

The Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon



Gorgias Historic Travels in the Cradle of Civilization

31

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The Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon

Who, in the Latter End of the Twelfth Century
visited Poland, Russia, Little Tartary, the
Crimea, Armenia, Assyria, Syria, the Holy Land,
and Greece.

Edited and Translated by
Abraham Benisch

In Collaboration With

William F. Ainsworth

By

Judah b. Samuel
he-Hasid



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P R E F A T O R Y R E M A R K S .

THE travels of Rabbi Petachia (by Bartoloccius and Plantavitius, called Moses Petachia) took place in the twelfth century, for he was a brother of Rabbi Yizchak Hallaban (the White ?) ben Yacob, of Rabbi Nachman, of Ratisbon, and a cotemporary of Rabbi Yehoodah ben Samuel, surnamed the Pious, all of whom flourished in the latter half of the twelfth century. The last-named rabbi, teacher of Rabbi Yizchak, died, according to Shalsheleth Hakkabalah, A. M. 4977 (1217, C. E.). We have in vain searched for data which might guide us in fixing the exact period of Petachia's travels. All that we can show is that he visited Bagdad at least one year after his cotemporary Benjamin. For this latter, named Rabbi Daniel as the chief of captivity at the time of his visit to the capital of the khaliphs, whilst the former speaks of him as having been dead one year (see p. 17) before his arrival there. But even this approximate date is somewhat invalidated by the discrepancy in the name of the father of this functionary, whom Benjamin calls Hasdai, and Petachia Shelomoh, as it is possible that one of the immediate successors of Rabbi Daniel ben Hasdai, of the time of Benjamin, might have

been Rabbi Daniel ben Shelomoh, who might likewise have been dead at the visit of Patachia at Bagdad.

Although a native of Ratisbon, which, at that time, from its numerous congregation distinguished for learning, deserved the epithet of Jewish Athens, yet Petachia, like his brother Yizchak, lived, according to Zunz, at Prague, from which city he set out on his travels, probably between 1170 and 1180, certainly prior to 1187, since he described the Holy Land as still in possession of the Crusaders.

From the title of the Altdorf edition, published by Wagenseil, from a manuscript,* it is clear that our rabbi wrote an itinerary. But it is equally clear, from the work before us, that this is not his production, but only an abridgment thereof, probably made by Rabbi Yehoodah the Pious, to whom Petachia, after his return, had given an account of his travels, and to whom, perhaps, he also entrusted the original notes. This is evident, from the fragmentary character of the work, and especially from pp. 13, on which it is stated "But Rabbi Yehoodah the Pious would not write this down;" 53, where we read, "He (Petachia) told us the names of all the cities, and

* The translation runs thus:—"Circuit of the rabbi, Rabbi Petachia, of Ratisbon, brother of Rabbi Isaac the White, author of the Tosephoth (additions, or rather glosses to the Talmud), and the rabbi, Rabbi Nachman, of Ratisbon. And Rabbi Petachia went round all the countries as far as the river Sambation, and all the news and all the wonderful things of the Holy One, praised be he, which he saw or heard, he wrote down as a memorial to tell it to his people, the house of Israel, thus to bring hidden things to light."

how many days he had had to travel from one city to the other, but it is not necessary to write this down;" 36, stating that "he (Petachia) had a record of all the graves, but forgot it in Bohemia."

According to the spirit of the age, descriptions of the graves of saints, and the miracles performed by them, occupy a prominent position. It is the same spirit which gave rise to the *Acta Sanctorum*, the fifty-three volumes of which are devoted to the lives of saints and personages reputed holy."

No reader of the itinerary can doubt its authenticity, every page of which bears evidence that the traveller actually described what he saw from personal knowledge, and when anything is reported from hearsay, he was careful to give us notice thereof. There are, moreover, accounts in it, the truth of which has been ascertained in comparatively modern time, and which nobody in the age of our traveller could have given, unless he spoke from individual experience. Among them we reckon that of the Karaites in the Crimea, whose religious practices have only become better known to the West in the seventeenth century, through the exertions of Triegland; of their sojourn in the Crimea, called by him *Chazaria*; his representation of the khaliphs, who about that time had freed themselves from the tutelage of the Atabegs, and once more held sway over the neighbouring sultans (see p. 14), as may be learned from Lebrecht's dissertation on the subject inserted in Asher's edition of Benjamin

of Tudela, and which traveller, who, according to Yuchasin, died in 1173, was, as stated before, Petachia's cotemporary. Nor is external evidence wanting for establishing the authenticity of the work, it having been recognised as such by the authors of Yuchasin, Shalshelth Hakkabalah, and other early writers well acquainted with ancient Hebrew literature.

