

MATANEL FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY REPORT

Program: The Matanel Chair of Kabbalah Studies at the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East
Year: 2025

Please present your activity report according to the following lines. The whole rapport will not exceed 2 or 3 pages (as word document).

Name of the Program: The Safedian World of Knowledge: Mapping Knowledge Networks in Sixteenth-Century Safed

Year of activity: 2025

Name of the report's writer: Dr. Assaf Tamari and Eugene Matanky

Function of the report's writer: Head of The Matanel Chair of Kabbalah Studies at the Ben-Zvi Institute and the project's coordinator.

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Number of active participants in the program: N/R

Estimated number of impacted participants: N/R

Give the actual state of the program (where the program stands at the date of the activity report, no more than ten lines):

The research project seeks to reconstruct the knowledge landscape of early modern Safed in both its textual and social dimensions, through a network-based and multilayered perspective. While Safed is renowned for prominent figures such as R. Yosef Karo, R. Moshe Cordovero, Isaac Luria, and many others, this project aims to broaden the scope of inquiry to uncover the full fabric of the knowledge culture that developed in the city. This includes marginal figures, copyists, students, families, and the processes through which texts were transmitted and preserved. Similarly, the project seeks to reconstruct, as fully as possible, the library of Safed—not only the works composed there, but also those that were read, copied, preserved in the collections of its scholars, and whose ideas resonated among its inhabitants.

The project has completed its first nine months. A dataset has been built, comprising dozens of manuscripts, works, and individuals, as well as some of their interrelations. Manual mapping of knowledge networks is underway, including metadata collection and entity linkage. The database architecture is functional, and select case studies are in advanced stages of analysis. Partial automation of the data mining has begun,

focusing on extraction of relevant information from the corpus of bio-bibliographical research available. Preparatory steps toward automation of dataset construction through metadata collection from various other resources has begun, as well as of creating visualizations of the connections, all using tools from digital humanities.

The main achievements during the last year of activity (main achievements, number of events, number of participants, etc.):

- Construction of initial data infrastructure with tables for people, works, and manuscripts.
- Identification and documentation of key textual and social connections in 16th-century Safed.
- Development of a preliminary network graph of the Safedian knowledge landscape.
- Analysis of several case studies, including on Meir ibn Gabbai, R. David Ibn Zimra, Solomon Alqabeş, and others.
- One article accepted for publication, with two additional academic articles in preparation.

The evaluation (methodology, results, comparisons with the precedent year, conclusions for the future...):

This is the project's first year. Methodologically, it combines manual research (based on primary sources, catalogues, and secondary literature) with digital tools (metadata structuring and automation). Results show high potential for uncovering new intellectual patterns in Safed's history, as well as presenting a fuller picture of its intellectual world. The project offers a replicable model for historical network analysis, and confirms that such digital-humanistic approaches yield both macro insights and detailed biographical discoveries.

It also underscores the challenges of this work, e.g. the difficulty to verify data mined of archival catalogues, vs. the slow work of manual construction of data sets, balance of micro and macro analysis, expansion of genres, as well as the analysis itself.

Provisional guide lines for the advancement of the program in the next year:

- Expand and refine the existing dataset, improving entity-linking and metadata clarity.
- Advance automation of data extraction using machine learning and NLP techniques.
- Continue academic publication of case studies, and broaden the project's methodological impact.
- Create a data-base accessible to the scholarly community, allowing to add/correct information, and research existing information to draw historical conclusions.

Please join the Evaluation Report, the Financial Report and the list of the participants to the program (**as PDF documents**)

The budget for the project's first year is 10,000 NIS, all of which is used to pay for the research done by Mr. Matanky. The cooperation with the e-Lijah Lab (a digital humanities laboratory at The Department of Jewish History and Bible Studies in the University of Haifa) is of no costs at this stage.

Please join photos – as **JPG files** – and any link or any other document connected to the program which will seem to you relevant – as **PDF document**.

N/R

Please join a 5 minutes movie which presents your institution and the particular project supported by the Matanel Foundation. The movie should be accessible to the philanthropic world and to other potential donors.

N/R