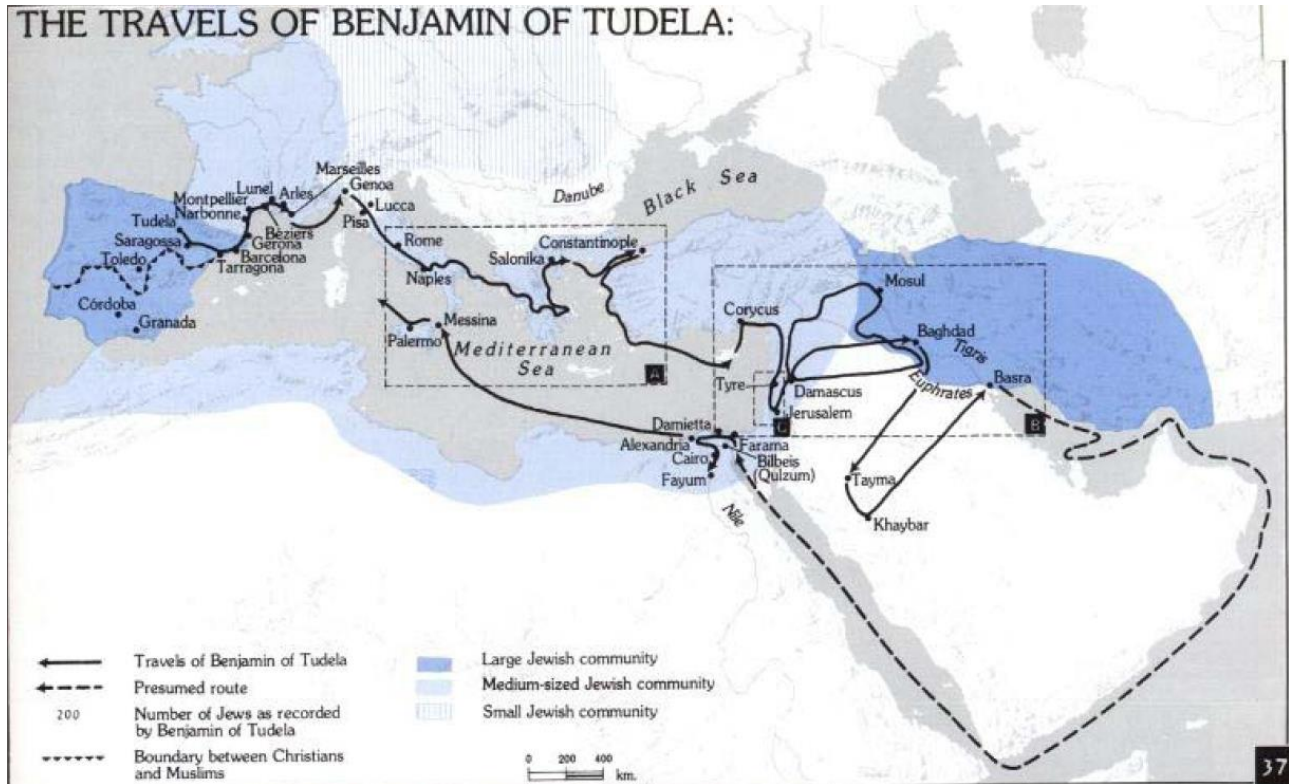


Names from *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*
 By Reb Eleazar ha-Levi
eleazar_halevi@yahoo.com
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Benjamin ben Jonah was a Jewish merchant, who lived in the city of Tudela in the northern Spanish Kingdom of Navarre in the second half of the Twelfth Century. Some time in 1165, he left the nearby city of Saragossa for a journey that would take him to Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Baghdad and beyond before he returned in 1173. He described that journey in a book, *The Itinerary of Benjamin* (*Masa'ot Binyamin*, also known as *Sefer ha-Masa'ot*, The Book of Travels). Hereafter, I will refer to his work as *The Itinerary*. The map¹ below shows his route.



The Itinerary describes the countries he visited, with an emphasis on the Jewish communities, including their total populations and the names of notable community leaders. He also described the customs and types of work of the local population, both Jewish and non-Jewish. There are also detailed descriptions of sites and landmarks he passed along the way, including lengthy descriptions of such cities as Rome, Constantinople, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Baghdad. He includes palaces, churches and synagogues, other important buildings, and tombs. Most notable of the latter is the tombs at the Cave of Machpela, where the Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their wives, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah are buried.²

Benjamin is noted for the level of detail and accuracy of his material, which matches the information in other period sources. Historians regard him as highly trustworthy, although some of his material beyond Baghdad read more like something he was told, rather than something he experienced.