The object for which the rabbi travelled is neither recorded by him nor by any cotemporary. It may, however, be conjectured, from the tenor of the book, that he was impelled thereto by a strong desire to visit his distant brethren, and to become acquainted with their fate. From p. 10 we may further infer that he was in easy circumstances, and even supposed to be affluent.

It is in vain that we search the pages of his cotemporaries, to learn what became of him after his return. He disappears from the stage of history without leaving any further trace behind him.

It would be superfluous to speak of the worth of this itinerary. Those who feel an interest in this kind of literature will know how to assign their proper value to the observations of a traveller of the twelfth century, who felt, saw, and described in the spirit of his age, and thus holds up one mirror more reflecting the image of a time in many respects most remarkable and instructive.

The following editions of this production, originally composed in rabbinical Hebrew, have, as far as we can learn, appeared on the continent; 1, at Prague, 1595,

with a German translation ; 2, at Altdorf, in 1687, and again in 1691, with a Latin translation by Wagenseil, and reproduced in Ugolini's *Thesaurus, Ant. Sacr.* ; 3, at Altona, in the reign of Christian VII. (who ascended the Danish throne in 1766), and is a reprint of the Prague edition ; 4, Paris, in the *Journal Asiatique* for 1831 : it is accompanied by a French translation, and explanatory notes by Dr. Carmoly. This Hebrew text differs materially from every other edition ; but as many consider it as interpolated, we abstained from profiting by the collation which we instituted ; 5, at Furth, in 1844, with a German translation, and accompanied by notes, by David Ottensosser. We have, however, not heard of its ever having been rendered into English. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first version into the vernacular. It was originally made for the Syro-Egyptian society before which it was read, and the members of which found it so interesting, that we were encouraged in the idea of publishing it.

Our edition follows that of Furth, confessedly a reprint of that of Altdorf, which is considered the most correct. We have adopted a few of the emendations of Ottensosser, put between brackets, but in most cases we have restored the text of Wagenseil. We were anxious to collate the printed text with some manuscript, but could not learn whether there was any in existence, although Wolfius (*Bibliotheca Heb.*, tom. i. p. 888, sub R. Moses Petachia) speaks of one in the *Bibl. Spizeliana*, and of another in the *Oppen-*

heim Library. For the elucidation of the subject, explanatory notes have been added, for some of the most valuable of which we are indebted to Wm. F. Ainsworth, Esq., the learned honorary secretary of the Syro-Egyptian Society, whom his travels in the East so well qualify for such labours, and to whom we take this opportunity of returning our sincere thanks. Mr. Ainsworth's notes will be found to be marked by the letter A.

Having, in compliance with the suggestion of some friends, added the original text, we have rendered our translation, in as far as the genius of the English language would permit, as literal as possible, and so placed the text and version on opposite pages, that the corresponding lines in the two languages almost face each other. In this arrangement we were guided by the wish to render this little publication also available for those who wish to become acquainted with the rabbinical dialect for which this composition is well adapted, by the happy medium which it holds between the pure biblical Hebrew, and the mixed Chaldaic idiom.

Before we conclude, it may not be amiss to make a remark on the terms mile (מִיל) and parasang, (פֶּרְסַע), used by our traveller in measuring distances. Supposing that he employed them in the sense in which they are taken in the Talmud, (Yoma, 67 a, Baba Metsiah, 33 a), the mile would be equal to seven stadia and a half, and the parasang to four such miles.

TRAVELS OF RABBI PETACHIA.

סבוב הרב רבי פתחיה

מרעגנשפורג.

אלה הסבובים אשר סבברבי פתחיה שכנב את
כל הארצות: ובתחלה הלך מפראג שבביהם
לפולין. ומפולין לקיוב שברוסייא. ומרוסייא הלך
בששה ימים עד על נהר דנפרא. ומעבר הנהר
התחיל לילך בארץ קדר: ואין להם כפינות. אלא
תופרין עשר עורות סוסים שטוחין. ורצועה אחת
בשפה סביב. ויושבין והעגלות וכל המשא בתוך
העורות וקושרין רצועה שבשפת העורות בזנבות
הסוסים, והסוסים שטין. וכן עוברין את המים:
ובארץ קדר אין אוכלין את הלהם. אלא אורז
ודוחן מבושל בחלב וחלב וגבינה: וחתוכות בשר