I was there I made up my mind to return with the ship to have safer passage whether from pirates or storms at sea. I boarded the conserva ship in Famagusta on Thursday, the Fast of Esther, and on the first day of Purim 5283 I arrived in Tripoli and from there I went the land route to Beirut.

While I was there there was a great uproar among the Jews concerning a certain Jew that passed from Egypt to Gaza to Jerusalem, the Holy City. He was then in Tzefat and they were telling great things and wonders about him so I got the idea to go to Tzefat to find him and to spend Passover in the Land of Israel because I knew the ship would be in Beirut until April 5, which was the sixth day of Passover. But it happened that when I came to Tzefat that man had gone to Damascus. I investigated concerning him and I know the truth of his ways and his deeds and the truth became clear to me without a doubt. I spent the first two days of Passover in Tzefat and Thursday night I rode until I arrived Friday in Beirut. Sunday, the sixth day of Passover I boarded the ship and traveled from there safely.

(79) Name of the Place

Name of the Righteous Ones¹⁹⁵

Sidon

Zebulun

Tzefat

Hosea ben Beeri
Beeri his father

Ein Zeitoon

R. Judah bar Ilai

Qayyumiya

R. Yose of Yodkart

Meron

R. Simeon Bar Yohai
R. Eleazar his son
Hillel the Elder and his students
Shammai and his students
R. Yohanan the Sandal Maker
R. Yose ben Kisma
R. Tarfon

Amuka

R. Yohanan ben Uziel

Navratin

R. Jacob of Navuri
R. Eleazar of Modiim

(80) Dalta

R. Yose the Galilean
R. Ishmael his son

Gush Chalav

Shemaiah and Avtalion

Alma

R. Judah ben Tema
R. Eleazar ben Hycanus
R. Yose the Priest
R. Eleazar ben Azariah
The Babylonians

Ras El Chamar

R. Zimra

Kefar Baram

Obadiah the Prophet
R. Phineas ben Yair
Esther the Queen

¹⁹⁵ Biblical names are transliterated according to the Jewish Publication Society Bible.
Rabbinic names are transliterated according to The Book of Legends.

Name of the PlaceName of the Righteous Ones

Achbara

R. Yannai
R. Dostai his son
R. Nehorai his son

Yakook

Habakkuk

Kefar Kiny

Jonah ben Amittai the Prophet

Kefar Kiny

Raban Simeon ben Gamaliel

(81) Shechem

Joseph the Righteous

Jerusalem, the Holy City

Zechariah the Prophet
Haggai the Prophet
Huldah the Prophetess
Simeon the Righteous
The Sanhedrin

Rama

Samuel the Prophet

Close to Bethlehem

Rachel, our mother

Hebron

The Cave of Machpelah
Jesse, the father of DavidOthers in the Galilee

Farad

Nahum Ish Gamzo

Kefar Anan

R. Abba Halafta
R. Yose his son
R. Simeon, his son
R. Avi Kav Naki
R. Jacob, his father
R. Haniniah ben Akisha and his students

(82) Far'am

Honi the Circlemaker
Abba Hilkiah
Hanan ha-Nehba

Avnit

R. Judah Nesi'a and his students

Name of the PlaceName of the Righteous Ones

Tiberius

R. Yohanan
Rav Kahana
R. Moshe ben Maimon
Jochebed

Zipporah
Elisheva
R. Hiyya and his sons
R. Huna
R. Akiva
R. Meir
R. Jeremiah

(83) Ordinances and Agreements of the Holy Congregation of Jerusalem, the Holy City which are written on a sign in the synagogue:

No one is able to bring his fellow to the citizen's list if he has not warned him three times and he didn't heed.

The judge is not able to force any person to lend money to the community for the needs of the public or for any purpose, except if he wishes and desires (to do so).

No scholar will pay any community dues or taxes at all, even if he is very rich and also the widows do not bear the burden for the essentials.

A Jew shall not buy with bad coin, and if he possesses any, he shouldn't spend it because he knows it is no good.