What makes *The Itinerary* of interest to heralds is that, for the Spain to Baghdad portion of his trip, he also mentioned the names of one or more Jewish leaders in each town. He referred to them mostly by their first names, always using the honorific, Reb. Occasionally, he added a patronymic or descriptive byname.

Since he often gives three names for a community, it has been suggested³ that those named are the members of the local Jewish court or Bet Din, which had jurisdiction over both religious and civil law.

This paper is an analysis of those names by country and region. The three regions I use here are: Western Europe (Spain France, and Italy; 108 individuals), the Byzantine (Greece and Turkey; 70 individuals), and the Middle East (From Antioch to Baghdad; 79 individuals). The regions reflect the three separate cultures and, most importantly, religions: Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Islam in which the Jews lived.

My primary sources in this paper were three versions of *The Itinerary*:

- *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages*, Introduction by Michael A. Signer. (New York, New York: Joseph Simon Publisher, 1983).
- *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, Critical Text, Translation, and Commentary* by Marcus Nathan Adler, M.A. (New York, New York: Phillip Feldheim, Inc., 1909).
- *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, Translation by Abraham Asher, This includes: volume 1 “Text, Bibliography, and Translation” and volume 2, “Notes and Essays”. (New York, New York: Hakesheth Publishing Company, 1840). The Asher edition contains work by Leopold Zunz, philologist and writer on (among many other subjects) Jewish onomastics.⁴

I also used *The Complete Dictionary of English and Hebrew First Names* by Alfred J. Kolatch. (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1984).

Kolatch gives very little information regarding the time period in which a name was used. He will cite a place in the Bible where a name may be found or state that it was the name of one of the Sages of the Talmudic period (roughly 500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.⁵). That is his limit. However, I am not using him for that.

I am using him as a baby-name book: to find the correct English spelling of names (based on the Hebrew in the Adler version), their meanings, and any alternative forms. There was no point in using it to document the time period for a name, since I had three separate editions of the primary source in front of me.

The Signer edition was solely in English. The Adler edition contained the Hebrew text, but without the vowels. The Asher edition had vowels, but it was located in the reference section of the Hebrew University of Baltimore. I was unable to consult it until the very end of my research due to its non-circulating status and the 75-mile driving distance from my home to the library.

Hebrew vowel notation consists of marks made above, below, or next to a letter of the alphabet. The vowels are not themselves letter, and a frequently absent from important texts, most notably a scroll of the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, a portion of which is read every Jewish Sabbath and holiday. Hebrew has an advantage over English in being much more regular in its spelling.

To consider the importance of vowels to the understanding of a word, consider that, depending on the vowels used with them, the letters D-G can refer to DOG or EDGE.⁶

Kolatch contained most of the names found in *The Itinerary* with their vowels and with alternative spellings. This is exactly what any “modern baby-name book” would contain, and that is how it was used.

* * * * *

The format for this paper will be a discussion of the names by country and region. For the most part, the names given are the original Hebrew in *The Itinerary*. There were a few names, such as Reb Ulsarnu of Lunel, France, for which the Hebrew was simply a transliteration of a name in the local vernacular. Also, the

Hebrew name recorded by Benjamin of Tudela does not reflect local vernacular versions by which the individuals were known. Thus, a man with the Hebrew name Avraham was Abraham in France, Abramo in Italy, and Ibrahim in the Middle East.

Where a name appears more than once, a number is given in parentheses. If one or more instances of a given name are the father of an individual, they are separated from the others. For example, there are three individuals in France with Abba Mari as a part of their name: Reb Abba Mari ben Yitzchak of Bourg de St. Giles, Reb Abba Mari of Arles, and Reb Yitzchak ben Abba Mari of Marseilles. For France, then, the name appears in the chart below as Abba Mari (2/1). If a name only appears as the name of a father, it also will be noted with parentheses, for example, also in France, Dovid (/1).

Following the frequency counts for the first names, there will be supplementary discussion of some of the first names, followed by a discussion of bynames. At the end of the paper, I'll show the Anglicized version of a number of the names.

