

## **Homo viator et narrans judaicus**

### Medieval Jewish Voices in the European Narrative of the Wandering Jew

Scholarly treatments of Jewish medieval travelogues have addressed these texts foremostly as historical and ethnographic documents. They have rarely been appreciated for the literary talent and craftsmanship invested in them or for their imaginative power or their potential to generate cultural images.

This is the reason why Petahiya of Regensburg's travelogue, the *Sibuv*, describing his journey to Babylonia and Palestine around the year 1180, has usually been treated with harsh criticism or at best with irony.

Petahiya's text has been rejected as fanciful, fantastic, legendary and folkloristic and it usually scores low points when compared with the accounts of his more fact-oriented contemporaries, Benjamin of Tudela and Ya'aqov ben Netanel Ha-Kohen. It is not unusual to hear hints about the possibility that Petahiya may not have visited the places he described or may even not have existed at all.<sup>1</sup>

For the same reason, and a number of others which shall be discussed further on, Petahiya of Regensburg's travelogue and the description of his pilgrimage constitutes a most adequate text for folkloristic study.

Folk literature, as folkloristic creativity in general, is characteristically traditional and collective. When it appears in the written mode it often reveals clear traces of orality and interactivity with the audience. Folk narrators tend to express themselves in traditionally crystallized genres and in inter-culturally distributed motifs. Their narrative art is best understood in the wider context of other forms of traditional creativity, beliefs, customs and rituals as well as folk art and other expressive forms of folk culture and as part and parcel of the totality of a *Lebenswelt*. They tend to communicate the "master narratives" or deep structures of their culture in generally understandable terms.

I shall discuss the following aspects of Petahiya's travelogue: 1. Orality and interactivity. 2. The cultural context of Petahiya and his audience. 3. Folk literary intertexts and parallels. 4. Narrative constructions of travelogue and pilgrimage. The discussion will mostly address more than one of the aspects at the same time.

The oral transmission of the text by Petahiya to an audience in Regensburg, Germany, in which Rabbi Judah the Pious seems to have been a central person, is rather clearly inscribed in one of the two main redactions of the travelogue, namely Gruenhut's edition following the textual tradition deriving from the Prague 1595 first printing.<sup>2</sup> The other main redaction represented in the Warsaw Ms 258<sup>3</sup> does not mention

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1 *Die Rundreise des R. Petachjah aus Regensburg* hrsg. L. Gruenhut, Jerusalem 1904.

2 Wagenseil and Ottensosser both including references to other extant versions.

Rabbi Judah but includes even more references to orality than the other redaction, such as „he told me" „Rabbi Petahiya told" etc. There is thus a clear distinction and interaction between the narrator who is also the traveller and the recorder who is the author or a link in the production of the written text.

Rabbi Judah the Pious, He-Hasid, was the charismatic leader of German Jewish Pietism, *Hasidut Ashkenaz* and a prolific author of numerous books articulating the world view of the movement in exegetic, moral, mystical and narrative modes of writing. Petahiya himself, known only as the protagonist of the travelogue - although some of his relatives were famous Talmud scholars in Prague and Regensburg - seems to have related to written documents as mere mnemo-technical devices, such as the one which he negligently had forgotten in Bohemia on his way back to Regensburg, as the text informs us. Whereas historians have skeptically debated the truth value of Petahiya's own account, the details of the recording in the German Pietist context, although of somewhat misty character, seem to have earned general recognition as historical facts.

Considering the fact that Petahiya transmitted his narrative orally to the German Pietists and that they readily turned it into a written text, it seems important to demonstrate the convergence of the poetics and the world view displayed in Petahiya's travelogue and those of the major folk literary opus of German Pietism, *Sefer Hasidim*, mainly written by Rabbi Judah. The two books bear a clear stamp of a Central European Jewish identity and they share a similar generic predilection for *mirabilia*, legendary narratives representing the world as full of marvels and miracles.<sup>4</sup>

German Pietism emerges in Jewish culture at a specific moment when its embeddedness - or rather its interactivity - in the European, and especially the German, context makes itself clearly articulated. From this very initial phase of the construction of European consciousness, the Jews are there, in their liminal position as Europeans and as Jews, echoing the strangeness of other Europeans, - usually Christians - to *themselves*. At this moment in the twelfth century, European culture crafts its mental apparatus by which this not yet existing entity will grow into a many-headed, multi-voiced, but in many ways unifiedly discernible configuration, Europe. It is in this century that Europe processes its clear distinction from its neighbors Asia and Africa, experiencing its own identity by penetrating the other. The Crusades have designed the intercultural communication of Christian Europeans with others, both within and beyond the borders of the continent, in the shape of a continuous battle, at which the stakes are high as God.

