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Tudelalı Benjamin'in Seyahatnamesinde Yahudilerin, Hristiyanların ve Müslümanların Orta Çağ'daki Algısı

The Medieval Perception of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Benjamin of Tudela's Travelogue

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Öz- Seyahatnameler, farklı toplumların yaşamlarına, geleneklerine ve dinlerine dair içgörüler sunan anlatılardır. Seyahatnameler, insan etkileşimleri ve kültürel alışverişler üzerine düşünceler sunar ve farklı bir bakış açısı geliştirmeye yardımcı olur. Orta Çağ seyahatnameleri, genellikle kişisel gözlemlere dayanan, karmaşık ve çeşitli Orta Çağ toplumlarının gerçekçi tasvirlerini sunar. Edward Said, Batı'nın Doğu'yu tarihsel olarak çarpıttığını ve basitleştirdiğini, bunun da Avrupa'nın egemenliğini ve emperyalizmini haklı çıkarmak için yapıldığını savunmaktadır. Batı söyleminde Doğu'nun Diğer olarak inşa edilmesinin, Doğu hakkında bilgi üretimini nasıl etkilediğini vurgulamaktadır. Ancak Said'in bu bakış açısını Orta Çağ dönemine uyarlamak çok da mümkün görünmemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, öz ve öteki kavramlarını, ayrıca Orta Çağ Doğu ve Batı'sını keşfetmek ve Said'in bakış açısına karşıt bir duruş sergilemektir. Bu makale, Orta Çağda yaşamış bir gezgin olan Benjamin of Tudela'nın seyahatnamesini analiz ederek, Oryantalizmin ikili karşıtlıklarının temelsiz olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, bu makale Benjamin'in Yahudi kimliğinin bakış açısını nasıl sınırladığını ve Doğu-Batı ikiliğine karşı Yahudilere, Hristiyanlara ve Müslümanlara karşı nasıl hoşgörülü bir bakış açısı benimsediğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler– *Orta Çağ, Edebiyat, Seyahatname, Dikotomi.*

Abstract – Travelogues are narratives that provide insights into the lives, customs, and religions of different societies. They offer reflections on human interactions and cultural exchanges, helping to develop a comprehensive understanding of societies. Medieval travelogues, often based on personal observations, offer genuine portrayals of complex and diverse medieval societies. Edward Said argues that Western depictions of the East have historically been distorted and oversimplified to justify European dominance and imperialism. However, adapting Said's perspective to the Middle Ages appears problematic. He emphasizes how the construction of the East as the Other in Western discourse has influenced the production of knowledge about the East. The main concern of this paper is to explore the concepts of self and other, as well as the medieval East and West, opposing Said's perspective. This paper aims to show that the binary oppositions of Orientalism are unfounded by analyzing the travelogue by Benjamin of Tudela, a medieval Jewish traveler. In other words, this paper explores how Benjamin's Jewish identity shaped his perspective and how he embraces a tolerant view of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, challenging the East-West dichotomy.

Keywords– *Middle Ages, Literature, Travelogue, Dichotomy.*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Traveling involves more than just moving from one place to another. It is a valuable experience that can broaden understanding of different cultures and alter one's perspective on others and oneself. It begins with departures, progresses through physical movement across distances, and ends with arrivals, fostering new bonds and relationships among strangers. Travelogues are narratives that provide insight into the customs, beliefs, and lifestyles of many nations. Travelogues offer valuable insights into relationships and cross-cultural interactions, deepening the understanding of diverse cultures. Because they are often based on firsthand observations, medieval travelogues portray complex and diverse medieval societies. Said argues that Western depictions of the East have historically been distorted and oversimplified to support European supremacy and imperialism. He focuses on how the construction of the East as the Other in Western discourse has affected the production of knowledge about the East. Said argues that prejudiced depictions of the Orient are a result of European perspectives that are ethnocentric and limited. Orientalism often portrays the East as inferior and separates it from the West. The text highlights a rigid dichotomy portraying the East as unchanging, homogeneous, and incapable of self-definition. However, Said's logic is overly simplistic and neglects the complexities of the Middle Ages. The connections and exchanges challenge such a simplistic interpretation, indicating that a more nuanced analysis of these intricate dynamics is necessary. When considering the historical complexity of the Middle Ages, the perception of this era as a monolithic representation of Orientalism is dismantled. This study examines the concepts of self and the other, as well as medieval East and West,

in opposition to Said's point of view. The travelogue, written by the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela in the Middle Ages, is used to demonstrate the irrationality of the binary oppositions engendered by Orientalism. This paper explores whether Benjamin's Jewish identity limited his perspective or if he developed a tolerant attitude toward others, in contrast to Orientalism.