A person should not dedicate something for use in the synagogue if he decides only the owner can use it -- rather, it should be like everything else.

One will not go drinking wine to pray in Rama, Samuel's home, may peace be upon him, and all the time that one stays there he will not drink wine. This is

done because men and women were going to drink there and becoming intoxicated. Thus, to protect them from sin, they forbid it, because while it is the custom of the city that the women go about covered with their faces veiled, they go about there unveiled.

In the year 5265, all the rabbis of the territory revolted about the Sabbatical year because they differed about whether to follow the counting of Rashi or Rambam (Maimonides). (84) But they agreed and decreed that the year 5271 would be the Sabbatical, and thus 5278, and so forth perpetually according to Rambam.

The aforementioned is written on the synagogue and the judge makes further decrees according to the needs of the time. For example, that one will not sell the wine and the cheese at more than such-and-such a price, or that one should not pay the butcher more than the regulated value in order to receive a nice piece.

No person is able to slaughter for himself or others until he shows the sage his knife. There is someone appointed to slaughter the fowl for the masses and he shows his knife to the sage in addition to the ritual slaughterer and the appointed inspector in the slaughter-house.

Individuals will not speak quarrelsome words in the synagogue. Instead they will go before the judge and the quarrel will be decided upon his ruling. Then two ducats will be placed in the account on behalf of the suit.

The custom in Jerusalem, the Holy City, is that on all the Sabbaths of the year (the privilege of) lighting (candles) in the synagogue is sold, i.e., one from Jerusalem or Chalav or Damascus or another country buys a Sabbath. It costs about six gold ducats and it is his all the days of his life. On that Sabbath

someone of his lights all the lights in the synagogue. (The privilege of) taking out the Torah (costs) about a ducat and a half, and all the honors of that Sabbath are his, whether the prayers or the seven called (to the Torah), he calls who he wishes, and all the dead in his family are remembered for good and the living are blessed. And if he wishes he will (85) make a feast for the poor. And thus every Sabbath belongs to one person and when that one dies that Sabbath is sold to another. And behold, his honor Asher Meshullam has Sabbath "Vaera" and Sabbath "Bamidbar Sinai" and on his behalf the master R. Yisrael Ashkenazi lights and divides the honors among the Ashkenazim. I was there on the Sabbath of the portion "Vaera."

They are accustomed to carry a torch before the Torah scroll from the ark to the bima, and this honor is sold every Sabbath. On Thursday, the fourth day of Chanukah, one of the elders named R. Yitzchak Chaiyaina, and of the cantors named R. Judah Sofer, quarreled. One said the honor was his and the other said it was his. They had already gone before the judge regarding this but the decision had not been issued. And now the torch was in the hands of the elder and their quarreling together angered the elder and he extinguished the torch in front of the Torah scroll. Because of this the judge ruled that he should not enter the synagogue for thirty days and that he should pay five ducats for the light and that he would not perform that honor for the duration of entire year, and this was announced in the synagogue the next day. Also it was decreed that R. Judah the scribe, since he was also at fault, should not have the honor. After the elder

had sat in his house for seven days all the sages entreated the judge and he permitted him to come to the congregation because he was an important elder and also his son was wealthy in Egypt and they receive an award from him.

(86) It is the custom of the Ishmaelites in Jerusalem, the Holy City, that when it does not rain they say that the sin of the Jews caused it because they drink wine. And they ask the governor to break the Jews casks of wine. On Wednesday, 20 Kislev, 5282, the ruler falsely accused (the Jews) about this until they compromised with 100 ducats of their coins, each ducat is four marchelo, and they placed this obligation and which cost $1\frac{1}{2}$ a ducat, that is two marchelo on 100 rotoli of wine, that is 600 of our litres.

