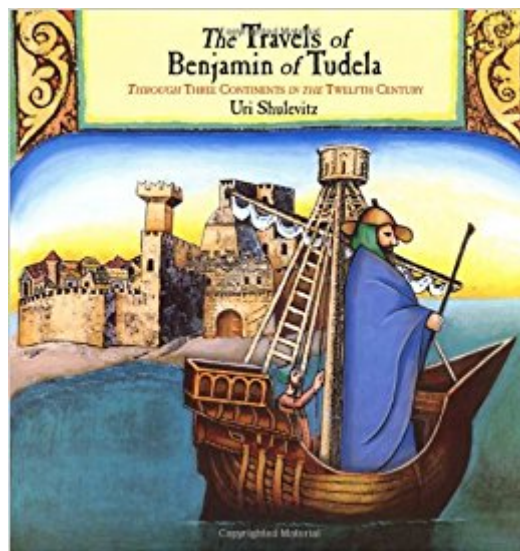




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The Travels Of Benjamin Of Tudela: Through Three Continents In The Twelfth Century



Synopsis

Through Three Continents in the Twelfth CenturyImagine a time when streets were narrow and dirty, towns were surrounded by walls, brigands lurked alongside roads that were treacherous and few, bridges over rivers were rare, and a man setting out on a journey never knew if he would return alive. It was the year 1159 when the medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin left his native town of Tudela in northern Spain on an adventure to see the places he had read about in the Bible. He traveled for fourteen years - from Rome to Constantinople to Jerusalem to Baghdad, among others - by ship, by cart, and on foot, enduring great hardships in his quest for knowledge of other places and people. Working from Benjamin's original chronicle, written in Hebrew, as well as other sources on the period, Uri Shulevitz captures the true spirit of this amazing adventurer, using a text written in the first person and superlative illustrations. The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela is a 2006 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 920L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 48 pages

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR); 1st edition (April 6, 2005)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 10.8 x 0.5 x 11.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #705,258 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > European](#) #118 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Exploration & Discoveries](#) #159 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Medieval](#)

Age Range: 9 - 13 years

Grade Level: 3 and up

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 4-8 — Benjamin, a Spanish Jew, left his native town of Tudela in 1159 to embark on a 14-year journey across the Middle East. His Book of Travels, written in Hebrew, recounts his grueling, often-dangerous journey through what is modern-day France, Italy,

Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt. Encounters with warring Crusaders and Muslims, rapacious pirates, and bandits added to his hardships. Shulevitz re-creates this epic journey in a picture book of epic proportions, adapting Benjamin's account into a detailed, first-person narrative, accompanied by large, ambitious illustrations that evoke the landscapes, people, architecture, and history of the places that Benjamin saw. Darker, freer, and more impressionistic than Shulevitz's familiar work, the art is often indebted to medieval manuscript painting and Persian miniatures. Meticulously researched, with a long bibliography, lengthy author's note, and brief insets containing information that complements Benjamin's descriptions, this oversize picture book is obviously a labor of love. Wherever he went, Benjamin visited Jewish communities. Shulevitz's retelling stands as a testimony to the history, wisdom, and fortitude of those medieval Jews living precariously under Christian or Muslim rule. Both art and text will help readers imagine life during that time and, perhaps, provide a context for the contemporary turmoil in the lands Benjamin visited so long ago.

—Margaret A. Chang, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams

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Starred Review Gr. 4-7. At first blush, the story of a bona fide twelfth-century Jewish wanderer might not seem the stuff of picture books, even for older readers. But this is so uniquely rendered that it proves, along with other recently published titles, that outstanding execution can draw readers to almost any subject. This fictional account follows Benjamin on a 14-year trip, which takes him from his home in Spain to historic cities of the ancient world: Rome, Babylon, Baghdad, and Jerusalem, among others. Illness, hunger, thirst, thieves, and assassins plague the journey. Yet there are also wonderful adventures, mystical stories, and fabulous sights, such as the pyramids. Told in an expansive first-person narrative, the book is filled with a bazaar's worth of detail, with unobtrusive sidebars explaining text references. In an extensive author's note, Shulevitz discusses how, beginning with Benjamin's actual diary in the original Hebrew, he faced the task of making the mostly factual reporting appealing by adding incidents found in other books. An extensive bibliography lists his sources, but, unfortunately, there are no specifics about the experiences he took from them. It's no surprise that Shulevitz, a Caldecott winner, provides splendid illustrations, but he outdoes himself here. The richly painted scenes, which vary in style and color according to their location, are highlighted by collage accents. Together with the evocative text, they capture the sweep of mysterious and faraway places. For other stories of intrepid travelers, see the adjacent Read-alikes column.

