Content Analysis of Travel Literature: A Journey Through Time to Jerusalem

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Abstract   This study explores Jewish travel literature from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, with a focus on depictions of Jerusalem. Combining distant and close reading methods, it analyses content categories and patterns to uncover recurring themes in the portrayal of the city. Utilizing digital tools such as CATMA, Voyant, and Dicta, the study applies computational techniques to generate and examine categories that would be difficult to identify manually. Through tagging and processing, the analysis offers a nuanced view of how Jerusalem has been represented across centuries, providing a unique historical perspective through digital humanities methods.

Keywords   Content Analysis. Digital Humanities. Travel Literature. Distant reading. Voyant Tools. Jerusalem.

Summary   1 Introduction. –2 Research Questions. –3 Methodology. – 4 Findings and Discussion. – 5 Century-By-Century Analysis: Tracing the Evolution. –6 Summary and Conclusions.

1 Introduction

Travel literature is a dynamic and multifaceted genre, encompassing diverse forms of written accounts such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, prose, diaries, and descriptions of places. In the context of Jewish travel literature, these writings serve as windows into historical, cultural, and spiritual landscapes, fulfilling purposes like documenting journeys, guiding future travelers, and preserving sacred memories (Borm 2004; Campbell 1991; Thompson 2011). This study examines how Jerusalem – a city revered by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – was depicted in Jewish travel literature from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, employing qualitative and quantitative tools from the digital humanities.

Jerusalem's unique role as a holy city transcends its geographical boundaries, symbolizing both universal spirituality and deeply personal devotion. While pilgrimage to Jerusalem was no longer obligatory in Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, the city's significance endured through prayers, rituals, and literary descriptions (Cohen-Hattab, Shoval 2015; Limor, Reiner, Frenkel, 2014). These texts provide a lens into the challenges faced by travelers, from hazardous sea voyages to threats of robbery and harsh weather. Notably, these journeys also reflect the resilience and spiritual determination of the pilgrims, even when some did not survive the perilous routes.[1]

These changes reflect not only the evolving nature of Jewish pilgrimage but also broader transformations in Jewish society and its relationship with Jerusalem. Particularly notable is the transition from the restricted access and limited descriptions during the Crusader period to the more extensive accounts during Mamluk and Ottoman rule, demonstrating how political contexts shaped both the physical access to Jerusalem and its literary representation.

2 Research Questions

This study examines 33 Hebrew travel narratives written by Jewish travelers between the mid-twelfth and late nineteenth centuries, aiming to understand how Jerusalem was depicted across different periods and literary styles. The research addresses two primary questions:

1. How did the nature and content of Jerusalem's descriptions evolve over the centuries? This includes analyzing stylistic, categorical, and quantitative aspects such as: geographical

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1 Schiller 1994; Yaari 1976; Kashani 1981; Rainer 2014.

descriptions, depictions of specific places, accounts of events, portrayals of individuals, personal experiences and emotions and religious experiences.

2. To what extent can these changes be attributed to factors such as: Shifts in political circumstances and access to the city, the evolving nature of Jewish religious experiences, developments in travel writing conventions and the diverse backgrounds and origins of the travelers.

By addressing these questions through a comparative analysis of travelers and time periods, this study seeks to uncover the various dimensions and perspectives reflected in the descriptions of Jerusalem. This approach enhances our understanding of how literary representations of the city changed in response to broader historical, cultural, and religious transformations.

3   Methodology

3.1   The Research Corpus

The research corpus comprises 33 digitized travel accounts from Avraham Yaari's *Travels of Eretz Israel* (1976), spanning from Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela's voyage in 1170 to Theodor Herzl's journey in 1898. This edition, available in the Hebrew Books database,[2] was selected based on several criteria: comprehensive coverage of the target time period; consistent editorial principles across all texts; availability in digital format and representativeness of different Jewish communities and geographical origins.

3.2   Corpus Preparation and Description

To prepare the corpus for analysis, the following steps were undertaken:

1. conversion: PDF images were converted into machine-readable text using Abbyy FineReader 15;
2. manual verification: OCR errors were meticulously corrected, with particular attention to: Hebrew diacritical marks, place names and proper nouns and historical terminology;
3. segmentation: the text was divided into individual journey accounts;

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2 This edition is available in the Hebrew Books database. `https://hebrewbooks.org/about`.

4. standardization: spelling variants were standardized to ensure accuracy in computational analysis.

The distribution of these journeys across centuries reveals distinct patterns **[tab. 1]**. In the early period (twelfth-seventeenth centuries), there is a consistent average of two to three texts per century, characterized by relatively concise descriptions, with the thirteenth century being a notable exception showing longer descriptions. The later period (eighteenth-nineteenth centuries) shows a significant increase in the number of journeys, with seven journeys in the eighteenth century and eleven in the nineteenth century, accompanied by a substantial rise in the volume and detail of descriptions.

The temporal distribution of words counts relating to Jerusalem **[graph 1]** highlights a clear evolutionary pattern. While descriptions remain relatively brief throughout the sixteenth century, a marked increase in textual volume begins in the seventeenth century, reaching its peak in nineteenth-century narratives. This progression reflects both the increasing accessibility of Jerusalem and evolving literary conventions. A detailed listing of all journeys, including dates, origins, and word counts, is provided in Table 1, illustrating the breadth and depth of the corpus.

Table 1 Travelers and Journeys

Journey no.	Year	Starting place	Passenger	No. of words
1	1170	Tudela, Spain	Rabbi Binyamin Modela	729
2	1180	Regensburg, Ashkenaz	Rabbi Petachiah of Regensburg	250
3	Second half of the twelfth century	Ashkenaz	Rabbi Yaakov ben Netanel	244
4	1218	Muslim Spain (Granada or Toledo)	Yehuda Alharizi	1456
5	1267	Girona, Spain	Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (Nachmanides)	4,292
6	Early fourteenth century	Spain	Anonymous student of Nachmanides	950
7	1322	Spain	Ishtori Haparchi	193
8	1441	Malaga, Spain	Rabbi Yitzchak v. Alfra	69
9	1473	Crete, Greece	An anonymous Cretan man	6

Journey no.	Year	Starting place	Passenger	No. of words
10	1481	Volterra, Italy	Meshullam of Volterra	422
11	1521-23	Pizarro, Italy	Rabbi Moshe Basula	2,335
12	1563	Pizarro, Italy	Elijah of Pissarro	453
13	1567	Yemen	Zechariah Yahya Alchahari	433
14	1641-42	Crimea, Ukraine	Shmuel Ben David	2,268
15	1650	Prague	Rabbi Moshe Poriat from Prague	8,594
16	1654-55	Crimea, Ukraine	Moshe ben Eliyahu Halevi the Karaite	1,294
17	1699-1706	Siemiatycze, Poland	Rabbi Gedaliah of Simiatic	9,588
18	1753-73	Jerusalem	Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Hida'a)	165
19	1764-1765	Zaluzha, Ukraine	Rabbi Simcha, son of Rabbi Yehoshua Mazalazitz	123
20	1769	Ashkenaz	Rabbi Moshe Yerushalmi	2,891
21	1785-86	Crimea, Ukraine	Benjamin son of Elijah the Karaite cases	3,262
22	1798-99	Jibuzhka, Ukraine	Rabbi Nachman of Breslav	250
23	1824	Vilnius, Lithuania	Rabbi David Debit Hillel	2,436
24	1833-34	Kaminitz, Belarus	Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kaminitz	1,104
25	1839	Livorno, Italy	Moshe and Yehudit Montefiore	3,025
26	1847	Paltican, Romania	Benjamin the II	1,594
27	1870-71	Krakow, Galicia (Poland)	Shimon Berman	1,206
28	1871	Jerusalem	Joshua Yellin	213
29	1876	Jerusalem	Rabbi Rahamim Yosef Opletka	730
30	1881-82	Yemen	Rabbi Shalom Alshikh	1,074
31	1889	Mohilev, Belarus	Mordechai ben Hillel HaCohen	5,463
32	1891	Squire, Ukraine	One of the people	387
33	1898	Budapest, Hungary	Theodor Herzl	1,494
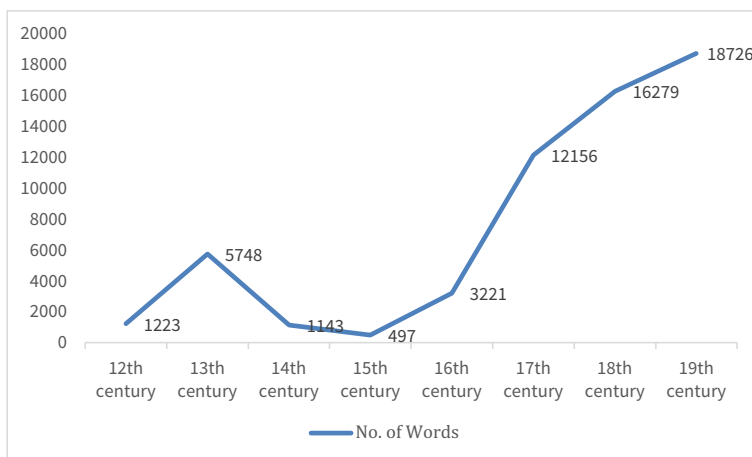
Graph 1 Distribution of word count relating to Jerusalem descriptions by century