This paper analyzes how Benjamin's Jewish upbringing shaped his viewpoint and how, in opposition to the East-West dichotomy, he adopted an accepting attitude toward Jews, Christians, and Muslims. From his home in northern Spain, Benjamin of Tudela, embarked on an extensive journey. Greece, Rome, Constantinople, Rhodes, Cyprus, Antioch, Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Alexandria, and Sicily were all on his itinerary. During Benjamin's journey, the Iberian Peninsula underwent profound political and cultural transformations. In the eleventh century, Al-Andalus experienced a transition from Muslim to Christian rule. Before King Alfonso I of Navarre took power in 1119, Tudela had been under Muslim rule for eight centuries. The shift in authority from Muslims to Christians before his time attests to the multicultural environment in which Benjamin was raised.Notably, Benjamin of Tudela was rejected due to his religious affiliation. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism did not become dominant in either the East or the West during the Middle Ages. Even though both Christianity and Islam experienced phases of dominance and fall during this time, Jews remained a minority religious community. Benjamin tells the story of a member of a religious minority who grew up during a period when Christians and Muslims were exchanging power. His opinions are significant because they provide insight into the lives of the marginalized and support the argument regarding the representation and interpretation of different religious identities in medieval Orientalist discourse. Even if Jews were permitted to reside in Christian nations, they were still seen as the other and a threat from inside. Benjamin upheld the religious divide between Judaism and Christianity while reinforcing Christian identity and serving as a cautionary example for Christians against renouncing their faith. Benjamin's travelogue highlights the complexity and diversity of Jewish communities. In his depictions of Muslim communities, he emphasizes mutual respect and the pursuit of common ground, indicating that he prioritizes conflict resolution over adhering to rigid Orientalist discourse patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Traveling is more than just moving from one place to another. It is a valuable experience that can broaden one's understanding of different cultures and reshape perceptions of oneself and others. It begins with departures, continues through passages across different lands, and ends with arrivals, fostering new bonds and connections between strangers. Travelogues are narratives that offer insights into the lives, customs, and religions of different societies. They offer reflections on human interactions and cultural exchanges contributing to a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and societies. Medieval travelogues, often based on personal observations, offer genuine portrayals of complex and diverse medieval societies. Said argues that Western representations of the Orient have historically been distorted and oversimplified to justify European dominance and imperialism.He emphasizes how the construction of the East as the Other in Western discourse has influenced the production of knowledge about the East. According to Said, European perspectives on the Orient have been deeply rooted in ethnocentrism and racial biases, leading to biased and limited portrayals of the region.[1]

Said's theory is very controversial as it is basically concerned with one-sided representation and it is too contradictious to be applied to medieval texts, particularly medieval travelogues. While Said mentions "the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" and "radical differences" between the strictly divided Western and Eastern parts of the world, medieval travel accounts subvert this preconceived opinion on a number of occasions.[2] In fact, Said's point of view disregards the fact that there were various points of interaction between the East and the West, as well as between Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. Tyerman notes that "[g]iven the nature of twelfth-century society, contact between communities was inevitable" and this naturally resulted in increased understanding and tolerance between them.[3] Despite the overarching tensions of this period, the presence of Christian and Jewish communities within Islamic territories, as well as Muslim communities in Christian lands point to a complex web of interactions that defies easy classification.

