

ELEPHANT, LEVIATHAN AND NINEVEH THE GREAT CITY:  
*SIBBUV RABBI PETACHIA* AND *MIDRASH YONAH*,  
PRINTED SIDE BY SIDE

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This paper focuses on the first printed edition of the medieval Hebrew itinerary *Sibbu Rabbi Petachia MiRegensburg* ('The Circuit of Rabbi Petachia of Regensburg'), printed in Prague in 1595, and on the singular reading context offered by its positioning alongside a Midrash (exegesis) on the Biblical book of Jonah. Although these two works belong to vastly different genres, they overlap thematically: both deal with travel to distant, marvelous lands. *Midrash Yonah* touches upon ideas and themes which appear in *Sibbu Rabbi Petachia*, and specifically upon the marvels found in distant realms, the constant presence of distant times and constitutive events in this world, and components of both creation and salvation which the traveler (and vicariously, the reader) witnesses in the present time. Juxtaposing these texts intensifies the *Sibbu*'s theological framing and brings into focus the Midrash's spacial dimension, inviting the reader to perceive it as a travelogue.

The examination of this booklet is an opportunity to explore how works from different genres are read when presented to the reader together. The use of two genres for describing distant lands creates a singular picture of the space depicted in them. The authority and style of *Sibbu Rabbi Petachia* is hinged on personal testimony, while the Midrash's authority is derived from its partaking in the traditional interpretation of scripture. The realms depicted in it are symbolic and hyperbolic as only a styled text such as Midrash can present them – but they lack the realistic and testimonial characteristics of a travelogue. One text, and one genre, cannot contain both types of description and both types of validity – the phenomenological and the divine; I suggest that by placing the texts side by side, they serve as interpretive keys for one another – and when read together, the description of distant lands becomes multi-dimensional.