In 1575, an unknown Jew named Uri Ben Shimon of Biella set out from his home in Safed to Venice, carrying a manuscript titled *Yihus ha-Avot,* the Lineage of the Fathers. The text was written in or shortly after 1538 and was copied, Ben Shimon said, by himself in 1564. *Yihus ha-Avot* is actually a list of tombs of Jewish saints from Hebron in the south to Kefar Bar’am and Alma in the north. In effect, it is an illustrated guidebook for Jewish pilgrims. Additional manuscript copies of *Yihus ha-Avot* exist; some are even slightly older. However, it is on the basis of Uri Ben Shimon’s copy that the Hebraist Johann Heinrich Hottinger published a bilingual edition in Latin and Hebrew, titled *Cippi Hebraici—*the Tombs of the Jews—in 1659 and again in 1662, in Heidelberg.

In 2002, Abraham David published a manuscript that he had found in the Casanatense Library in Rome. The manuscript contains several works in various fields, including one titled “A writing [that is, a letter] from Jerusalem, may it be built speedily and in our days, amen, with the lineage of the saintly and the pious, peace be upon them, who are buried in the Land of Sanctity, the Land of Israel, may it be built speedily and in our days, amen.” The letter is very similar if not identical, in both the order and the description of the holy places, to *Yihus ha-Avot*. At the very least, the two works are of the same origin. The most important difference between them is that the manuscript found by David—*Yihus ha-Tsadiqim ve-ha-Hasidim,* the Lineage of the Saintly and the Pious—is dated to 1489. This is known because its author mentions the destruction of the Yerushalmi Synagogue by Muslim fanatics in 1474, “fourteen years ago.” Namely, it was written before the Ottoman conquest of the land of Israel. *Yihus ha-Avot* (or, at least, R. Uri Ben Shimon’s edition), in contrast, describes the construction of the rampart in Jerusalem by order of Suleiman the Magnificent. Therefore, it certainly dates to the Ottoman era in the Land of Israel.

The existence of two similar works (so similar that, in my opinion, one may consider them two editions of the same work) on either side of the Ottoman conquest invites us to compare the descriptions of the Holy Places and the way Jews perceived them in the different periods.

The Ottoman conquest of the Land of Israel set a wave of messianic hopes in motion. Many Jews considered the Ottomans, victors over the Christian Byzantine Empire, harbingers of the redemption. The doings of personalities such as R. Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi and R. Yitzhak Hacohen Shulal in the Land of Israel, and of David Hareuveni and Shlomo Molcho elsewhere, reinforced rumors about additional evidence of the redemption in Jerusalem, creating an eschatological atmosphere that presumably influenced quite a few Jews.

In the next few minutes, I wish to compare the two works that describe the Holy Land in the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods. To do so, I will present several examples of descriptions of Jerusalem and Hebron.

First, Jerusalem. For most locations that appear in the lists in question, the name of the place and that of the saint buried there are mentioned. Sometimes, an identifying detail is added, such as “It is in a vineyard” or “There is a large almond tree over the grave. Jerusalem, however, is described in much greater detail, and the central element in the account, which includes the city’s markets and gates, is of course the Temple Mount.

It is only natural that while the Mamluk-era manuscript emphasizes the destruction of the city, the Ottoman-era work focuses on the city’s rehabilitation, because this was indeed breathtaking and joyous news for the Jews. I wish, however, to focus on the way the author represented this news and his choice of words and expressions to describe the city under construction.

If so, the 1489 text, as one would expect, describes Jerusalem in ruins. By this, I do not mean only classical literary conventions such as “The Temple was destroyed due to our sins.” The Western Wall is described pessimistically, in the context of the destruction of the Temple: “The Temple was destroyed due to our sins; nothing remains of the building of King Solomon, peace be upon him, but the Western Wall.” The place where the Temple stood is described in a similar context, with emphasis on the absence of the Temple and the Jews’ lowly condition in exile, because “The Ishmaelites built a beautiful dome atop the abode of the Holy of Holies, covered with lead on the outside and lead as black as ink, and paved on the inside with gold and gems.” Even the wretched condition of the city before Suleiman the Magnificent renovated it is emphasized— “And the walls of Jerusalem are all in ruins.”

The later text, written after the Ottoman conquest began, takes a much more optimistic view of the city. The Western Wall, described in the earlier text in the context of the destruction of the Temple, is now depicted as “an ancient building from which the [Divine] Presence has not moved.” Whereas the author of the earlier text emphasized Muslim worship on the Temple Mount, the structure that stands where the Temple once stood is described in the later text as nothing less than “the Temple” and the mosque is not mentioned at all: “There are two large domes at the Temple, covered with lead from the outside and paved with some gold and gems on the inside. The larger of them is the abdomen of the gallery. It is the place of the Holy of Holies and within it is the Foundation Stone.”

Another feature of the later text is its emphasis on the rebuilding of Jerusalem. At the very beginning of the description, the author stresses the following: “Now, in the year 297 [1537], they began to build the walls around the city by order of the king, Sultan Suleiman.” In addition to the wall, various construction projects in the city are described: “and beautiful buildings around them that gladden the heart of those who see them.” The description of delight and, in particular, the use of the expression “gladden the heart” in the context of rebuilding Jerusalem appear in a rabbinical commentary on the Book of Psalms that describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the end of days:

“For our hearts rejoice in Him (Psalms 33:20). The Holy One said, “You see me and rejoice and take delight, and I, too, see you and take delight and rejoice, as it is said, “And I will take delight in Jerusalem and rejoice in My people” (Isaiah 65:19). Thus it is said, “The Lord will rejoice in His works.”