Orientalism divides the East from the West and frequently portrays the East as less valuable. It highlights a rigidly binary viewpoint, portraying the East as static and uniform, incapable of self-definition. By limiting the East to the parameters set by Western authors and thinkers, orientalism presents the East as the Other. Said's thesis, however, is constrained and ignores the complexity of the medieval period. An examination of its complex dynamics is necessary since the contacts and exchanges that took place throughout this time period defy a simplified interpretation. Therefore, the representation of the Middle Ages' monolithic Orientalism is disrupted when its historical diversity is acknowledged. In contrast to Said's viewpoint, this paper explores the ideas of self and other as well as the medieval East and West. Examining the travelogue of medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela aims to show that the binary oppositions created by Orientalism are unwarranted. This paper investigates whether, in contrast to Orientalism, Benjamin adopted a tolerant attitude toward others or if his Jewish identity imposed limitations on his perspective. Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler from the Iberian city of Tudela in the Kingdom of Navarre, began his extensive travels from his hometown in northern Spain. His travel routes included Rome, Greece, Constantinople, Rhodes, Cyprus, Antioch, Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Alexandria, and Sicily.[4] Adler notes in a footnote to the 1907 English translation that "Benjamin's absence from Europe must be placed between 1166 and 1171," which coincided with the period between the First and Second Crusades.Benjamin's travels coincided with significant political and cultural changes in the Iberian Peninsula. In the 11th century, Christian rule replaced Muslim rule in al-Andalus. In 1119, King Alfonso I of Navarre took control of Tudela from

[1]Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 204.
[2]Said, *Orientalism,* 42-45.
[3]Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 225.
[4]Marcus Nathan Adler, Introduction to *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary,* ed. and trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (New York: 1907; Project Gutenberg, 2005). https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14981.

Muslim rule that had lasted since the 8th century.[5] This shift in power from Muslims to Christians before Benjamin's time points to his hybrid cultural background.[6] Benjamin of Tudela is notable for being marginalized due to his religious affiliation. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism did not become dominant in either the East or the West during the Middle Ages. While Christianity and Islam experienced periods of dominance and decline, the Jewish population remained a minority religious group throughout this era.[7]

Benjamin's perspective is that of a member of a religious minority who traveled during a period of power shifts between Muslims and Christians. His observations are relevant as they provide insight into the experiences of those on the periphery and support the argument regarding the representation and perception of different religious identities within medieval Orientalist discourse. Even though Jews were permitted to reside in Christian societies, they were considered as the other and an internal threat.[8] The purpose was to maintain the religious distinction between Christianity and Judaism while using Jews as an object lesson for Christians against religious renunciation and to reinforce Christian identity.[9] On the other hand, Islam granted dhimmi status to Jews and Christians, whom it defined as "People of the Book" (ahl al-kitāb).[10] People of other religions were not required to convert to Islam but to recognize its authority. They had to pay a special tax called jizya, and in return, they received protection from the Muslim rulers.[11] Within the dhimmi status framework, they were allowed to practise their religious duties and maintain their internal legal systems. However, they had to recognize and accept their subordinate status.[12]

The Jewish traveler at work

The historical marginalization of Jews in both the East and the West complicates the narrative of Benjamin. Benjamin's perspectives do not conform neatly to the traditional categories of East and West or self and other. Throughout his travel narrative, Benjamin primarily distinguishes between Jews and non-Jews instead of focusing specifically on Muslims or Christians. Scholars widely agree that Benjamin's 12th-century travelogue, Sefer ha-Massa'ot (The Book of Travels), was intended to connect Jewish communities worldwide and promote a unified Jewish world while seeking a safe haven for them.[13] Benjamin made diligent efforts to document the number of Jews, their locations, and their living conditions in predominantly Muslim and Christian communities he visited.

Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler from Navarre, visited Rome.He describes Rome as the leading city of Christendom with about 200 Jewish inhabitants.[14] In this center of Christendom, the Jews are given respect and are exempt from paying tribute. Some hold positions as officials of Pope Alexander, the spiritual leader of all Christians. The city is also home to Jewish scholars, including R.

[5]Leopoldo Torres Balbas, "Cities Founded by the Muslims in al-Andalus" in *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part 1: History and Society,* ed. Manuela Marin (New York: Routledge, 2016), 273.

[6]Martin Jacobs, *Reorienting the East: Jewish Travelers to the Medieval Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 29; Martin Jacobs, "From Lofty Caliphs to Uncivilized 'Orientals' - Images of the Muslim in Medieval Jewish Travel Literature." *Jewish studies quarterly* 18.1 (2011), 67.

[7]Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[8]Robert Chazan, "The deteriorating image of the Jews — twelfth and thirteenth centuries," in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, eds. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 230.

