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Pieter B. Hartog and Susanne Luther

# Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Travel Experiences

**Abstract:** This chapter introduces the theme of the volume and the contributions it seeks to make to the study of ancient travel. Such contributions are twofold. First, this volume is the first to include early Islamic travel within the comparative study of travel in antiquity. Second, our focus on experiential aspects of ancient journeying break new ground in demonstrating the variety of experiences travelling may evoke and in leading the way in the application of new methods in the study of ancient travel. This introduction ends with suggestions for future research, for which the articles collected here set the stage.

Travel, pilgrimage, and migration are well-established themes in the study of antiquity. Due in no small part to Lionel Casson's groundbreaking *Travel in the Ancient World*,<sup>1</sup> classicists, archaeologists, scholars of religion, theologians, and ancient historians all acknowledge the importance of mobility and related themes in the lives and literature of a notable subset of people in the ancient world.<sup>2</sup> An extensive overview of the developments in each of these fields would be beyond the scope of this introduction.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we will limit ourselves to outlining the specific contributions that this volume aims to make to the study of ancient travel, supplemented with suggestions for future research.

Before doing so, however, it is our pleasure to thank those who have contributed to this volume. Most contributions find their origin in a 2020 conference in Gronin-

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1 Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974).

2 As will be explored further below, it should be emphasized that travel in the ancient world was often a privilege of the elite or of those travelling in a professional capacity (merchants, soldiers). For many in antiquity, travel was out of the question, and passing travellers could even prove a serious burden. On the latter topic see Laura Nasrallah, "Imposing Travellers: An Inscription from Galatia and the Journeys of the Earliest Christians," in *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff, Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 273–86; Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

3 Such overviews are available elsewhere. Particularly thorough is Maren R. Niehoff, "Journeys on the Way to This Volume," in Niehoff, *Journeys in the Roman East*, 1–20. See also Philip A. Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland, Studies in Christianity and Judaism/Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme 21 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2011), 1–26; Pieter B. Hartog and Elisa Uusimäki, "Introduction: Views on the Mediterranean," *NTT JTSR* 75 (2021): 153–60.

gen, which was organised jointly by the Department of Jewish, Christian and Islamic Origins in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University Groningen and the Protestant Theological University. We look back to three inspiring days of scholarly exchange and thank our (then) host institutions for their financial and practical support. We are particularly thankful to the participants in the conference for their contributions, both on site and in this volume. We also owe gratitude to those colleagues who were not part of the conference in Groningen, but were willing to contribute to this volume. Finally, several people have been instrumental in getting this volume in its current shape. We thank Forrest Kentwell and Jonas Hiese for their expertise and commitment in editing the first batch of articles that reached us, and Marie Raschner for seeing the publication all the way through with great dedication and diligence.

## Travel in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Bringing together scholars of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this volume foregrounds the role that travel plays in each of these religious traditions. By so doing, our volume joins a growing body of scholarly literature developing a comparative approach to ancient journeying, both religious and other. Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford, for instance, presented a collection of essays dealing with Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> The same comparative outlook underlies Philip Harland's volume *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, which deals specifically with the religious aspects of travel and includes an article on ancient Mesopotamia and one on the Nabataeans.<sup>5</sup> Pilgrimage, of course, gets its fair share of attention in that volume as well, but, as its contributions show, the gods often also had a significant role to play in journeys that served another purpose than visiting a shrine. Finally, Maren Niehoff's 2017 volume *Journeys in the Roman East* moves beyond pilgrimage to analyze journeys of various kinds in Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman sources ranging from the early Roman empire up until late antiquity.<sup>6</sup>

Our focus in the pages that follow is both narrower and broader than that of these earlier volumes. In contrast to these previous works, this volume draws particular attention to the role of travel in three monotheistic traditions. As a result, themes such as ancient philosophical reflection on travel or military travel are absent from this volume. Greek and Roman views on travel do appear, but nearly

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4 Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford, eds., *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5 Harland, *Travel and Religion*.