It is the custom of the governor that when a surplus of merchandise comes to him from Egypt he imposes it on the merchants and also the Jews take their part. Recently a surplus of sugar came to him and he imposed 70 rotoli on the Jews and they divided it among the spice merchants reckoning 120 dirhams to the rotoli. But there is no loss in this, except that it is hard for them to find the money immediately. Sometimes these things happen, when there is great quantity but little value.

There was an early decree with the force of excommunication that a Jew may not give wine to Ishmaelites, but for some time they have relaxed the law because they need the moneychangers, who are close to the government. But this year the moneychangers made a lot of wine to sell to the Turks and once again, they (the Jews) obtained (consent) from the governor that the Turks not take (impound) any wine, because they would enter a Jewish house to take from what

they found. For this reason, the moneychangers have now come before the judge to know what to do with the wine that they made at the command of the community to sell to the Turks. (87) They imposed some on the community, about 100 casks, everyone bought according to its value and afterwards the judge again decreed a fast and threat of excommunication so that no person would sell wine except the moneychangers -- they are R. Eleazar Albotani and R. Judah from Corbeil -- until Purim in order that they might sell what was left over.

The custom of the prayers is similar to the Sephardic order. They say kaddish after the 100 blessings before Psalms. They say the Shema in a loud voice and thus "Ashrei" and "Come to Zion." (They do the) Priestly benediction every day. They say "v'yavor boker" and "mincha" before supplications and on Monday and Thursday also "veyavor" three times. In every final kaddish they say "renew the world" etc. "on Israel" etc. They don't say "asher calah" on the Sabbath and not "meahvatcha" rather "Atah Kidashta." They don't say "Yotzrot" at all and on a fast day they don't recite "selichot" until after the "Shemonah Esrei." There is no reader on the Sabbath except for the seven (aliyot).

On the Sabbath in Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh six read because of the Sabbath and seventh on Rosh Chodesh, and they say Kaddish and maftir on Chanukah and after the blessing of the month. The Nagid and the rabbis debated about this and a shaky legal tradition according to which an "Israelite" can repeat the reading of the Cohen and the Levite.

They have four appointed cantors, each one praying for one week, and they do

not receive a wage from the congregation, rather many of the people who go up to read (88) the Torah, especially guests, make donations for them.

The Ishmaelites call Damascus "Ash-sham," Sidon "Saidah," Shechem "Nablus," Jerusalem "El Kuds," Hebron "Al-Khalil," and a half mile from Hebron there is a place called Chavra. I think that it is the ancient Hebron, and afterwards for the honor of the patriarchs they settled the place of the Cave of Machpelah which was at the edge of a field, and that is enough for the one who understands.

Investigations Concerning the Ten Tribes and the River Sambatyon

When I arrived in Beirut I found I saw (sic) four Babylonian Jews and I spoke with one of them who knew the Holy Language (Hebrew). His name was R. Moshe and he told me truths about the River Sambatyon that he heard from Ishmaelites who saw it and that there are the people of Moses there without a doubt. Also he told me that one day's journey from his house there are pillars and R. Judah ben Betera is buried there, and he swore to me that he saw this with his eyes and it is famous, that on the night of 18 Sivan and the nights of Shavuot every year a pillar of cloud appears above the grave of the aforementioned R. Judah. Every year all the neighbors go during those days to his grave and see this wonder. And this Jew who spoke with me appeared to me to be a good, innocent, and upright man who would not deceive.

When I was in Jerusalem, the Holy City, a Jew from the Land of Cush (Ethiopia) who had been held captive among the gentiles for ten years and then bought by Ishmaelites and sold to Jews in Egypt, and he came to see (89) Jerusalem and the Nagid spoke with him and he said clearly that there are there in the south many Jews, kings and nobles, and sometimes (they) are at war with the Indianim. And he said that among them are some from the First Temple and some from the Second Temple. Also the Nagid, may his Rock keep and preserve him, told that these three years a person from the tribe of Simeon had lodged in his house. And he said that there are in his place four tribes. One of them, the tribe Issachar, observes Torah, and (so) they have a prince over them from that tribe (i.e. Issachar); when he calls on them, they answer.