[9]Nadhiri, *Saracens and Franks*, 82-8.

[10]Jonathan Ray, *Jewish Life in Medieval Spain: A New History* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), 28.

[11]Tolan, "Dhimmis and Mudejars," 49-50.

[12]Ryan Szpiech, "Turning and returning: Religious conversion and personal testimony in Iberian societies," in *The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Medieval* Iberia, eds. E. Michael Gerli and Ryan D. Giles (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2021), 270.

[13]Martin Jacobs, "'A Day's Journey.'"

[14]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary* (The Project Gutenberg Book of The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela), ed. and trans. M. N. Adler (2005). Unless otherwise specified, all references are from this edition. Adler's translation is based on Asher's edition, which uses a manuscript in the British Museum as its foundation. There are three other existing manuscripts: one in Rome at the Casanatense Library, another in Oxford at the Bodleian Library, and the last in Jerusalem at the National Library of Israel. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 9.

Daniel, the chief rabbi, and R. Jechiel, who serves as an official of the Pope. R. Jechiel, as a steward, also has access to the Pope's palace and takes care of his house.[15] Benjamin mentions the presence of Jews in Rome, but he does not provide further details about their lifestyle in the city. However, he does highlight two Jews who held significant positions within the predominantly Christian society. The first of these individuals is R. Daniel, who was known as the chief rabbi. His presence indicates that Jews practiced their religion with a leader, the chief rabbi. Additionally, it's noteworthy that R. Jechiel, a Jew working for the Pope, earned the Pope's trust and managed all affairs within the Pope's palace.

In other words, the Pope transcended the notion of otherness as an unbridgeable divide and established a close relationship with this Jew. This connection and trust between Pope Alexander III and official R. Jechiel demonstrate mutual respect and cooperation between Christian and Jewish communities, despite the Jewish community being a minority in a society governed by Christian authorities. In addition to helping bridge the gap between self and other, this example of Jews as an integral part of Christian society also contradicts the Orientalist view that different social groups are fundamentally isolated from each other. Benjamin's observations indicate that Muslims played a significant role in palace affairs.[16] When both examples are considered, one from Palermo and the other from Rome, both under Christian rule, it would be fair to say that the daily dynamics of life do not always align with the clear separation that Orientalism creates between the East and West and between self and other. In these instances, both Muslims and Christians were religious minorities, yet they played integral roles in these societies. Benjamin of Tudela mentions the church of St. John in Rome, which has two bronze columns taken from the Temple, the handiwork of King Solomon, each column is engraved with Solomon, the son of David.[17]

Benjamin of Tudela, the medieval Jewish traveler, documented the Church of St. John in Rome, a significant center of Western Christendom. The church houses artifacts traditionally believed to originate from the East, including two bronze columns thought to be from Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. These columns symbolize the merging of Christianity and Judaism. According to Jacobs, medieval Jewish travelers aimed to depict a Gentile Land of Israel for their audience by superimposing a biblical landscape onto the recognizable map of the twelfth-century Outremer. Their goal was to draw connections between the Christian present and a Jewish past.[18] Therefore, it is clear that Benjamin's travels go beyond passive observation; they take place with a purpose. Instead of drawing clear lines between Judaism and Christianity, Benjamin strives to unite them on common ground. Benjamin describes Constantinople as a bustling, cosmopolitan city where merchants from various regions, including the East and the West, converge for trade.[19] The city's diverse nature, where people from Babylon, Shinar, Persia, Media, Egypt, Canaan, Russia, Hungary, Pecheneg, Khazaria, and the lands of Lombardy and Sepharad interact, suggests a fluid blending of different nations and cultures. This highlights how the East and the West become interrelated in such cities.[20] The Sephardic traveler's comparison of Constantinople to Baghdad is significant. He writes, [T]here is none like it in the world except Baghdad, the great city of Islam.[21]

Benjamin, a Jewish traveler, sees Constantinople and Baghdad as equals, even though Baghdad is an Islamic city. His recognition for these two cities over others suggests that he does not consider one superior to the other based on religious dominance. This challenges the idea of Western superiority. Jacobs argues that medieval Jewish travel literature does not adhere to a hegemonic discourse of the Orient and does not clearly distinguish between the East and the West.[22] Benjamin admires the Muslim city of Baghdad. He adds complexity to the "self" and "other" relationship by mentioning the division between the Greek and Roman churches. He notes, 'In Constantinople, there is the church of Hagia

[15]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 9.
[16]Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels,* 360.
[17]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 11.
[18]Jacobs, *Reorienting the East,* 83.
[19]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 21.
[20]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 21.
[21]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 21.
[22]Jacobs, *Reorienting the East*, 207.