3.3 'Distant Reading' and 'Close Reading'

This study employs the complementary methods of 'distant reading' and 'close reading', as developed by literary scholar Franco Moretti in his exploration of 'world literature' (2000; 2013). Close reading involves a detailed and in-depth examination of complete texts, adhering to traditional literary analysis methods. However, this approach focuses on a limited literary canon, which may not capture broader patterns. Conversely, distant reading involves extracting and analyzing text units outside their immediate context to uncover overarching trends and structures. While this method sacrifices some of the text's inherent richness, it enables the study of literature as a system.

Although the corpus in this study consists of 58,993 words – a relatively small size by Moretti's standards – distant reading proves invaluable in visualizing and analyzing how Jerusalem was depicted over 700 years of Jewish travel literature. The integration of distant and close reading allows for a holistic analysis, balancing detailed textual insights with a broader, systematic perspective (Münz-Manor 2021).

3.4 Research Tools

To support this dual methodology, the study utilizes several digital humanities tools:

1. CATMA (Computer Assisted Textual Markup and Analysis, available at `https://catma.de/`) is a web application designed to support flexible workflows in text annotation, analysis, and visualization. It offers a user-friendly interface for creating tag sets, making it highly effective for qualitative analysis. In this study, CATMA facilitated tagging and categorizing textual elements, enabling systematic qualitative and computational analysis.

2. Voyant Tools (available at `https://voyant-tools.org`) is an open-source platform for quantitative text analysis and visualization. The Cirrus tool within Voyant was used to generate word clouds that highlight the most frequently occurring terms in the corpus. To enhance accuracy, a Hebrew-specific stop word list was adapted to exclude function words and improve term frequency analysis.[3] A unique challenge in Hebrew grammar is the use of attached prefixes (e.g., 'habayit' for 'the house' or 'babayit' for 'in the house'), which can create ambiguity in text analysis. This issue was addressed using advanced linguistic tools, as described below.

3. Dicta (available at `https://dicta.org.il/`) provides machine learning and natural language processing tools tailored for Hebrew texts. In this study, Dicta's automatic vocalization and morphological analysis tools improved the accuracy of word clouds and frequency calculations, compensating for the complexity of Hebrew's grammatical structure. For instance, these tools are distinguished between different forms of the same root, ensuring a more reliable analysis.

3.5 Text Analysis

Following the preparation of the corpus, we conducted a two-pronged text analysis, combining qualitative content analysis and computational techniques using CATMA and Voyant Tools. These methods provided complementary insights into the evolution of Jerusalem's descriptions.

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3 See HebrewStopWords: `https://github.com/gidim/HebrewStopWords`.

3.6 Qualitative Content Analysis

Category development method – to structure the qualitative analysis, we employed a combined deductive-inductive approach (Shakedi 2003; 2014; Bauer 2011):

1. Deductive Framework: based on theoretical insights from travel literature and pilgrimage studies (Limor, Reiner 2005; Turner, Turner 2011), we developed a thematic framework comprising three core categories: Object Descriptions: Physical and geographical depictions of Jerusalem, Experiential Descriptions: Personal and emotional interactions with the city and Historical Descriptions: Accounts tied to Jerusalem's past.

2. Inductive Refinement: using open coding on 20% of the corpus, we identified emerging patterns and themes, formulated preliminary categories, and iteratively refined them based on additional data.

The resulting category tree **[fig. 1]** combines theoretically derived structural elements with data-driven insights, providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing Jerusalem descriptions across centuries.
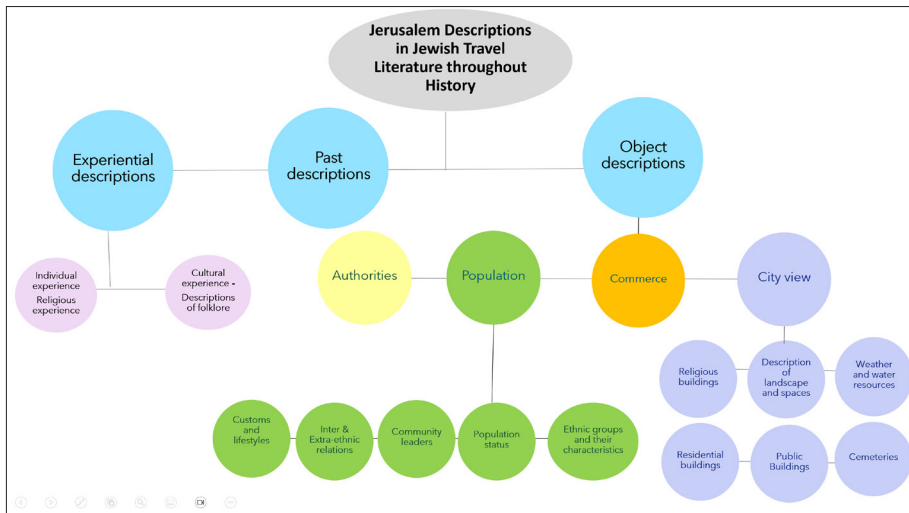

Figure 1   Category Tree

3.7   Computational Analysis

The computational analysis complemented the qualitative approach, focusing on two distinct levels:

1. Data Layer Analysis (Voyant Tools): uploaded texts into Voyant's web-based interface for quantitative mapping of word prevalence by century, Visualized patterns using word clouds to highlight key terms and trends.

2. Metadata Layer Analysis (CATMA): applied qualitative content analysis categories through tagging, Mapped category frequency across individual texts, historical periods, and the entire corpus, Identified absent categories and examined relative frequencies to account for variations in text length.

To ensure consistency, category frequencies were normalized as percentages rather than relying on absolute counts, enabling meaningful comparisons across texts and time periods.

4   Findings and Discussion

4.1   A Comprehensive Analysis Across Generations (Twelfth-Nineteenth Centuries)

Our analysis of Jewish travel literature about Jerusalem, spanning eight centuries, reveals systematic changes in both content and descriptive approaches. Based on a computational analysis of 33 travel narratives, distinct patterns emerge in how Jerusalem was perceived, experienced, and documented. As shown in graph 2, object descriptions overwhelmingly dominate, accounting for 86% of all tags. These emphasize tangible and physical elements such as cemeteries, landscapes, public buildings, and religious structures, reflecting a strong focus on infrastructure and material aspects of life. In contrast, experiential descriptions, representing 13% of the tags, highlight limited attention to cultural, social, or personal experiences, while historical descriptions, comprising just 1%, underscore a preference for contemporary observations over retrospective accounts **[graph 2]**.
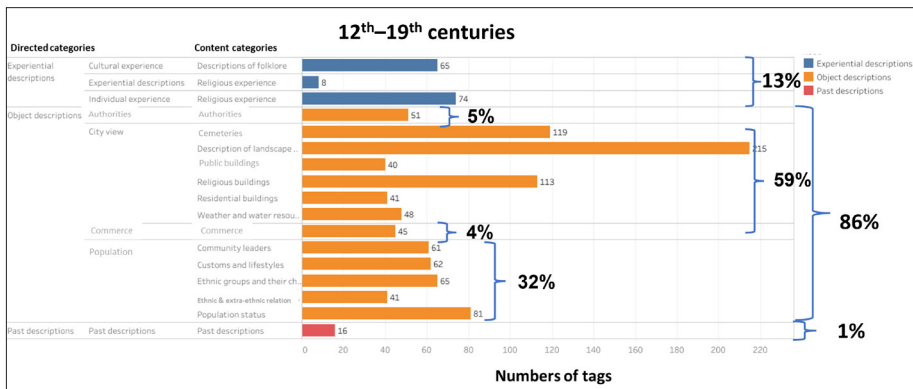
Graph 2   Division into Directed and Content Categories, twelfth-nineteenth centuries