Also I found in Tzefat an elementary teacher who came from Aden two years ago and he told me that in his land, there in Aden, which is from here to Egypt via the south a 40 day journey, there was a Jew there who stayed in Sinvel six years, and this is the place more than forty days beyond Aden, and it was from the truth of that Jew because in Sinvel all the Jews are kings and they send their servants to war while they enter the synagogue to pray and are victorious. And they told me in Jerusalem that a letter had come from Sinvel which said that all of them are righteous and a king rules them. There are only about 5000 of them, but all of them are nobles and each one has 50 or 60 servants and they send their servants to war.

An important elder in Tzefat, the Moroccan judge, unique in his generation for his expertise in Talmud and kabbalah, righteous and upright, has three sons and the youngest is 16 years old. Two years ago, this youth (90) was sitting on the roof alone and a white dove burst upon him. He caught it in his hand and saw written in square Assyrian writing on one of its wings "The Ten Tribes are coming." After he cried out, while he was holding the dove in his hand, he ran to show it to his father but he felt a hard slap on his hand so that he was forced to open his hand and the dove flew off and was not seen again. He went and told his father the story and his father inquired of him and questioned him and he swore (91) that he had not lied. He consistently told the same story and did not change it at all. I have written it down just as I heard it from the father.

A rumor came concerning the moon that is in the Sanctuary grounds. The Ishmaelites have a circular dome and there is a large metal column on top of it and an image of the moon sticks out turned to the south. They say that on Sukkot, 5280, it was turned toward the east and the Ishmaelites say that it is an evil sign for their faith and they wanted to turn (it) to the south toward Mecca but they weren't able to. Also, then an oak that was planted on the Sanctuary grounds in the days of Mohammed fell. This I heard.

The Cuthite letters were found on coins. They are Samaritan.¹⁹⁶



I will bless the Lord who counseled me to go up and see the Land of Israel in her ruin and the Lord who showed me all the land. Thus may it be his will that I merit to see its rebuilding and the Temple on its dwelling place.

Concerning most things that, (I wrote) "they say"

So people won't say Moses

made it up.

(92) One who wishes to go to the Land of Life (Land of Israel) on a ship in the midst of the sea should only board a Venetian galley because they are safe from pirates and storms at sea. When sails on it he should be careful to take a place to sit even if he is alone. The boat will push him from side to side saying, "Go to

¹⁹⁶ Copy of the alphabet is taken from Azariah de' Rossi, מאור עינים, Mantua, 1573-1575, pg. קעא.

your place" when he is unable to stand. One should be very careful not to rent a place in the ייב"ה from the master because if there is much cargo, the ייב"ה fills up, even if he cries out and implores, he'll have no room and the guards will certainly expel him and the master will not listen to his yelling. And even if there is little cargo the guards accuse him of this. Further, he won't be able to sit in his place until all the cargo is brought in and they load and unload goods in every port and will make him leave his seat coming and going, and he won't have (any) rest. Thus, one who is alone or with another should take the סקרינו. One can be found for the cost of four or five ducats each. Also, a place in the deck is good for one who has few in his household; that place is inexpensive, five ducats is the cost, and there's a pleasant breeze from the water and the fire is close to there. One who has many members in his household should take the איסקנדולירו from the master. It is a spacious place next to the deck. There is no better place on the galley than the place of the head of the oarsmen because there is no distress or dispute there. Further, because the head of the oarsmen oversees and commands the entire galley, anyone who is in his shadow is protected from everyone else, and the rent is at least 15 ducats. The מראנוניו¹⁹⁷ and the גלאפיה¹⁹⁷ have two nice rooms in the prow and their price is 10 ducats each. Also the secretary's place is like this and good and nice and thus the ארמאורלו¹⁹⁸ is good, but they are the master's. A person needs to be careful about water, filling the

¹⁹⁷ The exact meaning of the words is uncertain, but from context these appear to be types of ships.

