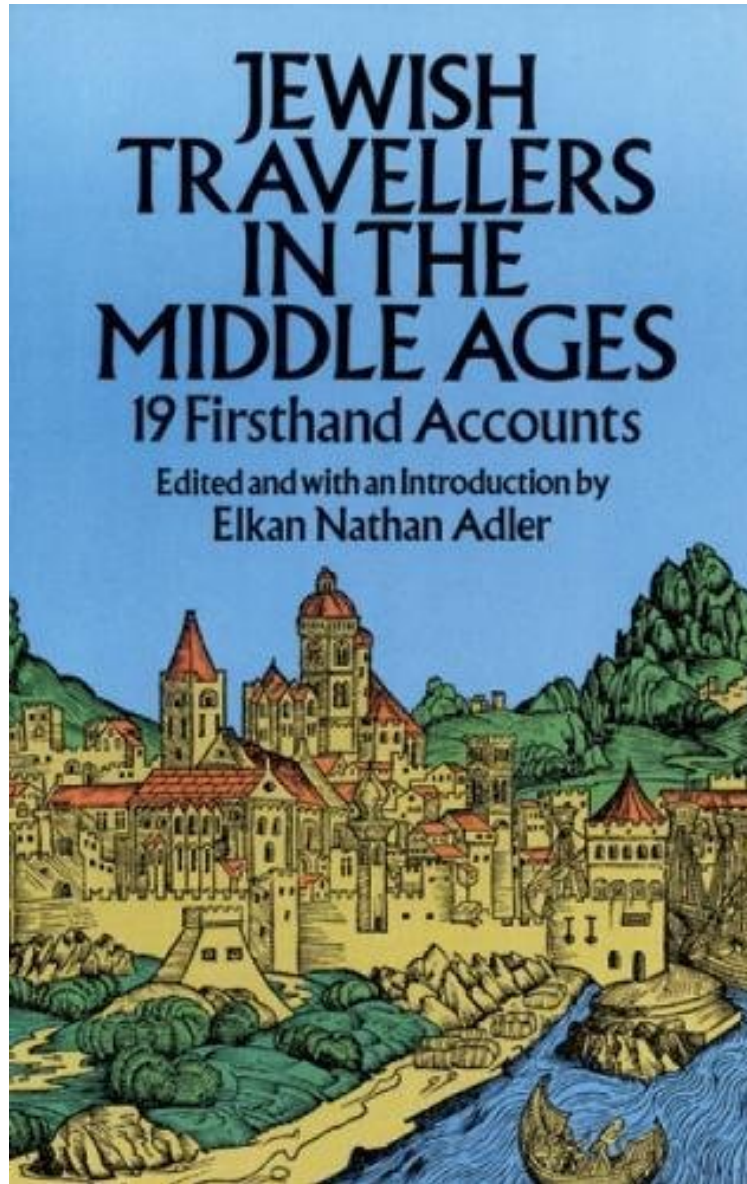


(Pdf free) Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts

## Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts

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**From Dover Publications :** **Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. sometimes interesting, sometimes bizarreBy Michael LewynThe title of this book is self-explanatory: 19 travelogues, written by Jews between the 9th and 18th centuries (though a couple

of them are of doubtful veracity). The most common refrain throughout this book is the sheer difficulty of travel in the Middle Ages: many places had constant plagues of various sorts (presumably due to bad sanitation), highways were full of sometimes-murderous robbers, etc. I can't vouch for the translation, let alone the validity of the original sources—so I'm not sure how factually accurate any of the travelogues (as translated) are. But assuming that the translation is at least reasonably close to the authors' intent, a few other facts grabbed me: \*As late as the 12th century, Egyptian Jews with roots in Israel still read Torah according to the triennial cycle (finishing every 3 years instead of every year). I had heard that the triennial cycle had ancient roots, but had never read "primary source" confirmation. \*The level of obsession with graves. More than one essay had numerous tales of the graves of prophets and holy men, and miracles that allegedly happened in those places (though to be fair, some of the authors were skeptical of such stories). \*The assimilation of Jews into Muslim societies. Some of the essays were by European travelers who visited Egypt or Iraq on the way to Israel, and remark on the similarities between Jewish and Muslim attitudes towards women (usually involving high degrees of sex segregation and low levels of financial support for wives).