Building on this quantitative analysis, Graphs 3 and 4 provide further insights into how descriptions of Jerusalem are distributed across three main categories: 'object descriptions', 'historical descriptions', and 'experiential descriptions'. The majority of tags fall under 'object descriptions', which emphasize physical features and infrastructure, followed by 'experiential descriptions', while 'historical descriptions' remain marginal **[graphs 3-4]**. These three primary categories are further divided into 16 content subcategories. For instance, the 'object descriptions' category encompasses 'city view', 'commerce', 'population', and 'authorities', with additional distinctions within 'city view' and 'population' **[graph 1]**.
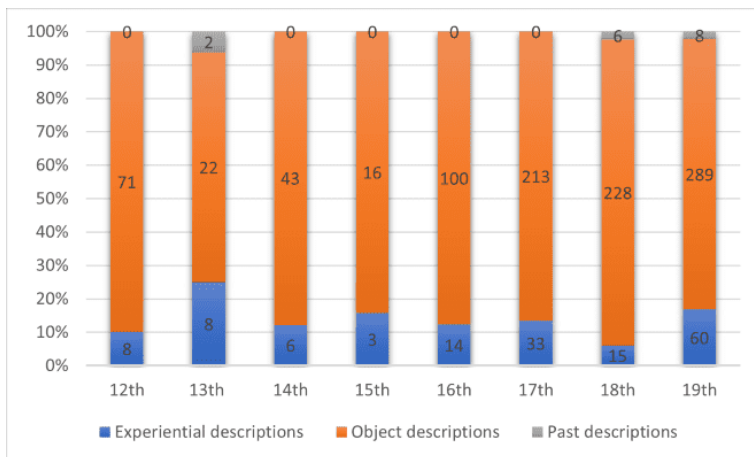
Graph 3   Summary of Directed Category Performances, Twelfth-Nineteenth Centuries
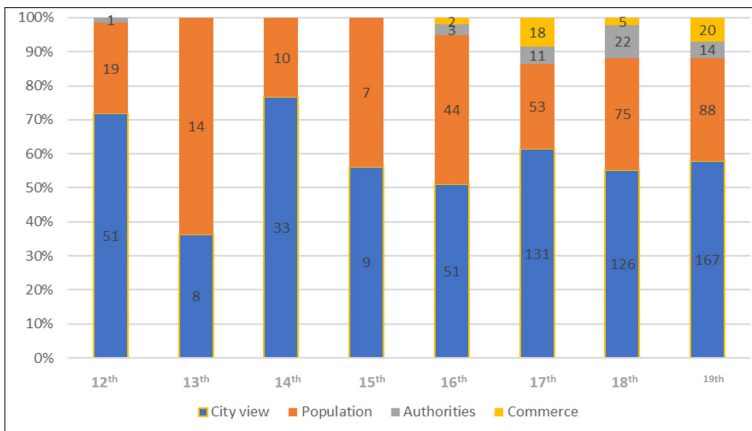
Graph 4   Summary of Directed Category 'object descriptions', Twelfth-Nineteenth Centuries

As demonstrated in graph 4, 'city view' consistently dominates over most periods, except for the thirteenth century. This subcategory provides detailed accounts of Jerusalem's sacred spaces, cemetery, prayer and worship buildings, the Temple Mount complex, and other prominent features. Descriptions of the population explore customs, lifestyles, inter-ethnic relations, community leaders, and demographics, offering a glimpse into Jerusalem's social fabric. However, the 'commerce' and 'authorities' subcategories are significantly underrepresented until the sixteenth century, when they begin to feature more prominently, reflecting evolving interests in economic and administrative aspects.

Over time, the descriptive focus shifts, revealing a gradual enrichment in both scope and detail. Holy places, consistently central to the narratives, are elaborated upon with additional details about access, local customs, and associated traditions. For example, recurring references to prayer at the Golden Gate appear across centuries, showcasing continuity in certain practices. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, descriptions become increasingly detailed, encompassing a broader range of topics, such as residents' occupations, market activities, goods, food preparation, residential architecture, and water sources, as well as landscapes, gardens, and orchards.

By the nineteenth century, descriptions adopt a more literary and sentimental tone, often influenced by Zionist themes. These writings, predominantly from Ashkenazi visitors and immigrants, incorporate personal impressions and religious experiences, offering a nuanced view of Jerusalem's physical appearance and cultural life. A pivotal transformation occurs around the 1830s, coinciding with improved

equality among Jerusalem's population. This period sees a shift toward more personal, literary styles of writing, reflecting broader societal changes and the emergence of Zionist ideals.

4.2   Authorial Background and Perspectives

The travel narratives demonstrate significant evolution in authorial background and perspective across the studied periods [graph 5]. In the early period (twelfth-fifteenth centuries), accounts come predominantly from Sephardic writers, exemplified by Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela from Spain and Meshullam of Volterra from Italy. Their accounts reflect the prominent role of Spanish and Italian Jewish communities in maintaining connections with Jerusalem during this period.

In the sixteenth century, authorial diversity increased, as seen in the accounts of Moses ben Mordecai Bassola and Eliyahu of Pissarro from Italy. Zechariah Dhahiri from Yemen introduced a unique contribution to the genre with his rhyming prose (maqama), reflecting the influence of Yemenite literary traditions. This period demonstrates how different Jewish cultural traditions began contributing to the documentation of Jerusalem.

A significant shift occurs in the seventeenth century, marked by the emergence of multiple perspectives: Karaite accounts from Shmuel ben David and Moshe ben Eliyahu Halevi of Crimea, alongside Rabbi Moshe Poryet from Prague, representing Ashkenazi tradition. This diversification of voices enables richer documentation of inter-communal relations and varying religious perspectives within Jerusalem's Jewish community.

The eighteenth century shows further transformation, with accounts predominantly from Ashkenazi and Eastern European writers, such as Rabbi Gedaliah of Simatitz and Rabbi Moshe Yerushalmi, though maintaining some diversity through figures like Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Hida), who was born in Jerusalem. This shift reflects broader changes in Jewish migration patterns and the growing connection between Eastern European communities and Jerusalem.

The nineteenth century accounts, including those of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Mekminitz, Mordechai Ben Hillel HaCohen, and ultimately Theodor Herzl, demonstrate the dominance of Ashkenazi voices, particularly those associated with early Zionist thought. However, this period also includes diverse perspectives such as those of Judith and Moshe Montefiore, maintaining the multi-vocal nature of Jerusalem documentation.

This evolution in authorial background parallels broader changes in Jewish demographics, mobility patterns, and ideological developments. The shift from predominantly Sephardic to

increasingly Ashkenazi authorship, along with the integration of Karaite perspectives, provides crucial context for understanding how Jerusalem was perceived and documented across different Jewish communities and traditions.
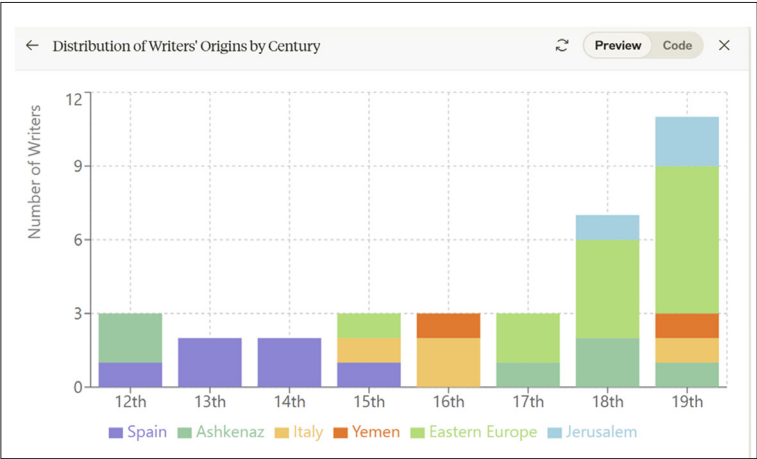

Graph 5 Distribution of writers' origins by century

The comprehensive analysis of descriptions of Jerusalem in Jewish travel literature from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries reveals significant changes in approaches and content. While early descriptions focused primarily on physical elements such as buildings and infrastructure, there was a gradual increase in attention to social and cultural aspects, particularly in the nineteenth century. These trends reflect an expansion in historical documentation influenced by demographic, cultural, and technological factors. Additionally, the cultural diversity and backgrounds of the authors shifted significantly, from Sephardic dominance in the early periods to the growing inclusion of Ashkenazi, Karaite, and other regional traditions. This process highlights the dynamic evolution of the relationship between Jewish communities and Jerusalem, as reflected in the increasingly nuanced portrayals of the city across generations.