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3 Avraham David, „Rabbi Petahya of Regensburg's *Sibuv* in a New Version" *Qovetz Al Yad*. New series 13 (23), Jerusalem 1996: 237-269 (Hebrew), includes in addition to a carefully annotated printing of the Warsaw MS version also an updated discussion of the various versions in print and in manuscripts. Dr. David shared the edited manuscript with me before publication and he also kindly commented the oral presentation of this paper at the conference „Pilgrimages to the Holy Land" at the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem in February 1996.

4 Claude Bremond, Jacques LeGoff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'Exemplum* (Typologie des sources du Moyen Age Occidental, no. 40), Turnhout 1982; Jean-Claude Schmitt, „Les Traditions Folkloriques Dans la Culture Médiévale", *Archives des Sciences Sociales et Religion* 52 (1981): 5-20; idem, *Les revenants, les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale*, Paris: Gallimard 1994.

Both Rabbi Judah, 'the pious' and Rabbi Petahiya, 'the traveller' came to Regensburg from other centers of Jewish learning, Rabbi Judah from Speyer and Rabbi Petahiya from Prague. The period of their activity is parallel to the great renaissance of Jewish philosophy and mysticism in Spain, the monumental work of Maimonides and the revolutionizing enterprise of the Kabbalists. In terms of folk culture Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Petahiya mark two distinct communicative directions of constructing the universe, the vertical direction of cosmology and the horizontal direction of geography, in a way which will prove formative for the Jewish imaginary universe as well as for the German - and ultimately also European - imaginary concepts regarding the Jews.

Since Noah's ark and Odysseus' sea journey, traveling has served as one of the grand symbolical conceptualizations of human life. The symbol of the journey *qua* quest is an adequate image of life as a linear process in time, with a beginning, an irreversible movement and an end, also perceived as a goal - the end of the journey. In addition to the probable universality of the symbol of the journey, the two examples which I have given - Noah and Odysseus - also point at the convergence of two major traditions in the cultural baggage of the European mind: the biblical and the classical.

Gerhart B. Ladner has masterfully expounded the image of traveling man, the *homo viator*, as what we would today call a "key symbol" of the mediation and articulation of the opposition and communication between the terms of alienation and order in European culture.<sup>5</sup> The major personification of Jewishness in European tradition — also in elite but mainly in folk culture - is the *homo viator judaicus*, the Wandering or Eternal Jew. The full fledged form of this personification of Jewry was first crafted in Germany during the Reformation – in the late 16th, early 17th century.<sup>6</sup>

The early years of Reformation witnessed the growing popularity of the *Volksbuch* about Ahasver, the wandering cobbler from Jerusalem who was punished for not letting Jesus Christ rest on the wall of his house, while the latter was carrying the cross on the *Via Dolorosa*. The legend is thus constructed around the mythical journey which serves as the model of Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was to become one of the most popular chapbooks in the German language, second only to the *Faustbuch* in the number of editions and copies produced. No European language, as far as I know, missed the opportunity to create its own tradition of the Wandering Jew, although it was more dominant in Protestant, especially Lutheran countries. The effective figure of the Wandering Jew that has served many expressive and propagandistic aims until our own time, was not created *ex nihilo* but by interweaving numerous traditional motifs stemming from earlier periods of European folk culture. The emergence of such motifs

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<sup>5</sup> Gerhart B. Ladner, "Homo viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order", *Speculum - A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* XLII (1967): 233-259. I thank my friends and colleagues Moshe Idel and Israel Y. Yuval for drawing my attention to this important article.

<sup>6</sup> George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, Providence: Brown University Press 1968; Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, *The Wandering Jew - Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1986.

in the texts of Rabbis Judah and Petahiya demonstrates how Jewish and German folk and elite discourses interacted very early in a dialogue of similarity and difference in the construction of the European cultural identity.

Petahiya's contribution to the image of the Wandering Jew is more apparent than Rabbi Judah's: the journey he undertakes is certainly a manifestation of the all-European (if not even universal) *homo viator*.

However, his travelogue presents a specific *homo viator Judaicus*, as he wandered from one synagogue to another, from one holy tomb to another.