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Despite all the problems trying to enter this review, this book is excellent! By Barbara Stienstra This book should be purchased before visiting The Holy Land, October 16, 2004 Reviewer: Barbara Stienstra (Goshen, New York United States) - See all my reviews This book should be purchased before visiting The Holy Land, taken there when on a visit, and studied and applied while traversing the countryside and cities! Chocked-full of wonderful and interesting genealogy and grave-ology! A who's (located) where, when and why! Did you know: "From the river Hiddekel (Tigris) at the foot of the mountains of Ararat it is a distance of four miles to the place where Noah's Ark rested, but Omar benal-Khatab took the ark from the two mountains and made it into a mosque for the Mohammedans." (Page 42) - Benjamin of Tudela. "Ninevah is in ruins..." (Page 42) noted in Benjamin of Tudela's day. In the land of Cush "There is a people among them who like animals, eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the fields. They go about naked, and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They cohabit with their sisters and anyone they find. The climate is hot. When the men of Assuan make a raid into their land they take with them bread and wheat, dry grapes and figs, and throw the food to these people, who run after it. Thus they bring many of them back prisoners, and sell them in the land of Egypt..." (Page 61). Gee, when my husband Greg and I were in Aswan in 1995, we were lucky that this is no longer done as it would surely have vexed us, and would have been most disconcerting! With regard to the "desert called Sahara", Benjamin states: "In this desert there are mountains of sand, and when the wind rises it covers the caravans with sand and many die from suffocation." (Page 61). Alas we were in a sandstorm on The Giza Plateau, and it sounds as if we were lucky "to have survived" such treacheries! Petrarchia of Ratisbon states of the Ararat terrain "...There is one high mountain, behind which there are four others, two of which are opposite the two others. The ark of Noah was carried between these mountains and could not get out. However, the ark is not there, for it is decayed." (Page 83). Hum, a totally different stance on the ark! Rabbi Jacob sheds more light on this fascinating story: "...Al-Kufa where is the city first destroyed during the generation of the flood Thence it is a day and a half's journey to Sura, and the tombs of the righteous... Four parasangs from Al-Kufa is the place where Noah entered the ark..." (Page 128.) With regard to another important "ark" (obviously, of the Covenant), Rabbi Jacob teaches us that ".....there are tombs of the Kings and an ancient building called David's Sanctuary, directed towards the Temple, ... They say it was built by David and was the place where the Ark was brought and kept by David till the Temple was built." (Page 11. This sounded familiar: "...the gates of Baghdad. They are a hundred cubits high and ten cubits wide. They are of polished copper and ornamented with figures so fashioned that no one can produce the like. A nail once fell out and no artificer is able to fix it again. Formerly the horses used to be startled back at the sight of the gates for, seeing the brightness of the gates, they perceived, as it were, other horses running towards them, whereby they took fright and started off. They, therefore, poured boiling vinegar over the gates, and thus deadened the brightness of the polished copper, so that the horses should enter. However, the polish of the copper is still partly to be perceived at the top, where no vinegar was poured. These gates were once gates of Jerusalem..." (Page 81), thus recorded Petrarchia of Ratisbon. I deem it noteworthy, Meshullam Ben R. Menahem's description of the "treasure chambers": "...on the other side of the Nile there are three great treasure chambers, like a city rising to a diamond point. These are the pyramids, of which I have seen nothing so big, even in Rome. They are very much higher than the foundation-base, and if a man stands on top of the pyramid in the middle and throws a stone, he cannot throw it outside the structure. They are built out of stones great beyond measure." (Page 167). A-men, to which my husband Greg and I can attest! I also learned: Isaac Chelo taught me "...Father of the Anakim. He was a giant even among giants, and there still remains to this day at Hebron a skeleton of enormous stature said to be that of one of these giants." (Page 135). Azuli gave the reader fodder for thought: "... and when we had gone out of the gate of the city and the coach was ready, I wished to make water, and got on to a heap of stones; but as it was a conspicuous place I went on a little further, and seeing on one side of the field a rather deep depression in the ground which I thought was terra firma, I jumped over the stone fence between and put one foot to the ground, but my foot and thigh sank right into the mud and dung; it appears it was a cesspool... I thought I was in great danger and nearly died there... Most of my clothes were in a mess and all spoilt and defiled and stinking, but God in His mercy put it into the mind of a Gentile to come at the sound of the noise, and he took me to his house where there was a water well and