Sophia, and the seat of the Patriarch of the Greeks, since the Greeks do not obey the Pope of Rome.[23] As an outsider to Constantinople, Benjamin can see the duality of religious authority between the Western and Eastern churches, also known as the schism. The medieval Sephardic traveler takes an unbiased position on the division within the Christian world. He does not distinguish between which side is good or bad, but he does point out the separation among Christians, who tend to otherize one another within their religious group.

Benjamin does not compare his religion to other religions he encounters. Generally, Jewish travelers do not engage in polemic or portray themselves as religious authorities.[24] In this context, Benjamin challenges the idea of a unified Christian world from a Jewish perspective and highlights the complexities of religious identity in the medieval era. During the medieval period, the diversity and division within religion were not limited to Islam and Christianity, as mentioned by Benjamin. This division is also evident within Judaism. For example, Benjamin states that in one of the Jewish neighborhoods in Constantinople, there are "about 2,000 Rabbanite Jews and about 500 Karaites, and a fence divides them.[25] The Jewish voyager from Iberia also visits Cyprus and notices different groups of Jewish people with varying religious practices. He observes Rabbanite Jews, Karaïtes, and a group known as the Epikursin, who have been excommunicated by Jews everywhere for their heretical beliefs. This sect does not observe the Sabbath eve and instead celebrates the first night of the week as the end of the Sabbath.[26]

During this period, Judaism wasn't a single unified religion. In addition to the dominant Rabbanite tradition, which focused on following Rabbinic interpretations of scripture, there was a smaller group known as the Karaites. The Karaites didn't recognize the authority of the Rabbis and only followed a literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.[27] Benjamin of Tudela mentions a heretical Jewish group known as the Epikursin. These individuals were excommunicated by the wider Jewish community because their beliefs were considered deviant by mainstream Judaism. One specific practice mentioned by Benjamin is that the Epikursin observed religious rituals at a different time. Unlike the traditional Jewish Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday, the Epikursin observed a different holy day, starting on Saturday night and possibly ending on Sunday evening. In Benjamin's travel narrative, he frequently mentions the number of Jewish populations in the places he visits. A notable example is his visit to Caesarea, where he distinguishes between Jews and Samaritans (also known as Cuthim and Jews of Shomron, a Jewish sect). He states that in Caesarea, there are about 200 Jews and 200 Cuthim, while in Nablous, there are no Jews but approximately 1,000 Cuthim.[28] According to Benjamin, the Samaritans adhere to the written law of Moses alone. They have priests of the seed of Aaron, called Aaronim, who do not intermarry with Cuthim but only amongst themselves.[29]

Benjamin explains that the Samaritan alphabet is missing three letters, and the absence of each letter carries significance to him.[30] Accordingly, the letter attributed to Abraham, about whom Benjamin tells our father, points to a lack of dignity. The letter attributed to Isaac points to a lack of kindliness. Lastly, the letter attributed to Jacob points to a lack of humility. These letters were replaced with another one called the Aleph.[31] The Iberian Jewish traveler explains that although the Samaritans acknowledge the law of Moses, they do not follow the three letters and sever their ties with the seed of Israel.[32] Benjamin informs about approximately two hundred Rabbanite Jews, forty Karaites, and three hundred

[23]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 21.
[24]Weber, "Sharing the sites", 42.
[25]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 24.
[26]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 26.
[27]The Rabbanite-Karaite debate centred on biblical interpretation, specifically who had the authority to interpret scripture and the proper methods of interpretation. Rabbanites argued that any legal ambiguities in the Bible were resolved through the authoritative traditions documented in the Talmud. In contrast, Karaites emphasized the interpreter's independence in defining the details of the Law. See, Daniel Frank, "Rabbanites and Karaites in the East (Tenth–Eleventh Centuries)" in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: A-K, Index,* ed. Josef W. Meri, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 709.
[28]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 33.
[29]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 33-34.
[30]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 34.
[31]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 34.
[32]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 34.