Jesus's wandering on the Via Dolorosa is reversely transformed into the eternal wandering of Ahasver, thus the horizontal movement is doubly connected to a vertical movement of damnation and redemption. The Jewish experience of wandering is thus present in the Christian image of the Jew from the very crucial beginning of the evolution of the European mind.

Ladner, as well as many other historians, has pinpointed the twelfth century as the great dividing line in the development of the European mind.<sup>7</sup> The French historians especially have dealt with the mind in terms of comprehensive ethnographies. The subjectivity of the Jewish mind as generated in the intellectual endeavor of Rabbis Judah and Petahiya should be seen specifically as that of the *European* Jewish mind.

"*Homo viator* - man is a wayfarer. He is a wanderer between two worlds, but in more than one sense", says Ladner. This metaphor which seems obvious for characterizing Petahiya's narrative may also be applied to Rabbi Judah's intellectual production in which two main cleavages between worlds are discernible. The first one is the seemingly unbridgeable abyss between the world of the human beings and the world of the divine. Much of the mystical speculation and the theological dialectics of Rabbi Judah, following his father Rabbi Shmuel and mainly as followed by his disciple Rabbi Elazar of Worms, is dedicated to the painstaking effort of finding an upward path from the human to the divine, through meditation and especially prayer - and to meticulous formalities designed to assure a safe route upwards and back. The two-way traffic between the divine sphere and the human world is basically envisioned as veiled and secret, and it is only perceivable by the scanty traces and marks which God has left in the world after his retraction from it as a final act of creation. The chain of separations described in Genesis chapter I is thus crowned with the radical separation between the human and the divine spheres.

Gershom Scholem has argued that theological and mystical speculation are not the areas of creativity in which the German Jewish Pietists left their most important stamp in later Jewish culture.<sup>8</sup> Later Jewish culture adopted almost completely the mapping of the roads betwixt and between the human world and the spheres of the divine as it was powerfully undertaken by the Kabbalists in the various manifestations of their learning. The influence of the German Pietists on posterity is to be found elsewhere as we shall see.

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<sup>7</sup> Haskin, LeGoff, Constable and Schmitt among others.

<sup>8</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 1961:103, 107.

The other cleavage between two worlds which is marked in the moral and ethnographic writing of the German Jewish Pietists *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, especially in the *Book of the Pious - Sefer Hasidim*,<sup>9</sup> is the gap between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Unlike the distance between human and divine, which is conceptualized as immense and unbridgeable, the path between the worlds of the living and the dead is well trodden. It is as the *viators* of this road that the German Pietists produced their most innovative discourse and it is the guidance on this road which is later quoted in innumerable rabbinic responsa, first in Europe and later outside its limits.

The space of the twelfth century universe is densely populated by spirits of the dead. *The Book of the Pious* abounds in various forms of communication about the conditions of the otherworld, some of which are very concrete. The *homo viator* of Rabbi Judah's creative imagination is therefore set, first on a route between life and death - walking on the earth and being buried in it - and later on a route from the grave to *Gan Eden* - Paradise - or *Gehinnom* - Hell. The main axis of the movements is vertical, and the most mobile stage of a person's existence seems to occur after his death. Similarly to the Christian death lore of the period, the dead wander separately or in hosts. The restless wandering is sometimes interpreted as a punishment but mostly as the way to communicate to the living how they can alleviate the suffering of their dear departed ones or warn them regarding dangers concerning them.<sup>10</sup> The utmost goal of the wandering of the dead is redemption, both of the living and the dead.

Rabbi Petahiya's travelogue, the *Sibuv*, represents at first sight a very different option in the articulation of human mobility and traveling and its emergence in the context of German Pietism thus radically stretches the horizontal axis of their imaginary mobility. Like Rabbi Judah, Petahiya too originated from an aristocratic family of scholars, in his case talmudists from Prague. But whereas Rabbi Judah's works mark him unambiguously as an *Ashkenazi* (German) Jew of the twelfth century and the texts related to his own texts are to be found in the Ashkenazi cultural sphere, in comparison Petahiya emerges as a European Jew, and formally at least the closest generic inter-text of Petahiya's production is the travelogue of his somewhat older Sephardi contemporary, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela in Navarra.<sup>11</sup> The Spanish traveler's experiences may actually have inspired Petahiya, who was apparently encouraged by his wealthy family and his friends to go on the expedition.

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9 *Sefer Hasidim, Das Buch der Frommen*, nach der Rezension in Cod. de Rossi No. 1133, ed. J. Wistinetzki, 2te Aufl. Frankfurt a.M.: M.A. Wahrmann Verlag 1924.

