The representation of Jerusalem and Eretz Israel in early modern Jewish writing and its relation to the experience of Jews who lived or traveled there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demands more than a single essay. Judiciously defining, clarifying, and limiting terms alone could fill the space allotted here. One might first address ‘Jewish,’ for example. There were Jews in communities around the world who thought about and prayed for the reestablishment of Israel; Jews who traveled to Israel, whether for short visits, to immigrate, or sometimes, as with the elderly, to die on holy ground; and Jews who grew up and lived in Israel. There were Jews in Morocco, Constantinople, Amsterdam, Lithuania, Safed, and Jerusalem who not only held slightly different theological beliefs and observed slightly different ritual practices, but who also understood their relationship to each other in manifold ways.

As the work of many, especially Matthias Lehmann, has demonstrated, the putative bond often assumed to have connected all Jews in one diasporic world did not exist – or at least was not always perceived to exist. Records of cross-cultural encounters show, rather, that early modern Jews recognized the existence of “different, if overlapping and competing,”

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2 For the effects of cultural overlapping, see David Ruderman, Early Modern Jewry (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), who identifies five factors (mobility, social mixing, the loosening of rabbinic control, knowledge explosion, and mingled identities) in the creation of an early modern Jewry characterized by doubt, crisis, and liminality.
Jewish diasporas. These differences were noted by shlihim [emissaries] who were sent around the world to collect funds for the Jewish communities in Israel. A Talmudic saying holds that “all of Israel are responsible for each other” (Shavuot 39a), but emissaries like Moses Hagiz learned the difference between this ideal and reality. His 1707 polemical Sefat Emet [The Language of Truth], which attempted to defend and legitimize the network of shlihat against its critics in Amsterdam and elsewhere in Western Europe by invoking a unified Jewish diaspora centered around Israel, failed to persuade precisely because Spanish-Portuguese and Ashkenazi Jews held to a sense of ethnic difference; they donated funds to their own communities, not to “all the Jews” in Eretz Israel. Of course, diversity of opinion often existed within each community as well, especially in cities like Amsterdam where the Jewish population was of mixed origin; rationalism, Kabbalism, messianism, Sabbatianism, and Hasidism (even, in some places, Karaitism) were available, if sometimes rabbinically proscribed, modes of Jewish belief.

Having accounted for this diversity, one might turn to ‘Jerusalem,’ ‘Eretz Israel,’ or even the meaning of Jewish ‘writing.’ Jerusalem and Eretz Israel are featured, after all, in the Tanach and midrash, in the Talmud, in rabbinic homilies and sermons, in diaries, letters, and in prayers. Indeed,


4 The major work on the emissaries from Israel is Avraham Yaari, Sheluhei Eretz Israel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1951).


6 See Ruderman’s Early Modern Jewry on the diversity of the Jewish communities.

7 The geographic boundaries of Israel were ambiguous. See the letter of Abraham Ishmael (1741), for example, in which Israel is said to begin outside the walls of Akko; also the letter of Joseph the Scribe of Beresteczko, in which he relates how the community in Safed complained about his delay in Sidon: “When the people of Safed heard from me that I was in Sidon for several months, they wrote me in this language: ‘why haven’t you come to us, isn’t Sidon doubtfully Israel, and there is certainly no doubt here.’” Both texts are in Avraham Yaari, ed., Iggerot Eretz Israel [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: ha-Mahlakah le-inyene ha-no ‘ar shel hanhalat ha-Histadrut ha-Tsiyonit: Gazit, 1943), 257, 300. All translations from Iggerot are mine.