The Western European Region

Spain, France, and Italy all three had some history of Jewish persecution, and it has been suggested that Benjamin of Tudela made his journey to see the condition the Jewish communities in these countries as well as to scout possible places of refuge if the persecutions returned or worsened.⁷

Western European Region				
Spain	France		Italy	
Avraham	Abba Mari (2/1)	Moshe (3)	Abu-al-Gir	Menachem (2)
Binyamin	Aharon	Natan (2)	Achimatz	Moshe
Chisdai (/1)	Antolin	Natanel	Avraham (2)	Natan (3/1)
Shealtiel	Asher	Reuven	Binyamin	Pelit (/1)
Sheshet	Avraham (5)	Shimon	Chananel	Shabbetai (/1)
Shlomo	Benevist	Shlomo (5)	Chayim	Shallum
Yonah (/1)	Binyamin	Shmuel (2)	Chizkiah	Shlomo (1/1)
	Chalafta	Simeon	Conso	Shmuel
	Dovid (/1)	Tivon	Consoli (1/1)	Tzemach
	Eleazar	Todros (/2)	Daniel	Yechiel (2)
	Kalonymos	Tovi	Dovid (2)	Yehudah
	Levi (/1)	Ulsarnu	Elisha	Yisrael (2)
	Libero	Ya'akov (5/1)	Elijah	Yitzchak (3)
	Machir	Yehudah (3)	Hamon	Yo'ab
	Meir (/3)	Yeshaya	Kalev	Yosef (3)
	Melchi Tzaddik (/1)	Yitzchak (6/1)	Kalonymos	Zaken
	Menachem (/1)	Yosef	Mali	Zerach
	Meshulam	Zacharyah	Meir (2)	
	Mordechai			
Most Common Names in Region:				
Yitzchak (9/1)	Ya'akov (7/1)	Meir (2/3)	Yehudah (3/1)	Dovid (3)
Avraham (8)	Yosef (6)	Natan (4/1)	Abba Mari (3)	Elijah (3)
Shlomo (7/1)	Moshe (5)	Shmuel (4)	Binyamin (3)	Menachem (2/1)

Notes on Western European Given Names:

Most of the comments here come from the notes in the Asher edition.

- *Abu-al-Gir*: This name means “Father of the Young Lion.” Jews living in Islamic areas adopted the Arab custom of referring to a man as Abu (Father of) and the name of his son, usually the oldest son. The next step was to reference a person in the Bible in the same name; for example, any man named Avraham would be called, in Arabic, Abu Ishaq. Since Abu also can mean “possessor of a given quality”, abstract concepts were applied, such as Abu al-Barakot, “Father of Blessings”. The Jewish

surname Abulafia derives from Abu-al-Fiya (possessor of health).⁸ The individual in *The Itinerary* lived in Amalfi, Italy, which had long traded with Egypt. The Norman kings of Sicily and southern Italy, who lived at the time of Benjamin, tolerated Jews and Moslems and allowed them to settle where they wanted within their lands.⁹

Jewish custom calls Jews to adopt a common name, the *kinnui*, for everyday matters. *Kinnui* could be:

- The Hebrew name could be translated into the vernacular, with Berichiyah, "blessing", became Benedict;
- A name similar in sound to -- or using some of the letters in -- the Hebrew name such as Robert for Reuben;
- A nickname derived from the Hebrew name, such as Hok, and Copin, derived from *Yitz-hok* and *Ya-a-kov*, respectively, and Biket was used for Rebecca;
- A Biblical link to the Hebrew name; for example, taking the references made by Jacob on his deathbed (Genesis 49) or Moses in his final oration to the Children of Israel (Deuteronomy 33), so that Judah became Leon ("Judah is a lion's whelp. (Genesis 49.9)"). Other times, a more obscure reference was used. Jacobs suggests that Jornet, coming from the word "jerkin" (jacket) was a *kinnui* for Joseph. And, in what seems to be a rare instance, the name Belaset was derived from *bella assez* (fair to look upon) and applied to Rachel (Genesis 29:17, "Rachel was fair to look upon.")
- A reference to the day the individual was born, with Bonevent (good day) referred to a child born on a holiday, especially Passover.¹⁰

The phrase "al-Gir" may be a *kinnui* for the name Judah. The name Judah has been linked with a lion (or lion's whelp) ever since Jacob blessed his sons in Genesis 49:9, with variants on "lion" serving as both a given name and a surname throughout Western Europe.