6 Niehoff, *Journeys in the Roman East*.

exclusively in a comparative context. The contributions of Pieter B. Hartog, Christoph Jedan, and Nils Neumann, for instance, contextualize travel experiences in several New Testament writings (or, in the case of Christoph Jedan's treatment of Paul, the lack of such experiences) by comparing them with Pausanias' *Periēgesis Hellados*, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Seneca's *Ad Marciam*, or Menippean literature. The only exception to our focus on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is Gert van Klinken's analysis of the goddess Nehalennia, who was venerated in what is now the Dutch province of Zeeland and served as a patron for merchants who travelled the Scheldt River.

At the same time, this volume moves beyond previous comparative work by bringing early Islam into the picture. While similarities between Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman travelling have been noted in earlier studies, Islam has been all but ignored by scholars of ancient journeying. This oversight is particularly remarkable given the long-standing study of Christian pilgrimage and the increasing attention being given to travel in rabbinic literature, for which Catherine Hezser's 2011 monograph *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* was instrumental.<sup>7</sup> Against this backdrop, early Islam presents itself as another late antique religious tradition in which travel occupied a central role. The significance of mobility in the formative stage of Islam speaks already from its expansion through conquest.<sup>8</sup> Yet travel continued to occupy a key role in Islam and offered ways of contact with other cultures and religions. Thus, Zayd Ibn 'Amr's journey in search for true worship, which Paul Heck discussed in his contribution, brings him into contact with Jewish, Christian, and other religionists. At a later period, Clare E. Wilde shows, Muslim travelers of various kinds would regularly lodge in Christian monasteries. The contacts between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in late antiquity, therefore, call for a comparative approach to travelling that treats these three traditions together in their intricate connectedness.

Adopting such a comparative approach does not entail restricting oneself to religious travel or pilgrimage. Nor does it imply a focus on earthly travels. The travelers who appear in this volume, travelled for various reasons: merchants feature prominently in contributions by van Klinken, Susanne Luther, and Wilde; Heck's protagonist is a pilgrim in search of true worship; Hartog, Jedan, Sigurvin Lárus

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, TSAJ 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). On the contribution that Hezser's book makes in laying to rest the image of the Jews as a largely sedentary culture see Pieter B. Hartog and Lieve Teugels, "Jews on the Move: Catherine Hezser's *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*," *NTT JTSR* 75 (2021): 275–81.

<sup>8</sup> See D.R. Hill, "The Mobility of the Arab Armies in the Early Conquests" (MA Thesis, Durham University, 1963), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/9863/>; Gudrun Krämer, *Geschichte des Islam* (Munich: Beck, 2005), 27–68 (esp. 29–34).

Jónsson, and Tobias Nicklas write about travelling teachers and apostles; and a traveling emperor appears in Eelco Glas' article. Nor did all travelers in this volume traverse geographical spaces: contributions by Benjamin Lensink, Neumann, and Theo Witkamp and Jan Krans show how religious experiences can take the shape of otherworldly journeys. Even while travelers remain geographically in place, their heavenly journeys provide them access to trans-earthly knowledge. Like the sage who traverses the earth in search of wisdom—think of Zayd Ibn 'Amr, for instance—the protagonists of Lensink's and Witkamp and Krans' articles traverse the cosmos in pursuit of knowledge.

