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Thomas Wright

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Thomas Wright : Early travels in Palestine,: Comprising the narratives of Arculf [and others] before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Early travels in Palestine,: Comprising the narratives of Arculf [and others]:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book contains nine accounts of early travels to IsraelBy Israel DrazinThis is a reprint of the 1848 book by Thomas Wright (1810-1877) in which he included the narratives of nine authors who visited Palestine from the eighth to the seventeenth century, including a saga by a twelfth century crusader. Each of the nine authors comments upon the people they saw, events, and various cultures of their time. These first-hand accounts are informative and interesting. I will focus in this review on the trip of Benjamin of Tudela, which was composed by a Jewish man, apparently a merchant, who visited quite a few countries, including what was then called Palestine, which is named Israel today. I also wrote a review of "The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela," which I recommend to readers who are interested in this trip.Benjamin apparently lived from 1130 to 1173. Virtually nothing is known about his personal life. He is called Rabbi Benjamin in the beginning of his book, but this part of the book was most likely added after his death. There is no indication that he was a rabbi, although it is clear that he was educated. His trip began in 1165 from his hometown in Spain. He visited France, Germany, Italy, Constantinople, Baghdad, Persia, Africa, and many other places, a total of some 300 cities. He came to Asia about a hundred years before Marco Polo. He focuses for the most part on the Jewish population of the cities and mentions the number of Jews living in the cities and the Jewish leaders of the community, but he also speaks about non-Jews. His book is

considered important because of the otherwise unknown information he gives about daily life in the middle ages. Some of the many interesting facts that Benjamin gives includes the following. The Jews of Constantinople were brutally oppressed, they weren't even allowed to ride horses, but the king's physician was Jew who was allowed to ride on a horse. In Cyprus, there were Jews who followed the ancient biblical practice where the day begins at day break, rather than the current Jewish view that it starts at sundown, and they observed the Sabbath from Saturday morning until Sunday morning. He wrote that Jews bring the bones of their dead to Hebron, the traditional burial place of Abraham and the other patriarchs and matriarchs, so that they can be buried near these saintly people. While much of Benjamin's reports are correct, his book is also filled with incorrect information. He thought that the Western Wall in Jerusalem, which we know was the outer wall of the Temple Court, was an inner wall, the wall of the temple's holy of holies. He saw a salt pillar near the Dead Sea and was told it was the pillar of Lot's wife, from the time she was turned into salt, when she looked back at the destruction of the city of Sodom, and he believed what he was told. In Damascus, he believed a report that a mosque was partially made out of the wood from the biblical Noah's ark. He was told and believed that the Pope in Rome had Jewish advisors; the Roman emperor Galba had a palace that was three miles long and had 360 windows equal to the number of days in a year; Rome had two copper pillars built by King Solomon which sweated or wept each year on the ninth day of the Hebrew month Ab, the traditional date on which the Jerusalem temples were destroyed in 586 BCE and 70 CE; the ancient Egyptian pyramids were constructed by magic; and the legendary King Romulus, the founder of Rome, feared the Israelite King David. Thus, it should be clear that along with facts accepted by scholars as being true, there were many superstitions in Benjamin's account that were most likely untrue. Benjamin's fascinating story of the life and death of David Alroy is the principle source about this pseudo-messiah. See my review of Benjamin Disraeli's novel "Alroy" for information about this "prince of the captivity."

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