- *Chalafta*: The name was mostly used in France. (Asher, vol. 2, p. 9-10)
- *Conso* and *Consoli* may be *kinnui* for Moses, who was referred to as the master counselor of history. A later form, Consiglio was used during the Renaissance.¹¹
- *Kalonymos* and *Todros*: Two of the three Greek names that have been used by Jews since ancient times. The third is Alexander (from Alexander the Great.) *Kalonymos* means "beautiful name", while *Todros* is Greek from "Gift (from G-d)" and is akin to Natan (Nathan), which means the same in Hebrew.
- *Kalev*: The equivalent of the English name "Caleb". Asher says that the name was more frequently found in Greece. (Asher, v. 2, p. 10). The Byzantine Empire and their Moslem rivals fought over Southern Italy for several centuries before being driven out by the Normans around the year 1100. The Normans were tolerant of both cultures, which left remnants, including names.
- *Libero*: Asher (v1, p. 14) gives the alternate L'varo. The name may be a variant on Levi.
- *Melchi Tzaddik*: This name means "King of the Righteous" and may have been an honorific applied to a particular individual, rather than a given name.
- *Shabbattai*: According to Asher (vol. 2, p. 20), prior to the 16th Century, this name was found in Italy and Greece, rarely in Germany, and even more rarely in Spain.
- *Sheshet*: The name, which means "Sixth (Son)", was used from the 11th to the 13th Centuries in Catalonia, Aragon, and Provance, but almost nowhere else. It may reflect the Roman (and Italian) habit of using cardinal numbers as given names.

Notes on Western European Bynames:

Most of these bynames had the Hebrew prefix “ha”, which means “the” in front; for example, “ha-Kohane” and “ha-Rophe” mean “the Cohane” and “the healer”, respectively.

- *Darshan*: The term means “preacher” and refers to an individual who wrote and delivered homilies in a synagogue on the Sabbath.
- *Kohane*: The term means that individual is descended from the high priests of ancient Israel. Use of the byname is, thus, prescribed in Jewish Law, and it would not be used by someone who is not a Cohane.
- *Paroosh*: This is an obscure term meaning “recluse” or “ascetic”.
- *Parnas and Rosh*: The text identifies two categories of community leader. The Parnas (warden) oversaw the collection and distribution of communal charity. The Rosh (head) was the chief officer of the community, sometimes with the responsibility of affixing his name to legal documents.¹² The titles were used in all three regions discussed in this paper.
- *Rophe*: The word means “healer.” The Hebrew name Raphael means “G-d will heal.” In modern times, it is usually translated as physician, but it could as well mean “herbalist”, “healer”, or “surgeon”, which was a different profession from a physician. Rophe also appears as a byname in the other regions.
- *Zakan*: The byname means “elder.” It may refer to the individual’s age or status.

There were also a number of *locative bynames* that reflect, to some extent, the mobility of the Jewish population.

- *M’Har Napos*: The prefix “m” translates as “of” or “from”, while “har” means “mountain. This individual is from Mount Napos.
- *Narboni*: Reb Abraham Narboni (of Narbonne) lived in Salerno.
- *Perpignano*: This name may refer to the town of Perpignan in city in S. France, near the Spanish border, although the earliest mention of Jews in Perpignan dates from 1185.¹³ They are said to have owned real estate around this time, and Reb Ya’akov Perpignano was described in the text as “a wealthy man” (Signer edition, page 62).
- *Sephardi* and *Yavani* mean that the individuals so named were from Spain (Sepharad) and Greece (Yavan); the individuals in *The Itinerary* were Reb Yehudah ben Tivon, the Spaniard, and Reb Eliyah, the Greek. Sephardi also can be found in the other regions discussed in this paper.

The Byzantine Region

This region included all of the territory ruled from Constantinople. The influence of this Empire extended across the Mediterranean as far as Sicily and southern Italy and into the Balkans.

Byzantine Region			
Greece		Turkey	
Aliv	Moshe	Abba	Shabbattai
Avraham	Netanya	Aharon	Shabtha
Chayim	Ork	Aviyah	Shamarya or
Chiyah	Shabbattai (3)	Avtalyion	Shmaiah
Chizkiya	Shalom	Bechor	Shlomo
Elazar (2)	Shelachiah	Chananel	Ya'akov (2)
Eliab	Shilo	Eliyah (3)	Yehudah
Eliyah (3)	Shlomo (4)	Elyakim	Yitzchak
Emanuel	Shmuel (3)	Heiman (/1)	Yoel
Guri	Ya'akov (4)	Moshe	Yosef
Kalev	Yedayiah	Ovadya (2)	
Kuti	Yeshayah		
Leon	Yitzchak (3)		
Machir	Yoktan		
Micha'el (2)	Yosef (4)		
Most Common Names in Region:			
Eliyah (6)	Shabbattai (4)	Micha'el (2)	
Ya'akov (6)	Yitzchak (4)	Moshe (2)	
Shlomo (5)	Shmuel (3)	Ovadya (2)	
Yosef (5)	Elazar (2)		

Notes on Byzantine Given Names:

Again, most of the comments here come from the notes in the Asher edition.