5   Century-By-Century Analysis: Tracing the Evolution

5.1   The Twelfth Century: The Beginning of Literary Documentation

The twelfth century marks the inception of comprehensive Jewish travel literature about Jerusalem, a period characterized by Crusader rule and significant restrictions on Jewish presence in the city. Three travel narratives from this period, totaling 1,223 words, have survived (Travels 1-3 in Table 1). A computational analysis of the tagging layer reveals 79 tags distributed across 11 content categories, with the vast majority (90%) falling under 'object descriptions' and only a minority (10%) under 'experiential descriptions' **[graph 6]**.
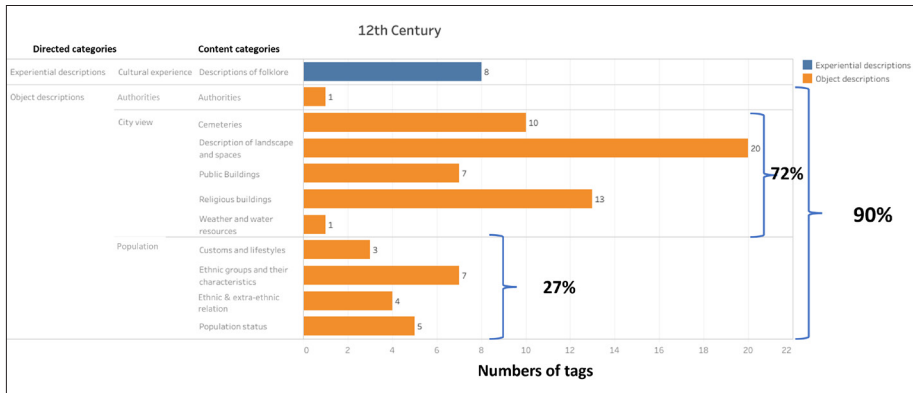
**Graph 6**   Division into Directed and Content Categories, Twelfth Century

The dominance of object descriptions reflects the writers' primary focus on the city's physical space. Within this category, urban landscape descriptions account for 72%, population descriptions 27%, and references to authorities merely 1%. The landscape descriptions primarily focus on Jerusalem's mountains, with the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion receiving particular attention. Benjamin of Tudela describes the magnificent views of the Dead Sea and the Land of Israel from Mount Zion, while Petachiah of Regensburg emphasizes the impressive view of the Temple Mount and the Gate of Mercy from the Mount of Olives (Rainer 2014).

A central religious practice described during this period is the 'Rounding of the Gates' – a prayer route that involved circling the gates of the Temple Mount or the city walls, observing mourning customs, and offering prayers for its reconstruction. Descriptions of religious buildings and cemeteries occupy a significant portion of the narratives, with particular emphasis on the Western Wall, the Temple

Mount, and the Muslim structure at the site of the Temple. The Golden Gate is described as a significant focal point for Jewish prayer.

The historical context of Crusader rule is clearly reflected in the descriptions. The hostility toward Jews and Muslims, which culminated in the destruction of the Jewish community during the Crusader conquest (Rainer 2014; Yaari 1976), is evident in the population descriptions. However, the Hospitaller Hospital established by the Crusaders is also mentioned, serving Jews and Muslims despite being primarily intended for Christian pilgrims.

The automatic analysis of the text layer reinforces the focus on the city's physical description [fig. 1]. The most frequent words include 'Mount' (16 occurrences), 'Gate' (15), 'Tomb' (16), 'House' (15), and 'King' (15), reflecting the intensive engagement with urban space and sacred sites. In contrast to later periods, there is a notable scarcity of experiential and personal descriptions, as well as limited reference to community life and social aspects.
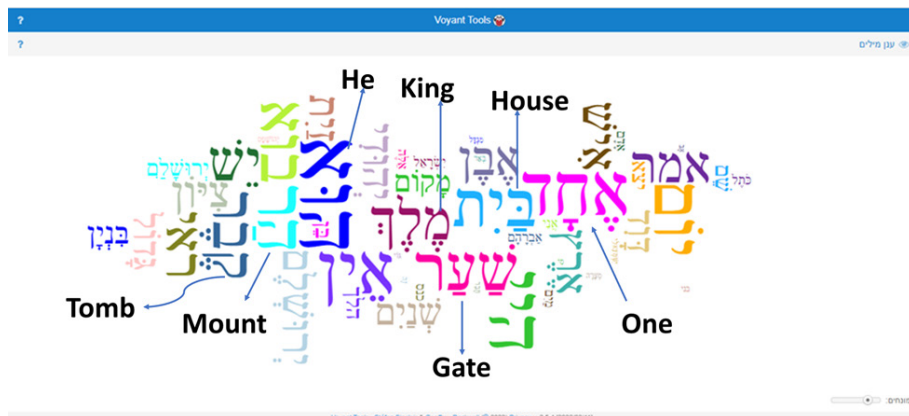

Figure 2 Word Cloud – Twelfth Century

Within the 'Object Descriptions' category, two other prominent program categories emerge: 'Description of Religious Buildings' (17%) and 'Description of Cemeteries' (13%). The travelers provide detailed accounts of significant locations along the 'Rounding the Gates' route, including the Temple courtyard, the Temple Mount, and the Western Wall area. The descriptions also include references to the Pool of Siloam and the Kidron River in the Jerusalem Valley, demonstrating the writers' attention to the city's water sources and topographical features.

It is important to note that our understanding of this period is limited by several factors: first, the paucity of available sources; second, the restrictive influence of Crusader rule on documentation

possibilities; and third, the dominant religious focus that may have come at the expense of documenting other aspects of city life. As shown in the word cloud analysis **[fig. 2]**, the emphasis on physical and religious elements dominates the narrative vocabulary of this period, setting a baseline for comparing the evolution of travel literature in subsequent centuries.

5.2   The Thirteenth Century: Transition and Revival

The thirteenth century presents a significant shift in Jerusalem's documentation through two notable journey descriptions (Travels 4-5 in Table 1), both written in rhyming prose. Analysis of the tagging layer reveals 32 tags across 9 content categories, with a distinctive distribution: 69% under 'object descriptions', 25% under 'experiential descriptions', and 6% under 'past descriptions' **[graph 7]**.
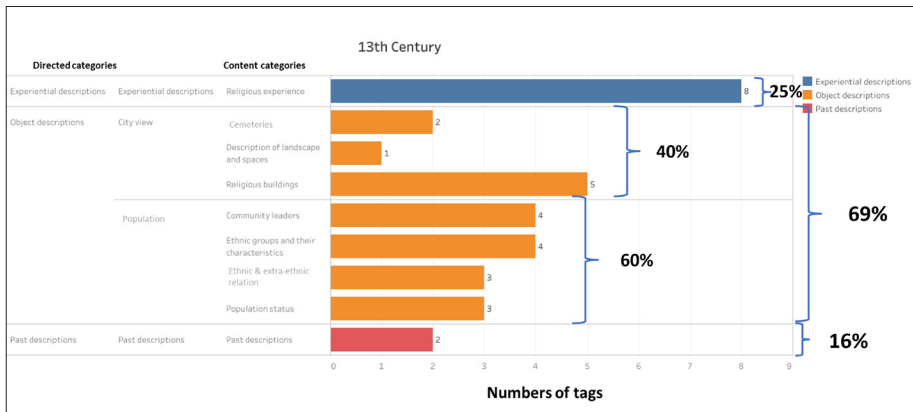
Graph 7   Division into Directed and Content categories, Thirteenth Century

Al-Harizi's journey (Journey 4) serves as a crucial historical source, documenting the revival of Jewish settlement in Jerusalem following the transition from Crusader to Muslim control during the Ayyubid rule (Shur 1980). His account provides valuable insights into the coexistence of Jews and Muslims during this period, offering detailed observations of internal ethnic relations within the Jewish population. In contrast, Nachmanides' account (Journey 5), dispatched to Spain in 1267, coincides with the beginning of Mamluk rule in Jerusalem and aims to encourage Jewish settlement in the Holy Land (Sabag-Montefiore 2013).