10 Schmitt *op.cit.* 128, 134.

11 *Masaoth: Die Reisebeschreibungen des R. Benjamin*, eds. and trans. L. Gruenhut and M.N. Adler, Jerusalem/ Frankfurt a.M. 1903-1904 (Hebrew and German, printed with the itinerary of Rabbi Petahya as mentioned above in note 1); also: M.N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, New York: Feldheim 1907; English translation in E.N. Adler, *Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages*, London: Routledge 1930.

Although both were born in elite families, the intellectual and creative imagination articulated in the works of both Rabbi Judah the Pious and Petahiya may be termed "marginal". Whereas the Pietists' marginality is possibly a social condition, the marginality of Petahiya stems from a choice to make his trip. It is generally assumed that his motivation, like the Tudelan Benjamin's before him, was primarily to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This motivation does not explain the wide range of the journeys in either of these cases, which both went much further east, at least to Babylonia. Reiner in his extensive work on the history on medieval Jewish pilgrimage suggests that both were actually traveling merchants.<sup>12</sup>

By touring the farthest known Eastern domains of the Jewish diaspora of his own time - ten days from the legendary river Sambatyon! - Petahiya defines European Jewry in counter-distinction from Near Eastern Jewry, similarly to the counter-distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewry which is expressed in the Pietist literary activity. Central Europe, Regensburg and Prague, become in his text the centre of the world to which the countries of his traveling, including the Holy Land, relate as periphery. From the Ashkenazi point of view the movement towards the Near East constitutes a reversal of the dominant movement of the founders of the communities in Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Although his route to the Near East is through East Europe, unlike Benjamin who sailed the Mediterranean, Petahiya's text nevertheless includes the topos of crossing the sea which was remarkably expressed by the poet Yehuda ha-Levi.<sup>14</sup> Petahiya crossed the northern part of the Black Sea rather than the Mediterranean as most pilgrims did.

The traveling between heaven and earth, between the domains of the divine and the human or between the dead and the living - constructs a mysteriously timeless universe in which human beings are mainly doomed to a constant limitation of their knowledge and to a constant game of hide-and-seek in which they are *a priori* inferior. Traveling to far away countries, on the other hand, implies a mastery of traveling technology and the very act of writing about strange territories constitutes an act of appropriating the other.<sup>15</sup> Thus a travelogue presents a mental image of acquiring knowledge and of widening the scope.

"Wenn Jemand eine Reise tut dann kann er 'twas erzahlen" says the German proverb, which establishes not only the genetic relationship between traveling and narrating but also the structural affinity between the two. Petahiya's narrative, although far from giving a linear account of the journey, still has the relatively fixed frame of a route in geography. What emerges is of course not only the details of the journey but

—12 Elhanan Reiner, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael 1099-1517", Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1988. (Hebrew).

13 Sara Zfatman, *The Jewish Tale in the Middle Ages - Between Ashkenaz and Sepharad*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1993. (Hebrew).

14 Yehuda Ha-Levi, "Sea poems" in Haim Yefim Schirman, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Mossad Bialik & Dvir 1954, Book one, volume 2, 494-510. (Hebrew).

15 Steven Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions - The Wonder of the New World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991.

also, and maybe mainly, the *homo viator*; the personality, or rather the function of the traveller as it manifests itself in the activity of traveling.

The world view and the poetics of *Sefer Hasidim* and the *Sibuv* reveal similarities which are reinforced by the explicit literary connection between the two embodied in the person of Rabbi Judah. What makes Petahiya's travelogue an especially adequate volume in the library of the German Pietists is the latter's poetical and theological dictum of "*zecher asa le-nifleotav*" (Psalms 111:4) - "He commemorated his marvelous acts" - by which it is argued that God has created marvels and wonders, the stuff of the genres *mirabilia* and *miracula*, to commemorate his wonderful acts of creation when he himself has retracted from the world.<sup>16</sup> This dictum which has been understood as the reason for the compilation of *Sefer Hasidim*, a book replete with demons, witches and various other supernatural phenomena, may also serve as the rationale of preserving the narrative of Petahiya with its many marvelous tales. *Mirabilia* and *miracula* have also been defined by LeGoff, Schmitt and others as major forms of expressing amazement in European medieval culture.