Ilene Cooper

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Introducing primary aged children to history is essential. A well-designed picture book is one method worth pursuing. Anyone seeking information about medieval life should read *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela: Through Three Continents in the Twelfth Century* (Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group, 2005). This book is written by award-winning author and illustrator, Uri Shulevitz. It is a fictionalized first-person account of Tudela's 14-year journey. Twenty-first century children are accustomed to a wide array of modern conveniences. Being able to imagine the primitive lifestyle of the Middle Ages is enhanced by the reading of first-hand accounts. Unfortunately, few pertinent documents have survived. Benjamin's Hebrew account is among the most famous. Benjamin introduced his contemporaries to some places that were previously unknown while maintaining a nonchalant voice. These original writings are usually reserved for historians and adult history buffs. Using extensive research funded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Uri combined many of the factual elements of Benjamin's Hebrew writings with a fictionalized voice. Benjamin's words and thoughts allow modern readers to visualize the perils of traveling during this turbulent time while learning about many historical events. Modern day adventurers have the luxury of traveling by plane, modern railroad systems, and via luxury cruise ships. Benjamin's bare bones land treks were accomplished by traveling by foot and in wagons. Sea travel was faster, but limited to rudimentary barges and small boats. Pirates, diseases, and inclement weather were major concerns. In the beginning of the book, Uri provides a map of Benjamin's travels. This illustration reveals Benjamin's amazing accomplishments. He left his home in Spain and bravely explored Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Persia, China, and Egypt before he made his way back to Tudela, Spain. Uri skillfully added many facts that provided a colorful and thought provoking overview of medieval life. He simultaneously put different events and places into historical perspective. Readers young and old will be inspired to want to learn more about the interactions between Christian Crusaders and Muslims. The role of the Assassins or Hashishin is likewise a noteworthy aspect of medieval history. Benjamin's journey is seen through the eyes of a European Jew. Thus, his perceptions are based on a Jewish mindset that ties each place to Jewish history and survival. Uri's illustrations add to the understanding of Benjamin's journey. The vibrant colors help to engage the reader. *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela: Through Three Continents in the Twelfth Century* would be the perfect book to share with anyone who is interested in the Middle Ages, notable European sites, and Jewish history.

Beautifully illustrated and lovingly redacted text, telling the fascinating stories of a remarkable man. Book arrive in excellent condition and has an honored place in the family library.

My daughter wanted this for summer reading and found it interesting. It's one of those books that she didn't take as an obligation to read.

It didn't meet my expectations. I thought I was getting the real manuscript, translated into English, of course. Instead I got a children's book...pretty but not helpful for my research....Neil Rolde

Beautifully written and illustrated, The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela takes us on an incredible journey through the ancient Jewish world into the Diaspora nine hundred years ago. As the story unfolds, we visit one enchanting city after another and experience with our imaginations and amazing illustrations the sights, sounds, and smells of each beautiful and mysterious location. Don't miss this great adventure!

not really his personal travels but fictionalized. not worth reading unless to young children. no more to say no more

I read this with my 7-year-old daughter, and we both loved it. It's a fascinating story that effortlessly weaves in history and geography. The pictures are beautiful.

In 1159, Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish man living in Spain, set out on a 14 year journey across the Mediterranean Sea and through the Middle East. His Hebrew-language journal is a wonderful look into the world of the twelfth century, but it is not accessible to many people. Well, in this wonderful book, author Uri Shulevitz retells Benjamin's story for the younger reader! Large and lavishly illustrated, this book does an excellent job of retelling Benjamin's story in a manner that is easily grasped by the younger reader. But, don't write this book off as mere childishness. Not being content to merely entertain, the author includes a number of interesting sidebars, in which he explains things being discussed. Overall, I found this to be a fascinating book as entertaining and informative. I highly recommend this book to those who have younger readers who want something distinctly non-childish. I highly recommend this book!

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