Within the 'Object Descriptions' category, a notable shift occurs from the previous century, with population descriptions now

dominating at 60%, while city view descriptions decrease to 40%. This shift reflects a growing emphasis on social and demographic documentation. The automatic analysis of the text layer reveals this changing focus, with religious and spiritual terms becoming more prominent: 'God (Elohim)' (45 instances), 'house' (36 instances), 'soul' (30 instances), 'God (Ha-Shem)' (28 instances), 'Israel' (26 instances), and 'Heaven' (16 instances) **[fig. 3]**.

Figure 3 Word Cloud –Thirteenth Century

Both travelers provide vivid accounts of their religious experiences upon encountering Jerusalem, particularly expressing sorrow when visiting the destroyed Temple site and other holy places. Their emotional responses represent a new layer of documentation that goes beyond mere physical description, introducing a more personal and experiential dimension to the travel literature.

The shift from Crusader to Muslim rule marks a significant turning point in the nature of Jewish presence in Jerusalem. The accounts suggest that Muslims demonstrated greater tolerance toward Jewish settlement compared to their Crusader predecessors, although internal conflicts and economic hardships continued to challenge the community. Nachmanides' detailed description of the impoverished state of the Jewish population he encountered provides valuable insights into the social and economic conditions of the period.

The thirteenth century narratives thus represent a crucial transition in the documentation of Jerusalem, moving from

primarily physical descriptions to a more nuanced approach that encompasses social, religious, and experiential dimensions. This evolution in descriptive focus sets the stage for the more complex and multifaceted accounts that would emerge in subsequent centuries.

5.3 The Fourteenth Century: Evolving Pilgrimage Patterns

The fourteenth century corpus presents two contrasting narratives (Travels 6-7 in Table 1): a detailed 950-word account by an anonymous student of Nachmanides, and a concise 193-word description by Ishtori Haparchi. The computational analysis reveals 49 tags distributed across eight content categories, maintaining a similar pattern to previous centuries with 88% classified as 'object descriptions' and 12% as 'experiential descriptions' **[graph 8]**.
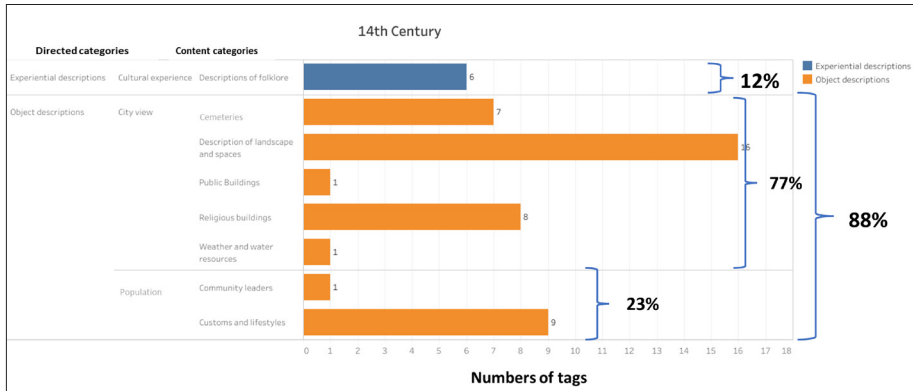
Graph 8 Division into Directed and Content Categories, Fourteenth Century

The anonymous student's account dominates the period's documentation, contributing significantly to the 'City View' category, which comprises 77% of all objective descriptions. This narrative introduces several innovations in the documentation of Jerusalem, most notably the first mention of the 'tearing ceremony' – a ritual mourning practice performed upon seeing Jerusalem. The student's systematic documentation follows a clear pilgrimage route, beginning from the northern approach to Jerusalem and proceeding through various significant sites.

Of particular interest is the students' description of Jerusalem's agricultural landscape, noting city gardens irrigated by the Shiloah waters extending to the Pool of Siloam. The account includes a novel observation about Muslim beliefs in the healing properties of the Shiloah waters, representing an early documentation of interfaith

practices at sacred sites (Limor, Reiner, Frenkel 2014). This attention to local customs and beliefs marks a significant evolution in the travel literature genre.

The description of the Temple Mount compound demonstrates increased detail compared to previous accounts, introducing new elements such as the Foundation Stone, Muslim customs surrounding it, and the network of caves beneath. This level of detail suggests greater access to sacred sites during this period, possibly indicating improved relations with local authorities.

Ishtori Haparchi's briefer account, while less detailed, provides valuable insights into contemporary pilgrimage practices. His observation that Jews traveled to Jerusalem during festivals "but not due to heartache, I mean: to multiply heartache" (Yaari 1976) offers a unique perspective on the emotional and religious complexities of Jerusalem pilgrimage during this period. This comment also provides indirect evidence of the improved conditions for Jewish visitors compared to the Crusader period.

The automatic analysis of the text layer reveals the continuing prominence of physical landmarks in the narratives, with 'house' (31 instances), 'mountain' (24 instances), 'road'(20 instances), and 'Jerusalem' (19 instances) among the most frequently occurring terms [fig. 4].
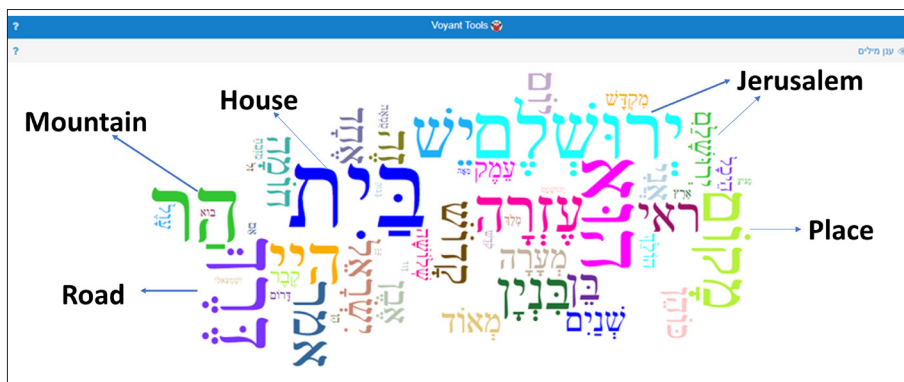
Figure 4   Word Cloud – Fourteenth Century

This word frequency pattern aligns with the predominant focus on city views and physical descriptions, while also reflecting the increased attention to movement and accessibility within the city.

The fourteenth century narratives thus represent a crucial development in Jerusalem travel literature.

This period is characterized by a more systematic approach to documenting pilgrimage routes, the introduction of new religious

practices and customs, and a heightened focus on interfaith interactions. Sacred sites receive more detailed attention, and experiential elements are increasingly integrated into descriptions that remain largely centered on physical aspects. This period sets the stage for the more complex narratives that would emerge in subsequent centuries, establishing patterns of documentation that would influence Jewish travel literature about Jerusalem for generations to come.

5.4 The Fifteenth Century: Shifting Perspectives under Mamluk Rule

The fifteenth century presents three travel descriptions (Travels 8-10) **[tab. 1]**, comprising the most concise documentation period with only 497 words total. Analysis of the tagging layer identifies 19 tags across 10 content categories, with 84% categorized as 'object descriptions' and 16% as 'experiential descriptions' **[graph 9]**. Within the object descriptions, there is a more balanced distribution between city view (56%) and population description (44%) than in previous centuries, suggesting a gradual shift toward greater attention to social dynamics.
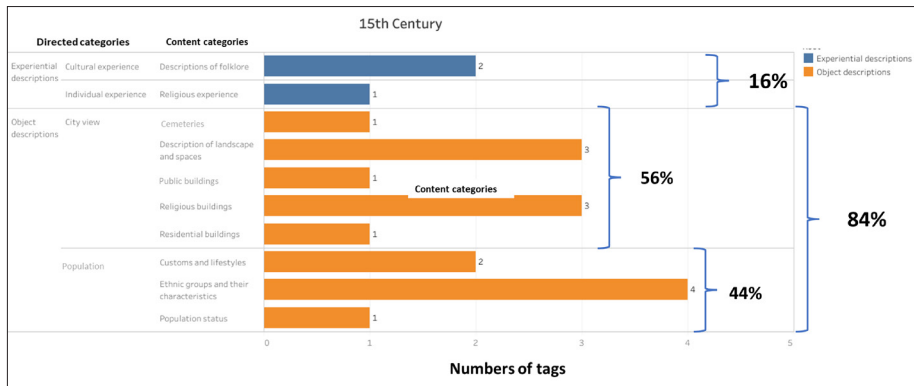
Graph 9   Division into Directed and Content Categories, Fifteenth Century

Rabbi Yitzchak Alpra's journey from Málaga, documented in a letter to Rabbi Simeon ben Zemah Duran (Rashbatz) in Algiers, provides valuable insights into the interconnected nature of Jewish communities during this period. His account emphasizes the networks linking Jerusalem's Jewish community with those in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, while also highlighting the prevalent poverty in Jerusalem. This focus on inter-community relationships represents a new dimension

in the travel literature, moving beyond purely local observations.