Amazement is an experience communicated in numerous instances in Petahiya's travelogue as well. Occasionally amazement may be aroused by almost mythological beings such as birds with human faces (the context allows for interpreting it as an exaggerated description of an owl) or the beastly elephant of New Ninveh (Mosul):

"It was so big that it could eat almost two cartloads of straw at once. Its mouth was in the breast; if it however wished to eat it had a two yards long trunk with which it collected the straw and carried it into the mouth....It carried easily a tower with twelve armored horsemen; they mounted the out-stretched trunk of the elephant instead of stairs".<sup>17</sup>

This description reveals Petahiya's possible indebtedness to the most well known travelogue in Talmudic literature, the chain of narratives describing Raba Bar Bar Hanna's fantastic experiences, partly experienced by him and partly told to him by sea- and desert-farers, among them encounters with monstrously sized fish and frogs. Like Bar Bar Hanna, Petahiya too tells many tales which he has heard rather than experienced himself, thereby enhancing the oral and traditional quality of his narrative.<sup>18</sup>

The other major source for amazement in Petahiya's narrative is, also the most frequent topic of the text as a whole, namely the tombs of saints, prophets and holy people. These serve as scenes for many wondrous miracles, and introduce into the text the genre of *miracula*, which is associated with an established location of worship. The stories articulate amazement in specifically religious terms and they usually prove the superiority of the Jewish saint or the Jewish faith over the "other" religion, in most cases Islam. The legends related to the holy tombs turn the travelogue specifically to a

—16 Tamar Alexander, *The Pious Sinner - Ethics and Aesthetics in the Medieval Hasidic Narrative*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1991, p. 19, quoting Joseph Dan.

17 Gruenhut's edition, p. 8 in the German version, p. 6-7 in the Hebrew version.

18 Dina Stein has brilliantly shown the relationship between travelogue and exegesis in the Bar

Bar Hanna tales in tractate Bava Bathra of the Babylonian Talmud: Dina Stein, "The Blind Eye of the Beholder: On Tall Tales and Travels in Bava Bathra 73a-75b", *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 19 (1999), pp. 9-32 (Hebrew).

narrative of pilgrimage even before Petahiya's entrance at a later stage of his journey to the Holy Land and they convey not less powerful emotional experiences of the sacred than those of the visits to the sites in Palestine.

The tales of the tombs also connect to the Bar Bar Hanna tradition in that they serve as Midrashic, interpretative acts of Scripture since in most of the tombs biblical figures are buried: Hezekiel, Daniel, Ezra.

Incidentally both the talmudic and the medieval traveller include in their accounts a tradition concerning Mount Sinai, thus relating the individual experience of amazement to the mythical source of the sacred text which is being interpreted by enactment. Whereas Bar Bar Hanna claims to have visited the original site of scriptural revelation, guided by an Arab, Petahiya mentions a Babylonian namesake of Mount Sinai which is told to be subterraneously connected with the real thing, and under which two early medieval masters and princes of scripture and interpretation, Rav Saadia Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon are supposedly buried.

Mentioning Mount Sinai, where the Israelites "saw the voices" (Exodus 20, 18), dialectically highlights the fact that undertaking a pilgrimage means seeing by own eyes rather than hearing in second hand, and thus reveals the ambiguity of visually approaching the Holy in a culture in which seeing the Holiest is strictly taboo. This ambiguity is already encapsulated in the vocalization of the biblical verses which gloss "to be seen" rather than "see" as the act of the pilgrim (e.g. Exodus 23,15; 34,20).

The editor-author of the book (not in Warsaw Ms), who is not Petahiya himself, presents the category of religious amazement as the leading motif of the text in his introductory sentences:

"... all the innovations and miracles and marvels of the Holy One Blessed be He which he (i.e. Petahiya) saw and heard, he wrote as a memory to tell His people, the sons of Israel..."

These introductory words, which insist on the presentation of the miracles and marvels of God as the main topic and purpose of the text also associate the categories of amazement with divine power, thus stressing the experiential connection between amazement in general and the category of the holy *fascinosum*.<sup>19</sup>

Comparing the constructions underlying Christian and Jewish pilgrimages, Reiner concludes that whereas the myth (his term) of Christian pilgrimage is the life of Jesus, Jewish pilgrims are motivated by the messianic myth, consisting of an ideal past, a difficult present and an eschatological future.<sup>20</sup> Petahiya's travelogue certainly reflects the messianic master narrative. But whereas the Mount of Olives and the Gate of Mercy are indeed introduced with messianic connotations, Petahiya also exclaims in clear disappointment that it takes only three days to walk through the Land of Israel and on

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19 Rudolph Otto, *Das Heilige*, Breslau 1917; English trans. by J.W.Harvey, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1923.