- *Bechor*: The word means “first-born” or “elder.” Kolatch says that it was used as a first name among Sephardic Jews (p. 34). It should be noted that the Jews scattered across the Mediterranean after the Expulsion from Spain in 1492. The term Sephardim now refers to most Mediterranean Jews, including those whose ancestors lived in the Byzantine region long before being joined by their Spanish co-religionists.
- *Guri*: This name means “lion” and may be a kinnui for Yehudah.
- *Kuti*: Adler suggests that this is a “pet name” for Yekutiel. (Asher, vol. 1, p. 47)
- *Micha'el*: This name is only found among Greek Jews. (Asher, vol. 2, p. 43).
- *Ork*: This name is the Hebrew version of the name of Reb Hercules of the Greek city of Arta.
- *Yoktan*: Asher describes the name as “rare” on vol, 2, p. 37

Notes on Byzantine Bynames:

Most of the bynames in this region were physical descriptors:

- *Kapur*: short (Asher, vol. 2, p. 55).
- *Magas*: Big or tall (Asher, vol. 2, p. 55).
- *Zutra*: Little (Asher, vol. 2, p. 55).

Or locative bynames:

- *Lombardo*: The Lombard
- *Mitzri*: The Egyptian.”

The one exception was *Psalteri*. None of the editions explain or comment on this name. Since the word means a collection of the psalms, which were prayers intended to be sung, one possibility is that the byname was a kinnui for a singer of psalms; that is a chazzan, the person who leads the singing in communal prayer.

The Middle Eastern Region

This is the remainder of *The Itinerary* though Benjamin’s descriptions of the City of Baghdad, “the great city and the royal residence of the Caliph Emir al Muminin al Abbasi... the head of the Mohammedan religion.”¹⁴

Middle Eastern Region		
Aharon	Eli (/1)	Shlomo (4)
Avraham (4)	Ezra	Simchah
Azaryah	Heiman	Tahor
Bostanai (/1)	Ishmael	Tzadok (2)
Chagi	Matzliach	Tzemach (1/1)
Chanan	Meir (3)	Uziel
Chananyah	Mordechai	Ya’akov
Chayim (2)	Moshe (2)	Yavin
Chen	Mubchar	Yefet
Chisdah (/1)	Muchtar	Yehosef
Chiyah (2)	Nedib	Yehoyakim
Chizkiya	Netanel	Yitzchak (4)
Daniel (2)	Ovadaya	Yonah
Efrayim	Sar Shalom	Yosef (7)
Elazar (2)	Shmuel (2)	Zaken
Elchanan	Shet	Zakkai (3)
<u>Most Common Names in Region:</u>		
Yosef (7)	Chayim (2)	Moshe (2)
Avraham (4)	Chiyah (2)	Shmuel (2)
Shlomo (4)	Daniel (2)	Tzadok (2)
Yitzchak (4)	Elazar (2)	Tzidkiya (2)
Meir (3)		

Notes on Middle Eastern Given Names:

- *Chen*: The name means “grace or charm.” It is the masculine form of the name, with Channah (Anna) as the feminine form of the same name.
- *Sar Shalom*: This name translates as “Prince of Peace.” (Sar is the masculine equivalent of Sarah.)
- *Yehosef*: name is a variant of Yosef.
- *Zaken*: The name means “old” or “ancient.” There is a folk tradition in Judaism of renaming a very sick child with a name like Chayim (Life) or Zaken, so that the Angel of Death can’t find him or her. “I’ve come for the child,” the Angel says, and the reply is that that there is only Zakan (the Old One). Confused, the Angel leaves, and the child survives.¹⁵

Notes on Middle Eastern Bynames:

Chozah: This term can be translated as “astronomer”, “astrologer”, “seer” or “prophet.”

Dayan: This is the title of a member of the Jewish Courts that could be found in all three regions. Jewish communities were allowed a great deal of autonomy in matters covered by Talmudic Law, both religious and secular.¹⁶

There were several individuals with the locative bynames: *Constantani* (from Constantinople). People were also identified as coming from Tyre and the town of Carcassone

Nasi: This title means “Prince.” In some cases, it denoted that the individual was descended from King David. In other cases, it was an appointed title for the head of the community.