The most comprehensive account of this period comes from Meshullam of Volterra, a member of a prominent Italian banking family. His narrative is particularly significant for its detailed documentation of the journey from Egypt to Jerusalem via Gaza and Hebron, offering a broader geographical context than previous accounts. Meshullam's observations about the absence of walls in Jerusalem during the Mamluk period provide important historical documentation of the city's physical condition.

Of particular significance is Meshullam's demographic analysis, noting approximately 250 Jewish families alongside 10,000 Muslim families. This quantitative approach to population description marks an evolution in documentation methods. When compared with accounts from the Crusader period, these numbers suggest significant growth in the Jewish community, reflecting the relatively greater tolerance under Muslim rule than under Crusader Christian governance (Schur 1980).

The anonymous traveler from Crete, while providing limited information about Jerusalem itself, offers valuable insights into peripheral communities such as Kfar Kana, contributing to our understanding of the broader Jewish settlement pattern in the Holy Land during this period.

The automatic analysis of the text layer reveals a significant shift in emphasis. The most frequent terms reflect a balance between physical descriptions of the Temple Mount ('house' with 12 instances, 'Temple' with 8 instances) and references to contemporary social conditions, particularly regarding Muslim-Jewish relations (with 'Ishmaelite' appearing 14 times). This linguistic pattern **[fig. 5]** suggests an increasing integration of social and political awareness into the traditional religious-physical description framework.

The fifteenth-century accounts reveal significant advancements in Jerusalem travel literature, emphasizing inter-community relationships and networks, providing more detailed demographic documentation, and offering broader geographical contextualization. A growing focus on Muslim-Jewish relations and the inclusion of quantitative population data further characterize this period. These shifts reflect the changing political realities under Mamluk rule and the evolving methodologies of travel documentation, laying the groundwork for the more comprehensive narratives that would emerge during the Ottoman era.

Figure 5 Word Cloud – Fifteenth Century

5.5 The Sixteenth Century: New Perspectives in the Early Ottoman Period

The sixteenth century represents a significant transition period, marked by the beginning of Ottoman rule that would span four centuries and bring substantial changes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Yaari's collection features three journey descriptions from this period (Travels 11-13 in Table 1): accounts by Moses ben Mordecai Bassola and Eliyahu of Pissarro, both Italian Jews, and a unique rhyming prose (maqama) narrative by Zechariah Dhahiri from Yemen, representing a diverse geographical and stylistic range.

The period coincides with Sultan Suleiman's reign (1520-1566), an era of significant development and reconstruction in Jerusalem, most notably the rebuilding of the city walls. The subsequent decline in Ottoman administration after Suleiman's death would have lasting implications for Jerusalem and pilgrimage practices (Schur 1980).

Quantitative analysis of the tagging layer reveals 114 tags distributed across 15 content categories, with 88% categorized as 'object descriptions' and 12% as 'experiential descriptions' **[graph 10]**. Within the object descriptions category, the distribution shows increasing complexity: 51% relate to city view, 44% to population, 3% to trade, and 2% to authorities, reflecting a broader scope of observation than in previous centuries.
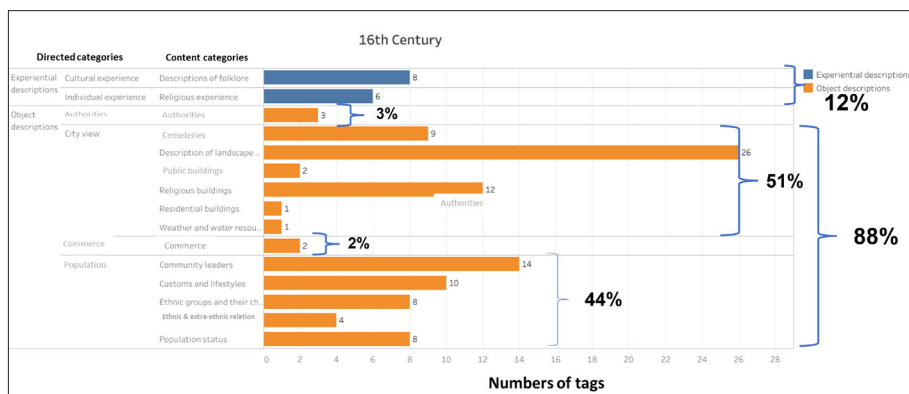
Graph 10   Division into Directed and Content Categories, Sixteenth Century

Moses ben Mordecai Bassola's account stands out for its comprehensive approach. As rabbi of the Jewish community in Pissarro, Italy, he provides detailed information about local regulations, customs, religious practices, and public leadership structures. His systematic documentation of the predominantly Sephardi Jewish community offers valuable insights into inter-communal relations, noting particularly positive interactions between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. This attention to community dynamics represents a significant evolution in travel literature.

Elijah of Pissarro's journey narrative, though interrupted by plague, provides important documentation of health conditions during this period. This inadvertent focus on public health issues adds a new dimension to our understanding of daily life in sixteenth-century Jerusalem.

Rabbi Zechariah Dhahiri's maqama-style account introduces a distinctive literary approach to travel documentation. His focus on the Jewish community, religious experiences, and encounters with significant figures like Joseph Karo enriches our understanding of both the social fabric and intellectual life of the period.

The automatic analysis of text frequencies reveals telling patterns, with terms like 'one' (47 instances), 'house' (42 instances), and 'day' (40 instances) dominating the discourse **[fig. 6]**. This word distribution suggests a shift toward more temporally organized and quantitatively precise documentation.

Figure 6 Word Cloud – Sixteenth Century

The sixteenth-century narratives stand out for their detailed documentation of Ottoman administrative changes, nuanced descriptions of inter-communal relations, and integration of public health observations. These accounts also demonstrate heightened attention to economic conditions and trade, alongside a notable literary sophistication in travel writing. This period represents a pivotal transition in travel literature, moving toward more comprehensive and systematic documentation of Jerusalem's physical, social, and economic landscapes. The focus on administrative and economic aspects reflects the shifting political dynamics under Ottoman rule and the growing sophistication of travel documentation practices.

5.6 The Seventeenth Century: Diversification of Perspectives Under Ottoman Rule

The seventeenth century marks a significant shift in Jerusalem travel literature, introducing accounts from previously unrepresented communities. Three primary narratives emerge during this period (Travels 14-16 in Table 1): accounts by two Karaite Jews from Crimea, Shmuel ben David and Moshe ben Eliyahu Halevi, and Rabbi Moshe Poryet from Prague. This diversification represents a notable departure from the previous dominance of Sephardic narratives from Italy, the Balkans, and Yemen, while highlighting the special connection between Jerusalem's Karaite community and their Crimean counterparts.

The period's documentation is particularly rich in detail, reflected in the quantitative analysis of content categories and tags. Analysis reveals 246 tags distributed across 15 content categories within

the 'object descriptions' directed category, showing a complex distribution: 62% pertaining to city view, 25% to population, 8% to trade, and 5% to authorities **[graph 11]**. This distribution suggests a more comprehensive approach to urban documentation than in previous centuries.
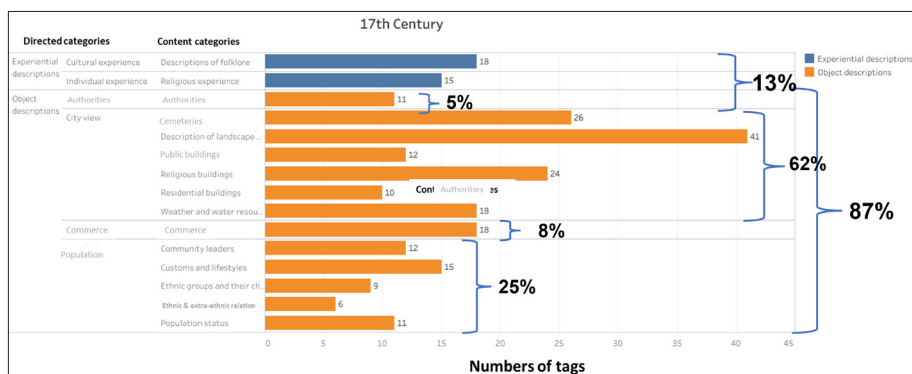
Graph 11   Division into Directed and Content Categories, Seventeenth Century

Shmuel ben David's account, the first of the century, provides unprecedented insight into the Karaite community's experience in Jerusalem. His narrative introduces new elements to the travel literature genre, including the first documentation of a tax requirement for Jerusalem entry, significantly paid to a rabbinical Jewish tax official. This detail reveals complex interrelationships between different Jewish communities and Ottoman administrative structures.