Cuthim in New Askelon. [33] Furthermore, one hundred Karaites live in Damascus, along with four hundred Cutheans, and there is peace between them, but they do not intermarry.[34]

It seems that Benjamin does not consider all these subgroups to be Jews and makes a clear distinction between himself and them. The Iberian Jewish traveler does not differentiate between Judaism and Islam or between Christianity and Islam but does identify different Jewish subgroups individually. According to Weber, Jewish travelers universally portray Samaritans and Karaites as being outside the fold, yet they show more interest in these groups than in Christianity or Islam.[35] The previous mention of disagreements within Muslim and Christian communities is not the only instance of internal division within a religious group. The Jewish community, often marginalized in both Muslim and Christian contexts, comprises various subgroups with diverse beliefs and practices. This internal division highlights the limitations of Orientalism's binary framework, showing that the lines between "self" and "other" may not be limited to different belief groups, but also extend to members within the same religious group. Benjamin refers to a synagogue built by Ezra in Harran, located on the site of the house of Terah and his son, Abraham. The site remains uncovered by any buildings, and it holds great significance for Muslims who gather there to pray.[36] Benjamin visited Baghdad during the reign of Caliph al-Mustanjid, who ruled the Abbasid Caliphate from 1160 to 1170.[37] The medieval Sephardic traveler compares the role of the Islamic caliph to that of the Pope over the Christians and lists many positive aspects of him:

There, the great king, Al Abbasi the Caliph (Hafiz) holds his court, and he is kind unto Israel, and many belonging to the people of Israel are his attendants; he knows all languages, and is well versed in the law of Israel. He reads and writes the holy language (Hebrew). He will not partake of anything unless he has earned it by the work of his own hands […] He is truthful and trusty, speaking peace to all men.[38]

Benjamin refers to the Abbasid Caliph, known for his kindness towards the Jewish community. Many Jewish officials hold positions in his court. Benjamin highlights the Caliph's proficiency in multiple languages, including Hebrew, which suggests a recognition of linguistic and cultural parity. The Caliph emphasizes the importance of earning through personal effort, avoiding any benefit not acquired through his own labor. He is recognized for his honesty, dependability, and consistent promotion of harmony and goodwill among all people. It is evident that the medieval Jewish voyager remains impartial throughout his travelogue and is determined to give an objective account of his experiences. He portrays the Muslim caliph as a leader who respects and values the Jewish people. Additionally, the caliph employs Jews as his attendants. Consequently, one could argue that there is no discernible difference in the treatment of Jews between Christian-ruled Rome and Muslim-ruled Baghdad, as Jews are held in high regard in both cities. Furthermore, Benjamin's reference to the attendants of the Muslim caliph as the people of Israel is not unprecedented.

Benjamin of Tudela depicts the caliph as a benevolent and righteous ruler, emphasizing that he established a hospital for the treatment of the poor and those suffering from mental illness, fully funding its operation.[39] Benjamin's positive comments about the caliph suggest that people from different groups can appreciate and respect each other. During the reign of the Muslim caliph, Benjamin of Tudela reports that approximately 40,000 Jews resided in Baghdad, enjoying safety, economic prosperity, and social recognition.[40] The Navarrean traveler observed that the Jewish community in Baghdad included renowned scholars who presided over academies dedicated to the study of Jewish law.[41] He mentions the presence of twenty-eight Jewish synagogues in Baghdad, demonstrating a substantial Jewish

[33]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 45.
[34]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 49.
[35]Weber, *Traveling through Text,* 111.
[36]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 52.
[37]John Block Friedman, and Kristen Mossler Figg. *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 43.
[38]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 55-56.
[39]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 59-60.
[40]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 60.
[41]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 60.

community and their right to practice their religion in this Islamic city.[42] The thriving Jewish community in Baghdad under Muslim rule serves as evidence that different religious groups could coexist peacefully. This indicates that Jews in Baghdad are not segregated and are allowed to openly practice their religion in their places of worship throughout the city.