Anglicized Names

The table below shows the most common English language version of some of the names on the regional lists above. It is given here to allow for those who would want a more familiar version of the Hebrew name.

Anglicized Names			
Hebrew	English	Hebrew	English
Aharon	Aaron	Ovadya	Obediah
Avraham	Abraham	Reuven	Reuben
Avtalyion	Abtalion	Shlomo	Solomon
Binyamin	Benjamin	Shmuel	Samuel
Chagi	Haggi	Tivon	Tibbon
Chizkiya	Hezekiah	Ya’akov	Jacob
Dovid	David	Yehudah	Judah
Efrayim	Ephraim	Yitzchak	Isaac
Eliyah	Elijah	Yoel	Joel
Kalev	Caleb	Yonah	Jonah
Micha’el	Michael	Yosef	Joseph
Moshe	Moses	Zacharyah	Zachariah
Natan	Nathan		

Footnotes

- ¹ ----, “Benjamin of Tudela”, *Wikipedia*. The map shown was online at en.wikipedia.org/Benjamin_of_Tudela on June 8, 2008.
- ² Adam and Eve are also said to have been buried at the site. Jacob’s second wife, Rachel, the mother of Joseph, was buried by Jacob on the road to Efrat, just outside Bethlehem.. “Cave of the Patriarchs” and “Rachel”, both in *Wikipedia*. This information was found online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave_of_the_Patriarchs and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_Bible on June 9, 2008.
- ³ The Signer edition, page 23. A full discussion of the Bet Din may be found at Cohn, Haim Hermann, Isaac Levitats, and Moshe Drori. "Bet Din and Judges." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 3. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 512-524. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. State Library of Pennsylvania. The material was online on June 12, 2008 at <http://go.galegroup.com/navigator-stlib.passhe.edu/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=pl2881>.
- ⁴ More information on Zunz may be found at Glatzer, Nahum N. and Gregor Pelger. "Zunz, Leopold." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 21. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 684-688. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. State Library of Pennsylvania. The material was online on June 13, 2008 at <http://go.galegroup.com/navigator-stlib.passhe.edu/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=pl2881>.
- ⁵ For obvious reasons, Jews prefer not to use the overtly Christian B.C. and A.D. system to mark years. Instead, the Before Common Era (B.C.E.) and Common Era (C.E.) system is used for the same years. This article was written

in the year 2008 C.E. Jewish calendar dates use Anno Mundi (year of the world). This Jewish year, which ends on September 29 is 5768 A.M.

- ⁶ For a *lengthy* discussion of the Hebrew system of vowels see Weingreen, Jacob Ben-Hayyim Zeev, and Ornan Uzzi "Hebrew Grammar." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. p554-620. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. State Library of Pennsylvania. The material was online on June 12, 2008 at <http://go.galegroup.com/navigator-stlib.passhe.edu/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=pl2881>.
- ⁷ Signer edition, page 26. Signer suggests that Benjamin was also going *aliyah*; that is, making a religious pilgrimage to Palestine. Benjamin includes the mention of numerous synagogues and tombs in his work, as well as a visit to Jerusalem. That city was almost empty of Jews, since most were killed when the Crusaders took the City in 1099 and few were allowed in.
- ⁸ Berenbaum, Michael and Skolnik, Fred "Abu." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed.. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 333. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. State Library of Pennsylvania. The material was online on June 14, 2008 at <http://go.galegroup.com/navigator-stlib.passhe.edu/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=pl2881>.
- ⁹ ---- "History of Islam in Southern Italy", *Wikipedia*. The information was available online on June 14, 2008 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam_in_southern_Italy.
- ¹⁰ Ha-Levi, Eleazar, "Jewish Naming Conventions in Angevin England" *1991Known World Heraldic Symposium*, page 134. The article was online on June 14, 2008 at <http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/jewish.html>.
- ¹¹ Bonfil, Robert, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, translated by Oldcorn, Anthony. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 140.
- ¹² Signer edition, pages 143 and 144.
- ¹³ Beinart, Haim. "Perpignan." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 15. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 781-782. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. State Library of Pennsylvania. On June 13, 2008, this material was available online at <http://go.galegroup.com/navigator-stlib.passhe.edu/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=pl2881>.
- ¹⁴ Signer edition, page 95. Benjamin's description of Baghdad covers some six pages.
- ¹⁵ Trachtenberg, Joshua, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion*. (New York, New York: A Temple Book -- Argeneum, 1970), pp. 204-206.
- ¹⁶ Cohn, Levitats, Drori. "Bet Din and Judges," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.