The author provides detailed descriptions of the Karaite quarter, including their 'Holy Courtyard', synagogue, and residential areas, while also documenting the financial support flowing from the Crimean Karaite community to their Jerusalem counterparts. His praise for Sultan Suleiman's contributions to Jerusalem's development, particularly regarding city walls and water sources such as Ein Rogel and Hezekiah's Pool, offers valuable historical context for urban development under Ottoman rule.

Rabbi Moshe Poryet's account, chronicled in *Darchei Zion*, represents a significant departure in travel literature's purpose and focus. Written explicitly as a practical guide for future pilgrims, it provides detailed information about markets, goods, prices, and daily life considerations. His warning about the prohibition of wearing green clothing, reserved for Muslims, and detailed descriptions of dress codes and time-restricted movements under Turkish rule offer valuable insights into the social regulations of the period.

Moshe ben Eliyahu Halevi's later account, while more limited in scope, provides important documentation of the Karaite community's decline over the fourteen years since Shmuel ben David's visit. His descriptions maintain focus on traditional elements – holy places, landscape, and cemeteries – while adding unique details about the Golden Gate and local traditions.

The automatic text analysis reveals shifting emphases in the period's documentation, with terms related to physical structure ('house' – 155 instances, 'Jerusalem' – 131 instances, 'Land' – 79 instances, 'Gate' – 66 instances) balanced by religious terminology ('Sabbath' – 58 instances, 'Torah' – 47 instances, 'Prayer' – 47 instances) **[fig. 7]**. This linguistic pattern reflects the period's integration of practical and spiritual concerns in travel documentation.

The seventeenth-century narratives mark a significant evolution in Jerusalem travel literature, distinguished by the introduction of non-Sephardic perspectives, detailed accounts of inter-communal relationships, and practical guidance for future travelers. These writings also offer comprehensive documentation of social regulations and a thoughtful integration of administrative and religious concerns. This period sets new paradigms for travel documentation, shaping the genre for subsequent centuries while offering rich insights into Jerusalem's intricate social and religious fabric under Ottoman rule.
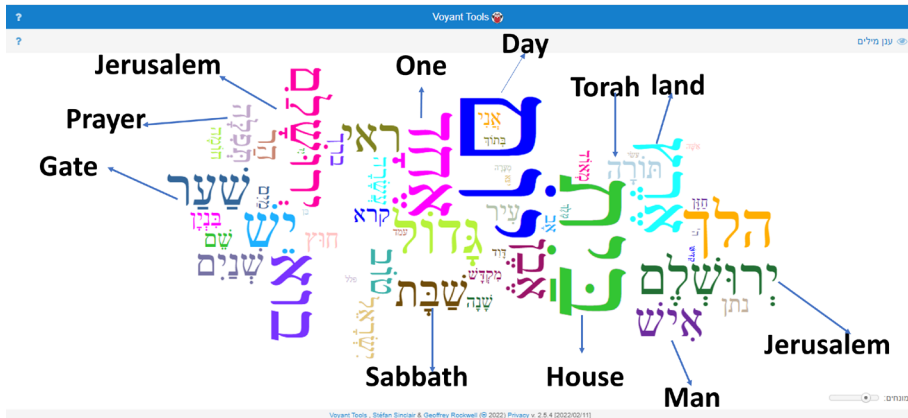

Figure 7   Word Cloud – Seventeenth Century

5.7 The Eighteenth Century: Intensified Documentation in a Period of Change

The eighteenth century marks a significant expansion in Jerusalem travel literature, with six detailed accounts (Journeys 17-22, Table 1) representing diverse perspectives. These narratives, predominantly from Ashkenazi and Eastern European writers, signal a shift from the previously dominant Sephardic voice. With the exception of Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Hida), a Jerusalem-born rabbinical emissary, all travelers originated from Ashkenazi or Eastern European communities. Rabbi Gedaliah of Simatitz provides the most extensive account at 9,588 words, while Rabbi Moshe Yerushalmi and Binyamin Ben Eliyahu the Karaite contribute approximately 3,000 words each.

Quantitative analysis reveals 249 tags across 16 content categories, with a distribution pattern of 92% 'object descriptions', 6% 'experiential descriptions', and 2% 'past descriptions' **[graph 12]**. This distribution demonstrates both continuity with earlier periods and new emphases in documentation focus.
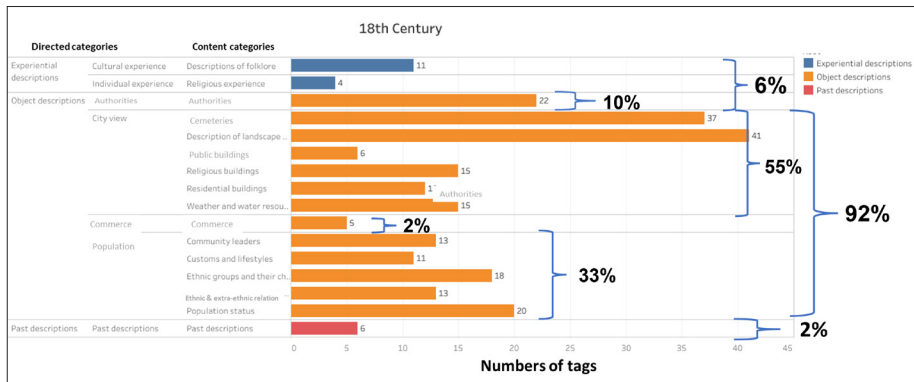
Graph 12 Division into Directed and Content Categories, Eighteenth Century

Eighteenth-century travel accounts are distinguished by their heightened focus on authorities, population dynamics, ethnic groups, and inter-ethnic relations, representing 43% of all tags. Rabbi Gedaliah's meticulous documentation sheds light on the challenges faced by Jerusalem's Jewish community under Ottoman rule, including complex relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, burdensome taxation systems such as burial site fees, strict regulations governing clothing and public behavior, and restrictions on movement and positioning in public spaces. Economic hardships are a recurring theme, with particular attention to the Ashkenazi community's struggles, exacerbated by language barriers stemming

from limited proficiency in Arabic and Turkish, which curtailed their economic opportunities.

Both Rabbi Gedaliah and Rabbi Moshe Yerushalmi frame their accounts as direct appeals for financial support to assist the beleaguered Ashkenazi community. Similarly, Binyamin Ben Eliyahu documents comparable economic difficulties within the Karaite community, further emphasizing the widespread financial struggles that defined Jewish life in Jerusalem during this period. These writings provide valuable insights into the interplay of social, economic, and cultural forces shaping inter-communal relations under Ottoman rule.

A significant shift in access to holy sites emerges during this period. New restrictions prevent non-Muslims from entering the Temple Mount, and Jewish access to the Western Wall becomes contingent upon tax payment. Despite these limitations, the accounts maintain detailed documentation of these sites, suggesting the development of alternative observation points and information networks.

The period's descriptions demonstrate particular attention to Jerusalem's climate and its impact on daily life, agriculture, and water resources. Rabbi Simcha Mazalazitz's emphasis on rainwater as a crucial drinking source provides valuable insights into the city's environmental challenges.