¹⁹⁸ Meaning is uncertain.

barrels in every port; even though those who sell the places are obligated to give water, one can't rely on them. If a person gives two or three marchelo to the cook he will let him cook all the way and free a place for his pot. And thus if one gives two or three markiti to the one in charge of the water he will fill his barrels with water and regularly the Jews gather among them a ducat to give to the head of the oarsmen so that he will watch over them for good and protect them from evil doers because he has the power to make evil and good and one needs to vow in the beginning of the journey and to fulfill it and that is enough for the one who understands.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source

- בן-צבי, יצחק. מסעות ארץ-ישראל לרבי משה באסולה. ירושלים, החברה לחקירת ארץ-ישראל ועתיקותיה, 1938.
(Ben-Zevi, Isaac. A Pilgrimage to Palestine by Rabbi Moshe Bassola of Ancona. Jerusalem: The Jewish Palestinian Exploration Society, 1938.)

Secondary Sources

- Adler, Elkan Nathan. Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987. (Unabridged reprint of Jewish Travellers. London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1930.)
- Asher, A., translator and editor. The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela. New York: Hakesheth Publishing Co., [1932?].
- Calimani, Riccardo. The Ghetto of Venice. New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1987.
- Campbell, Mary B. The Witness and the Other World. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Bonfil, Robert. Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- _____. Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Braudel, Fernand. The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972.
- Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971.
- Goitein, S.D., Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela. Malibu, California: Joseph Simon Publisher, 1983.

- Levanon, Yosef. The Jewish Travellers in the Twelfth Century. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1980.
- Marmorstein, Rabbi Avroham, editor. Pathway to Jerusalem: The Travel Letters of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura. Lakewood, New Jersey: CIS Publishers and Distributors, 1992.
- Penrose, Boies. Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance 1420-1620. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952.
- The Prestor John of the Indies. Translated by Lord Stanley of Alderly (1881) Revised and edited by C.F. Beckingham and G.W. B. Huntingford. (Millwood NY: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 36.
- Ran, Nachman. Journeys to the Promised Land. New York: Portland House, 1989.
- Roth, Cecil. Dona Gracia of the House of Nasi. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1977.
- _____. The Jews in the Renaissance. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1959.
- Said, Edward W. Orientalism. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Schechter, S. "Safed in the Sixteenth Century -- A City of Legists and Mystics," in Studies in Judaism. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1908.
- Schulvass, Moses A. The Jews in the World of the Renaissance. Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1995.
- Tirosh-Rothschild, Hava. Between Worlds: The Life and Thought of David ben Judah Messer Leon. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Journey and Its Narratives," The Morals of History Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Wilhelm, Kurt, ed. Roads to Zion Four Centuries of Travelers' Reports. New York: Schocken Books.
- Zumthor, Paul. "The Medieval Travel Narrative," New Literary History 25 (1994): 809-824.

Zunz, Leopold. "Essay on the Geographical Literature of the Jews from the Remotest Times to the Year 1841" in A. Asher, editor The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela. New York: "Hakeshath" Publishing Co., 1927.

אייזנשטיין, יהודה דוד. אוצר מסעות. תל אביב, 1969.
(Eisenstein, J.D. Ozar Massaoth. Tel Aviv, 1969.)

דוד, אברהם. עלייה והתיישבות בארץ-ישראל במאה הטי"ז. ירושלים: ראובן מס בע"מ, 1993.

(David, Abraham. The Immigration and Settlement in the Land of Israel in the 16th Century. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1993.)

ישעיהו זנה, "לתולדות קהילת בולוניה בתחילת המאה הת"ז",
Hebrew Union College Annual 16 (1941): ל"ה - מ"ד.

יערי, אברהם. אגרות ארץ ישראל. רמת-גן: מסדה, 1971.

למדן, ר'. ר' משה באסולה -- חייו ויצירתו (עבודת מ.א.), תל-אביב תשמ"ג.

מאור עינים. מנטובה (Mantua) 1573-1575.