20 Reiner *op.cit.*

his way back through Greece (or so it seems) he regards the population of the Jews in that country so big that would they all come to the Holy Land it would not bear them...

Babylonia, where the descendants of David rule in golden garments and where Torah is recited by thousands, and whose leaders' scriptural authority is extended even to the Holy Land, sounds much more of a promised land in Petahiya's account. Someone, either narrator or editor, has also made a clear statement by devoting only one fifth of the text to sites in Palestine (one eighth in the Ms. version).

The suppression of the messianic message with regard to Petahiya's pilgrimage may also reflect the interest of the clients, i.e. the audience back in Regensburg.

The text supplies indeed some corroboration for this thesis. The instance in the travelogue where Rabbi Judah's editorial authority is explicitly mentioned is an account of Petahiya's encounter with a Jewish astrologer and soothsayer in Mosul:

"In Ninveh there was an astrologer whose name was Rabbi Shlomo and in all of Ninveh and in all of Assyria and among all the wise men there was none acquainted more with the constellations of the zodiac. And Rabbi Petahiya asked him: When will the Messiah arrive? And he answered: I have already clearly seen it happen a number of times in the signs of the zodiac. But Rabbi Judah the Pious did not want to write it down lest he be suspect for believing Rabbi Shlomo's words." (Gruenhut's edition, the German version p. 8, the Hebrew version p. 7).

This echoes Rabbi Judah's skepticism concerning messianic speculations which is also attested also in *The Book of the Pious*: "If you see a person who prophesies about the Messiah, you should know that he is involved in black magic and demons" (parag. 212, p. 76).

Incidentally in the above mentioned Warsaw manuscript of Petahiya's text, the dialogue censored by Rabbi Judah does appear. In the dialogue Rabbi Shlomo answers that it will take neither a hundred nor two hundred years until the Messiah will appear in the world, and enigmatically adds that, until then the Lamb (Hebrew for Aries) will weep since the Messiah is expected to appear on Passover (which occurs in the sign of Aries).

But when the time of Redemption will come the light of the Lamb (Aries) will shine from one end of the world to the other. One wonders whether the Christian overtone of Messiah as the Paschal Lamb, *Agnus Dei*, was an additional factor in Rabbi Judah's (or whoever used his authority to legitimize the censorship) decision to leave out the passage; unless, of course the messianic dialogue in the Ms. is an interpolation elicited by the mentioning of an omission in the other redaction.

Petahiya's descriptions of Palestine, on the other hand, especially of the Galilee, indulge in marvelously paradisiacal qualities, plenty of water sources, rivers, springs, the lake of Galilee and trees and fruit groves, and even one in which there are forbidden fruits, to all except the Jews that is, since their ancestor the prophet Jonah is buried in the adjacent tomb. These motifs adapt the sites of the pilgrimage to the Utopian fantasy connected with messianic redemption. But they do not actually outweigh similar descriptions of Babylonia. Petahiya also quotes the Moslem conviction that if there is an earthly Paradise it is situated in Damascus and he seems even to agree with them or at least he does not explicitly say "but the Jews do not say so" which is his reflection on the Moslem tradition of Noah's tomb. In the Ms. version Damascus is also the location

of a synagogue built by Elijah the prophet, whose role is crucial especially in the folk narrative versions of Messiah's arrival. The rumor he quotes tells that Elijah, the eternal wanderer of the Jewish imagination, actually prays there every now and then.

The messianic master narrative of Jewish pilgrimage to the Holy land as reflected in Petahiya's travelogue and as transmitted through the context of his German Pietist audience reveals an unresolved tension and ambivalence. Petahiya seems to have been ready to define himself as a European by traveling to the periphery and by coming back to tell the tale. But whereas Petahiya played with the idea of exiting European history either by leaving for Babylonia or by opting for the messianic ideal, Rabbi Judah became fixed in the memory of later generations as one who refused to embrace messianism and the option of the Holy Land and prepared the way for staying, as the imaginary Wandering Jew, within European history. And whereas Petahiya more or less disappeared from tradition (and research), Judah became endlessly recycled and reinterpreted in Jewish folk tradition.

Source:

“*Homo viator et narrans* - Medieval Jewish Voices in the European Narrative of the Wandering Jew”, *Europäische Ethnologie und Folklore im internationalen Kontext*. Festschrift für Leander Petzoldt. Hrsg.. Ingo Schneider. Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1999, ss. 93-102.