Linguistic analysis reveals significant shifts in terminology and focus. Words associated with Muslim and Ottoman authority, such as 'Ishmael' or 'Ishmaelite' (104 instances), feature prominently, often in contexts referring to governance structures ('Ishmael's kingdom', 'King of Ishmael'). The frequency of water-related terminology aligns with the period's heightened attention to environmental concerns **[fig. 8]**.
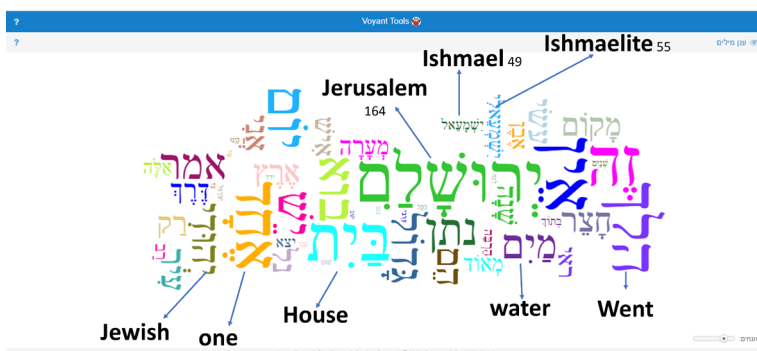

**Figure 8**   Word Cloud – Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth-century accounts mark a significant evolution in Jerusalem travel literature, distinguished by their detailed

documentation of regulatory systems and restrictions, an increased focus on economic hardships and community survival, and heightened attention to environmental factors and resource management. These narratives also chronicle changes in access to holy sites and demonstrate an explicit use of travel writing as a means of fundraising and advocacy. These developments reflect the shifting political landscape under late Ottoman rule and the growing sophistication of travel documentation, as writers began to use their accounts not only as descriptive tools but also as instruments for community support and advocacy.

5.8 The Nineteenth Century: National Revival and Modernization

The nineteenth century represents the final and most extensively documented period in the corpus, marked by significant demographic shifts and the emergence of new ideological frameworks. Yaari's compilation includes eleven travel accounts from this period, reflecting both traditional pilgrimage patterns and emerging nationalist perspectives. The period coincides with increased Jewish immigration to Jerusalem, including students of the Vilna Gaon and early Zionist pioneers, fundamentally altering the city's Jewish character.

Quantitative analysis of the tagging layer reveals a distribution pattern of 81% 'object descriptions', 17% 'experiential descriptions', and 2% 'past descriptions' **[graph 13]**. While maintaining the primacy of object descriptions seen in earlier centuries, the increased proportion of experiential descriptions suggests a shift toward more personal and subjective documentation styles.
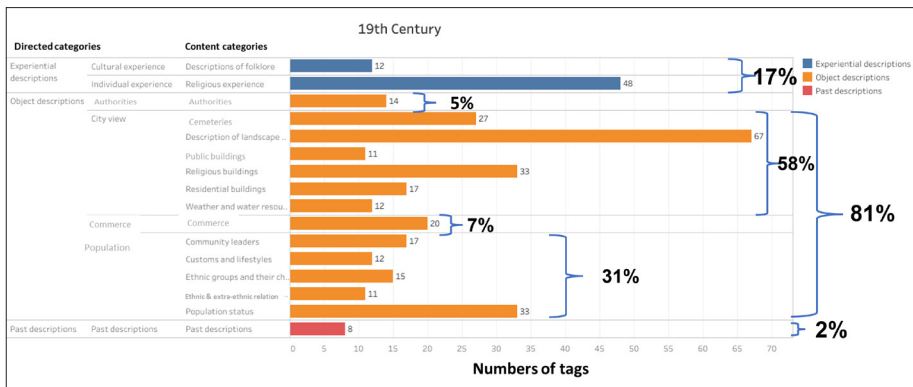
Graph 13 Division into Directed and Content Categories, Nineteenth Century

Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel's account exemplifies the period's more systematic approach to documentation. His narrative begins with a historical overview of Jerusalem, including Temple traditions, before proceeding to detailed descriptions of the city's physical infrastructure – walls, gates, and markets. His attention to the city's diverse population reflects the period's demographic expansion and increasing complexity of inter-communal relations.

The journey of Judith and Moshe Montefiore marks a significant departure in travel literature's purpose and scope. Their account, focused on philanthropic efforts and settlement initiatives, represents the first systematic documentation of mass Jewish settlement possibilities in Palestine. Their writing style, less descriptive and more personally engaged, reflects the emerging integration of traditional religious attachment with modern nationalist aspirations.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Mekminitz's account, while maintaining traditional elements such as prayers at the Western Wall and visits to holy tombs, introduces new attention to urban development and community organization. His documentation of city gates, holy places, and population dynamics provides valuable insights into Jerusalem's transformation during this period.

The final decades of the century witness accounts by prominent Zionist figures including Mordechai Ben Hillel HaCohen, Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg), and Theodor Herzl. Their narratives, while maintaining attention to Jerusalem's physical spaces and religious significance, introduce explicit discussion of national revival and settlement possibilities. This ideological framework represents a significant evolution in travel literature's purpose and perspective.

The automatic analysis reveals the growing prominence of nationalist terminology, with words like 'Land', 'Israel', 'Jewish', and 'Zion' featuring prominently in the period's vocabulary **[fig. 9]**. This linguistic shift reflects the broader transformation of Jewish discourse about Jerusalem from purely religious to national-political frames of reference.
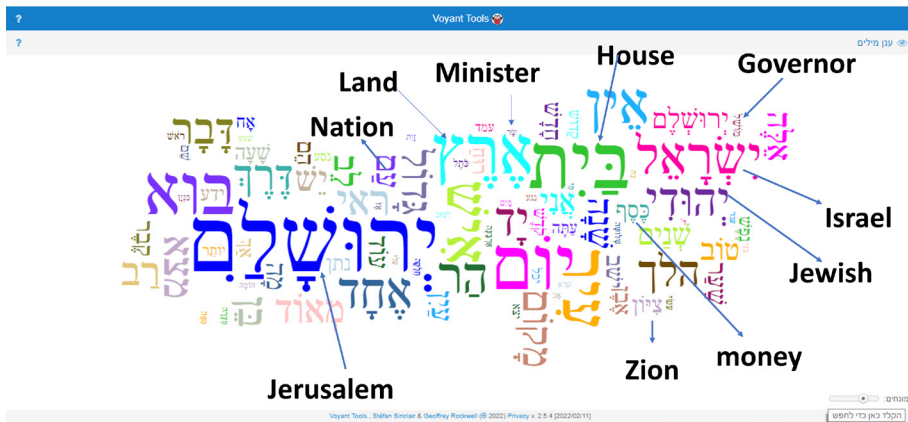
Figure 9 Word Cloud – Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth-century accounts reveal significant advancements in Jerusalem travel literature, blending traditional religious perspectives with emerging modern national ideologies. These narratives showcase more systematic documentation methodologies, a growing focus on settlement possibilities and urban development, and broader consideration of demographic and social dynamics. Additionally, they mark the emergence of explicitly political frameworks for describing Jerusalem, bridging the gap between traditional pilgrimage accounts and modern political-national documentation.

This period reflects broader transformations in Jewish relationships with Jerusalem and Palestine, illustrating the shift from purely religious frameworks to ones infused with national and political aspirations. While maintaining continuity with traditional documentation patterns established in earlier centuries, these accounts provide valuable insight into the modernization of Jewish discourse about Jerusalem.

As the final period in the corpus, the nineteenth century highlights how travel literature evolved beyond mere documentation of physical and social realities. It became a medium for expressing and promoting new ideological frameworks and aspirations, particularly those tied to settlement and the broader Zionist movement.

6 Summary and Conclusions

This research presents an in-depth analysis of Jerusalem's depiction in Jewish travel literature across eight centuries, from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis of 33 travel accounts, significant patterns and trends in the city's documentation were revealed.

In the early period, under Crusader rule, descriptions focused primarily on physical and religious elements, such as landmarks and holy sites. These limitations reflected the challenges of access and travel during that period. With the transition to Ottoman rule, documentation expanded and enriched, influenced by changing political realities, inter-communal dynamics, and evolving Jewish migration patterns.

Quantitative analysis revealed a consistent emphasis on 'object descriptions', particularly city views, demographic dynamics, and religious structures. However, experiential and historical narratives gained prominence over time. Simultaneously, the range of authorial voices and perspectives expanded – from Sephardic dominance in early periods to the inclusion of Ashkenazi, Karaite, and other voices, especially from the seventeenth century onward.

A significant shift occurred in the nineteenth century, when narratives reflected not only traditional religious themes but also emerging nationalist ideologies. This change marks a transition from pilgrimage-focused descriptions to those supporting Jewish settlement and modernization. These transformations highlight how Jerusalem's portrayal reflected broader historical, cultural, and ideological changes in Jewish communities.

The main conclusion is that Jewish travel literature serves as a rich historical source documenting the evolving relationship between Jewish communities and Jerusalem. The interaction between religious devotion, social reality, and emerging national aspirations demonstrates how the city's representation adapted to changing contexts while maintaining its enduring symbolic significance. This corpus illustrates the diverse ways in which literature both reflects and shapes cultural and ideological transformations.

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