This account is followed by a detailed description of the reservoirs of Jerusalem and the drinking facilities that had been brought to the city: “They never run out of water; rather, [the inhabitants of Jerusalem] draw living water in the summer and the winter and there is enough for everyone.” In this account, the author chooses to use Zechariah’s eschatological prophecy. In Chapter 14, Verse 8, the prophet describes the final battle for Jerusalem: “And it will happen on that day that life-giving water shall come forth from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter” The next verse symbolically expresses the outcome of the battle and the reality of redemption in the End of Days in words that are familiar to every Jew from the prayer liturgy: “And the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and His name one.”

The use of Zechariah’s prophecy of redemption, however, is not limited to the quotation of that verse. The *Yihus ha-Avot* manuscript opens with an illustration of implements from the Temple. Prime among these artifacts is the golden menorah, as is described in Zechariah’s prophecy about the construction of the Second Temple. Above the illustration is the verse that describes it: “I see a solid gold menorah with a bowl at the top and seven lamps upon it, with seven spouts to the lamps.” Under the menorah appear several implements from the Sanctuary: the basin, the table, a few musical instruments, and others. Some manuscripts of *Yihus ha-Avot* also present an illustration of the city of Jericho, enveloped in a maze of seven circles that symbolize the Israelites’ seven circlings of the walls of that city before the walls fell.

The art researcher Rachel Sarfati claims that the appearance of Zechariah’s vision of the menorah is symbolic of the era just before the construction of the Second Temple, whereas the implements from the Sanctuary, among which the Ark of the Covenant is missing, symbolizes the time preceding the First Sample. The message one gets from this is now, too, the redemption is imminent. The walls of Jericho—the first city that the Israelites conquered when they entered the Land of Canaan—allude to the hope of the redemptional conquest of the Land of Israel in the foreseeable future.

Similar illustrations of items from the Temple appeared before, as early as Bible manuscripts from Spain and Provence in the fourteenth century. They, too, are given messianic meanings. But when the illustrations are accompanied by expressions and references to prophecies and rabbinical commentaries relating to the redemption, the feeling gets even stronger.

In addition, I would like to suggest that the messianic implications of *Yihus ha-Avot* are connected with the anti-Christian polemic consciousness of the author, who may be of Christian European origin.

His optimistic description of Ottoman Jerusalem stems not only from the very rebuilding of the city by its new rulers but also from his view of the city’s conquest and revitalization as part of a process of “destruction of Rome,” that is, the Ottoman Empire’s victories of over Christendom. The fact of Muslim worship taking place on the Temple Mount is ignored because the author, influenced by the messianic atmosphere that set in after the Ottoman conquest, believes that a redemptional era has begun in Jerusalem. Therefore, in stark contrast to the 1489 text, his description of the city omits the Muslims altogether, describes the Dome of the Rock as “the Temple,” and refers to the Western Wall, a symbol of the destruction of the Temple in the earlier text, in its positive aspect only—the place that the Divine Presence never left. The existence of Muslim worship in the Holy City, an indication of the Jews’ downtrodden condition in exile in the earlier text, is not mentioned at all in the later text, least of all in a negative way. This is because, in the author’s mind, the Muslims’ current role of eschatological history focuses on defeating the Kingdom of Edom, namely, Christendom. For this reason, he disregards their control of the Holy Places because this control is a temporary and, therefore, unimportant stage in the overall redemption process.

An example of the author’s anti-Christian mindset appears in his account of the Cave of the Machpela (the Tomb of the Patriarchs) in Hebron. Like the description of Jerusalem, he makes no mention of Muslim worship when he writes about Hebron and the Tomb, in contrast to the earlier text, that of 1489, which notes that “The Ishmaelites worship there, due to our sins.” But another difference, perhaps more meaningful for our purposes, concerns the list of those buried in the Tomb. In the 1489 text, it is stated that “Buried there are the holy patriarchs, the eternal patriarchs: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah,” In *Yihus ha-Avot,* a small but highly significant addition is made to this esteemed list: “And they say that Esau’s head is there in the Tomb.” The source of this tradition is the exegetic work *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer,* in which Jacob’s burial is described:

When they came to the Cave of the Machpela, Esau came to them from Mount Horev to stir up discord and said, the Cave of the Machpela is mine. […] Hushim the son of Dan was deaf and speech-impaired. He asked them: Why are we sitting here? and he pointed with his finger. They told him, it is because of this man, who is not allowing us to bury Jacob. [Hushim] then brandished his sword and severed Esau’s head, which rolled into the Cave of the Machpela, and sent his body [back] to Esau’s landholding at Mount Se’ir.

Jacob’s right to own the Cave is contrasted with the contemptuous conduct of Esau, the ancient forefather of European Christianity. It seems to me that this emphasis, precisely in the context of the Cave of the Machpela—one of the three places that, according to the Sages, symbolize Jewish ownership of the Land of Israel—is connected to the anti-Christian polemic consciousness of the author of *Yihus ha-Avot*. Elhanan Reiner has shown that polemics over the Holy Places during the Crusader era was a Jewish way of coping with the political situation of Christian rule in the Land of Israel, by which the Christians stressed their claim to the Holy Places. It is possible that the Jewish-Christian polemic over title to the country had not died down even many years after the Crusader era. Instead, it took on a different form and a different purpose. No longer did it concern ownership of the Holy Places, since the defeat of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem undermined the Christian claim. Instead, by using figurative devices and specific modes of expression, it re-validated the Christians’ non-ownership of these places and the downfall of “Edom”— even more emphatically in view of the ascendancy of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and, particularly, in the Land of Israel along with its Holy Places.