Benjamin discusses a situation where Muslims and Jews honor Ezekiel, a Hebrew prophet from the Babylonian captivity, at his burial site and the nearby synagogue named after him in Baghdad. Jews regard this site as sacred and organize a religious festival known as Fera, extending from the Jewish New Year to the Day of Atonement.[43] During this festival, a Torah scroll, traditionally attributed to Ezekiel the Prophet, is ceremonially read aloud.[44] Jewish people from Persia and Media, along with Mohammedans, come to this site to pray. Muslims greatly honor the Prophet Ezekiel and refer to the area as Bar (Dar) Melicha, meaning the Dwelling of Beauty.[45] Benjamin suggests that the reverence for Ezekiel extends beyond the Jewish community. In addition to attracting Jews from neighboring Persia and Media, the site also draws a notable contingent of "Distinguished Mohammedans," indicating the profound respect for Ezekiel held by Muslims. They call it "Bar (Dar) Melicha," which translates to "the Dwelling of Beauty." Benjamin of Tudela also draws attention to a similar situation in Basra:

In front of his [Ezra's] sepulchre is a large synagogue. And at the side thereof the Mohammedans erected a house of prayer out of their great love and veneration for him, and they like the Jews on that account. And the Mohammedans come hither to pray.[46]

This passage indicates that both Muslims and Jews have a shared respect and admiration for the revered figure of Ezra. The fact that Muslims built a house of prayer next to Ezra's tomb shows their deep love and reverence for him, like the sentiments held by Jews. This shared reverence suggests common ground between the two religious communities, as both Muslims and Jews are drawn to this sacred site to offer their prayers. During the Middle Ages, the tombs of saints were visited by Jewish, Muslim, and Christian pilgrims.[47] Benjamin, a Jewish traveler, observes that both Muslims and Jews visit these two holy sites. The shrines attributed to Ezekiel and Ezra were regional pilgrimage centers for Jews and were also revered by Muslims.[48] Muslims and Jews revere and respect the same figure, indicating a degree of understanding and acceptance between them to illustrate the complexity of the self and other dichotomy:

Mizraim refers to the great city located on the banks of the Nile, also known as Pison or Al-Nil. The number of Jewish inhabitants is about 7,000. Two large synagogues are there, one belonging to the men of the land of Israel and one belonging to the men of the land of Babylon. The synagogue of the men of the land of Israel is called Kenisat-al- Schamiyyin, and the synagogue of the men of Babylon is called Kenisat-al-Irakiyyin. Their practices concerning the division of the Law differ. The Babylonian Jewish community follows the custom of reading one portion each week, a practice also observed in Spain, completing the Torah within a year. In contrast, the Palestinian Jewish community divides each portion into three sections, completing the Torah over a three-year cycle. The two communities, however, have an established custom to unite and pray together on the day of the Rejoicing of the Law, and on the day of the Giving of the Law.[49]

[42]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 64.
[43]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 68.
[44]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 68.
[45]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 68-9.
[46]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary* 74.
[47]Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria. Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146–1260)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199-200.
[48]Ezekiel is a Quranic prophet, known as Dhū 'l-Kifl (Quran, al-Anbya, 21/85; Quran, Sad, 38/48); Ezra is another Quranic prophet known as Uzair (Quran at-Tawbah, 9/30). Joseph W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.
[49]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 99.

Benjamin discusses the different practices of the people of the land of Israel in Mizraim (Egypt), noting two large synagogues with distinct religious practices. One belongs to the men of the land of Israel and the other to the men of the land of, who are divided based on their reading of the Torah. Benjamin does not consider Babylon himself superior to them and acknowledges that the men of Babylon read the Torah as it is done in Spain.[50] The traveler from Iberia refers to Spain without employing possessive expressions related to territorial affiliation. At this point, Benjamin's approach to his fellow religious practitioners is neither superior nor inferior but neutral. The Tudelan voyager depicts Alexandria as a bustling marketplace and economic center where merchants from various Christian and Muslim kingdoms trade, highlighting the interconnection between the East and the West:

Alexandria is a commercial market for all nations. Merchants come from all the Christian kingdoms: on the one side, from the land of Venetia and Lombardy, Tuscany, Apulia, Amalfi, Sicilia, Calabria, Romagna, Khazaria, Patzinakia, Hungaria, Bulgaria, Rakuvia (Ragusa?), Croatia, Slavonia, Russia, Alamannia (Germany), Saxony, Danemark, Kurland? Ireland? Norway (Norge?), Frisia, Scotia, Angleterre, Wales, Flanders, Hainault? Normandy, France, Poitiers, Anjou, Burgundy, Maurienne, Provence, Genoa, Pisa, Gascony, Aragon, and Navarra, and towards the west under the sway of the Mohammedans, Andalusia, Algarve, Africa and the land of the Arabs: and on the other side India, Zawilah, Abyssinia, Lybia, El-Yemen, Shinar, Esh-Sham (Syria); also Javan, whose people are called the Greeks, and the Turks. And merchants of India bring thither all kinds of spices, and the merchants of Edom buy of them. And the city is a busy one and full of traffic. Each nation has an inn of its own.[51]

In this passage, Benjamin paints a vivid picture of Alexandria as a bustling commercial hub that attracts merchants from various regions and nations. He describes a vibrant and cosmopolitan atmosphere where trade and commerce thrive, drawing traders from Christian kingdoms such as Venetia, Lombardy, Tuscany, Sicily, and other regions, as well as regions under Muslim influence like Andalusia, Algarve, and Arab lands. Additionally, he mentions trade connections with India, Abyssinia, Syria, and other distant regions, emphasizing Alexandria's role as a major trade hub where merchants from diverse backgrounds established their accommodations.-During the medieval period, Alexandria was a major trade center in the Mediterranean, attracting merchants from all over the world.[52] As a crossroads connecting various regions of the world, Alexandria's demographic diversity warrants discussion, particularly regarding the movement of people in and out of the city. The exchange of goods between different regions also led to the exchange of cultures. Benjamin identifies numerous cultural identities within the East and the West rather than presenting a homogenized view of the East or West. He also emphasizes the presence of inns owned by merchants from diverse backgrounds, suggesting a coexistence of various cultures and a degree of social parity among them. Benjamin challenges the Orientalist understanding of a hierarchical relationship between Eastern and Western people by not portraying any nation as superior or inferior to others. The Sephardic traveler highlights Palermo, a bustling commercial center in the Mediterranean located on the island of Sicily. It is home to around 1,500 Jews, alongside a significant population of Christians and Muslims.[53] The city, serving as a trade center where Eastern and Western cultures intersect, has a multicultural population that challenges the strict East-West division promoted by Orientalist ideology. Trade brings together people of different religious and cultural backgrounds, making it difficult to identify a homogenous community, unlike other trade-centered cities. Travelers of different religious backgrounds peacefully coexist in a city under the governance of a ruling authority representing a separate faith

CONCLUSION

Travelogues offer insights into various cultures, traditions, and beliefs, enriching our understanding of human relationships and cross-cultural exchanges. Medieval travelogues, often based on firsthand accounts, depict the complexities of diverse societies. Said argued that Western representations of the East have been oversimplified to justify imperialism, framing the East as the Other. This paper offers an

[50] Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 99.
[51] Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 107.
[52]Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders,* 113; David Jacoby, *Medieval Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 139.
[53]Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary,* 109.

alternative perspective to Said's viewpoint by examining the concepts of the self and the other in the medieval context, focusing on the travelogue of the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela. This paper illustrates the limitations of Orientalist binary oppositions. It highlights how Benjamin's Jewish identity shaped his perspective and emphasizes coexistence among Jews, Christians, and Muslims rather than reinforcing the East-West divide. Rather than conforming to rigid Orientalist discourse categories, Benjamin focuses on acknowledging differences by highlighting respect and common ground in his portrayal of Muslim communities. While Benjamin's Jewish identity undoubtedly shapes his perspective, his work does not limit him to a rigid, ethnocentric worldview which brings Jews to the foreground. Instead, he offers the complexities of Jewish communities among themselves across different regions and mentions varying Jewish customs and practices encountered throughout his travels. Furthermore, his portrayal of Muslim communities often emphasizes shared ground and a sense of respect. This focus on both intra-religious difference and interfaith commonality suggests that Benjamin is interested in negotiating differences rather than holding on to the fixed categories of the Orientalist discourse.[54]

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