The World According to Jewish Sources from the First Millenium A.D.

We have in our possession verbal descriptions of the world in Jewish works from the time of the Second Temple, like the “Book of Jubilees” or alternatively, “The Antiquities of the Jews” by Josephus Flavius . Out of these descriptions, it is possible to construct Jewish maps of the Oikemene and examine the relation between the way in which the civilized world is described in Greek and Roman descriptions and the way it is described in Jewish descriptions.

Rabbinical literature does not contain an organized description of the world. That literature which was edited after the destruction of the temple, is composed of various layers which were edited in different locations in Israel and in Babylon. The purpose of the research here put forward is to construct the maps of the civilized world and its surroundings, in accordance with the different layers in Rabbinical literature. Using digital tools, it is possible to map the way in which the world is portrayed in the different works as well as in the different layers of the literature of the sages.

A central source for a description of the civilized world is found in the ancient interpretation of the biblical “Commonwealth Calendar” (Genesis, chapter 10). The treatment of the different peoples which appear in the bible and the identification of their places of settlement appear in the Talmudim and Midrashim as well as in Greek and Aramaic translations of the bible. The comparison between the maps which are portrayed by the different works and the “Jewish” maps with familiar maps and the Roman and Christian writing can enable a platform and a title page for research in general. The spatial turn rested on the extensive tools available for recognizing the way in which space is conceptualized in order to understand central axes in the cultural world of the writers and creators.

As already stated, a layered mapping using G.I.S. (Geographical Information System) enables us to isolate different layers as well as different works of Rabbinical literature and to form a comparative research with such maps in the Greek and Roman world. The infrastructure for presenting the research already exists in an internet website which I formed (diaspora.haifa.ac.il) which functions today by way of the technology of Google Maps. An integration of the G.I.S. program will enable exhibition and use of the fruits of the research by the community of researches and those interested in the research.