I took off my clothes and washed myself and my clothes, in order to remove the mess..." (Pages 346-347). This book had traces of Ripley's Believe-it or not" adventures: Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon in 1170-87 in an excerpt from his journey, stated Russia he went for six days on the River Dnieper. On the other side of the river he commenced his travels in the land of Kear. There they have no ships, but sew together ten extended horse hides, with a thong around the border; they then seat themselves on the hides, placing thereon also the wagons and all the luggage They then tie the thong which is on the border of the hides to the tails of the horses, who start swimming, and thus they pass over the water...They also put pieces of flesh under the saddle of a horse, which they ride and, urging on the animal, cause it to sweat. The flesh getting warm, they eat it.."(page 65). The Rabbi goes on "They perceive and recognize (objects) at more than a day's distance. (Ibid.) He continues with a story about the land of Khozaria, "There is a sea there on one side, from which there arises a great stench, whilst on the other side there is a sea which does not emit any offensive smell. There is about a day's journey between the two seas. If any individual passed the stinking sea he would die immediately. When the wind blows from the stinking sea to that not emitting any offensive smell many die. People only go there when the wind does not blow from it." (Page 66)... "He then returned to Baghdad. There he was shown a flying camel. It is low, and its legs are slender; and if anybody wishes to ride on it he must tie himself to it lest he should fall off. The rider traverses in one day the ground over which a man on foot would have to take fifteen. It would be possible to go even swifter if the rider could only stand it. In one second the flying camel gallops a mile." (Page 80.)... "At Nineveh there was an elephant. Its head is not at all protruding. It is big eats about two wagon loads of straw at one time; its mouth is in its breast, and when it wants to eat it protrudes its lip (trunk) about two cubits, takes up with it the straw, and puts it into its mouth. When the sultan condemns anybody to death they say to the elephant: this person is guilty. It then seizes him with its lip, casts him aloft, and kills him. Whatever a human being does with his hand it does with its lip; this is exceedingly strange and marvellous. Upon the elephant's back is set a structure like a citadel (howdah), within which there are twelve armed warriors; when the beast stretches forth its lip they climb up, using it as a bridge." (Page 68.) Another unbelievable statement from the said party can be found on page 86 "...A pleasing odour ascends from his grave. This odour is smelt at the distance of a mile from his grave."... Ions later, Meshullam Ben R. Menahem records: "...In the months of June, July and August the air is very bad in Alexandria, and this because an evil wind rages then called the boreas which attacks people like the plague, God forbid! Or makes them blind so that for five or six months they cannot see at all. Therefore it is that in Alexandria many people are found whose eyes are diseased..." (Page 160). Much later on, Obadiah Da Bertinoro indicated "... On the Nile I saw the large species of frog which the natives call El Timsah (the crocodile); it is larger than a bear and spots are visible on its skin..." (Page 223.) Lastly, if one were to play "Trivial Pursuit" this may be of interest to remember, as I had never heard of it, nor have any of my co-erthers: Azulai, arriving in Paris the 22nd Kislev, 5538 (December, 1777) felt it necessary to relay: "There is a saying that never in the twenty-four hours is there an instant without a white horse, a monk and a prostitute at this spot. The city is of great beauty and everything is to be found in it, but all at a very high price, except prostitution, which is very cheap and openly displayed; there are said to be thirty thousand public prostitutes inscribed on the registers, without counting the thousands who are not public and offered to all comers..." (Page 350.) And here is a message from David Reubeni, which transcends time! "I was in Pisa in the house of R. Jechiel, his old grandmother Sarah, who was a wealthy and wise woman, had told me, 'I see that thou art angry all thy days; if thou wilt avoid this anger thou wilt prosper in all thy days,' and she gave me a great Bible as a gift, and wrote at the beginning of the book, 'Anger not and thou shalt prosper.'... A message for THIS GENERATION! Posted on: 1:05 pm on Sep. 7, 2002-----I would have been the first one to have reviewed this if the template worked. I wrote to tech. help at , to no avail. This is precisely why I had stopped reviewing as I spent a great deal of time typing the review into , and it did not appear. I had written at that time to your customer service, and I received no satisfaction. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Just Amazing... first hand accounts By mbcz Do not buy this book for the editorial content, it is minimal. The first hand accounts provided by the travellers provide more than enough reason to buy this book. There are not many other diaries similar to the ones presented here.

This fascinating book vividly portrays the wandering Jew as a very real character in the great drama of history. In nineteen engaging narratives, some twelve centuries old, travelling Jewish scholars, merchants, pilgrims, ambassadors, and others are revealed to be men of many moods and missions. In these pages you will meet: Isaac, an interpreter in the service of the Emperor Charlemagne, who in the year 802 escorted an elephant named Abulabaz, a gift to the Emperor from the caliph Harun ar-Rashid, over the Alps to the Emperor's court. Eldad the Danite, who lived on the Gulf of Aden and in the late ninth century was shipwrecked and seized by cannibals, though he lived to tell the tale. Benjamin of Tudela, the great Hebrew satirical poet of the thirteenth century, whose masterpiece, the Tachkemoni, is filled with clever, sometimes bitter jibes at the notables encountered in his many travels. Elijah of Ferrara, who describes fifteenth-century life in Jerusalem and tells of the plague in Egypt and Palestine that carried away his sons and grandson. Rich in human experience and historic detail, their accounts and 14 more revealing narratives offer rare perspectives on the unfolding drama of life in Europe, the Near East, and North Africa in the Middle Ages. This is a volume that will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers, from those interested in travel and adventure to those

interested in cultural history and Judaica.

Language NotesText: English, Hebrew (translation)