## Travel and Experience

This brings us to a second contribution that this volume makes to the study of ancient travel. In much previous scholarship, the focus has been on either the practicalities and materiality of travel or on literary and narratological depictions of space and travel. Thus, the Roman road network, often perceived as a catalyst for increased mobility, has been the subject of extensive study.<sup>9</sup> The same holds for Roman travel management: as Claudia Moatti has shown, the Roman empire was a world of extensive mobility, but the Romans also regulated this mobility.<sup>10</sup> The study of Jewish and Christian travel, too, is often practically inclined, raising questions such as: where would travelers stay during their journeys? or: How would they deal with the dangers that awaited them en route?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Casson, *Travel* explicitly identifies the Roman empire as a turning point in the development of ancient mobility, and his findings have greatly influenced subsequent scholarship. On Roman roads see, in addition to Casson's work, Thomas Pekáry, *Untersuchungen zu den römischen Reichsstrassen* (Bonn: Habelt, 1968); Raymond Chevallier, *Les voies romaines* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972); Hans Christian Schneider, *Altstraßenforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982); Cornelis van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); Anne Kolb, ed., *Roman Roads: New Evidence—New Perspectives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Moatti, "Le contrôle de la mobilité des personnes dans l'empire romain," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome—Antiquité* 112 (2000): 925–58; Claudia Moatti, "Roman World, Mobility," in *Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, ed. Immanuel Ness, Saër Maty Bá, Michael Borgolte, Donna Gabaccia, Dirk Hoerder, Alex Julca, Cecilia Menjivar, Marlou Schrover, and Gregory Woolf (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 1–14; Claudia Moatti, "Migration et droit dans l'Empire Romain: Catégories, contrôles et integration," in *The Impact of Mobility and Migration in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Twelfth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Rome, June 17–19, 2015)*, ed. Elio Lo Cascio and Laurens Ernst Tacoma, Impact of Empire 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 222–45.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the large amount of practical information gathered in Hezser, *Jewish Travel*, 19–196.

In addition to these practical matters, literary depictions of space and travel have been prominent in previous studies on ancient journeying. Hezser, for instance, devotes the larger part of her monograph on Jewish travel to literary portrayals of travel in Jewish (mostly rabbinic) sources.<sup>12</sup> Many contributions in the comparative volumes mentioned above also focus on the aims and effects of literary representations of travel. Moreover, travel is, understandably, an important theme in narratologically informed studies of space in ancient literature.<sup>13</sup> Most contributions to this volume join the choir of those who study literary portrayals of travel, as their focus is on travel in literature. This literary focus speaks most clearly from those contributions that explore literary aspects of the travel topos. Neumann compares literary descriptions of otherworldly journeys in the New Testament with those in Menippean literature. Hezser shows how rabbinic literature offers geographical imaginations rather than real-life geography, writing that the rabbis' "geographical references and descriptions should . . . be considered a mixture of daily life (e.g., travel) experiences, biblical reminiscences, hearsay, and wishful thinking" (265). Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer, finally, draw attention to a common core of "sailor-yarn traditions" (307) in Jewish, Christian, and other travel narratives, on which each of these narratives builds to fulfil its specific purposes.

At the same time, this volume adds a specific dimension: it concentrates particularly on the experiences of the traveler and how these are managed by, and serve the purposes of, the authors of literary travel accounts. Such an experiential perspective is not entirely novel: Jean-Marie André and Marie-Françoise Baslez include a small section on "l'expérience du voyage" in their monograph *Voyager dans l'Antiquité*, and Silvia Montiglio details how wandering in Greek literature is accompanied with "pains and privations" and so is informative of "the human condition."<sup>14</sup> Even so, the study of travel and experience remains strongly indebted to narratological and literary approaches, despite the potential application of social-scientific (e.g., psychological) methods in this field of study. The notion of the dialogical self, for instance, may prove helpful in understanding how the experiences of uncertainty shapes identity, as Hartog argues in his contribution. What is more, studies on travel and experience tend to foreground the intricate connection between travel and uncertainty and, related to it, the quest for wisdom. The contributions in

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<sup>12</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Travel*, 197–440.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Irene J.F. de Jong, ed., *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*, MnS 339 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Maximilian Benz and Katrin Dennerlein, eds., *Literarische Räume der Herkunft: Fallstudien zu einer historischen Narratologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Marie André and Marie-Françoise Baslez, *Voyager dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 66–70; Silvia Montiglio, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 24–61.

this volume confirm this link, but also add other experiences to the picture. In this way, we aim to broaden the study of travel and experience in antiquity.

The contributions in this volume address four main themes. First, the articles by Robin B. Ten Hoopen, Hartog, and Nicklas explore how journeys create uncertainty. This uncertainty, in turn, offers a canvas to develop one's identity. Building on this dynamics, authors of literary sources dig into the travel motif to promote their own agendas. Concentrating on Gen 11 and the unknown "travelers" in Gen 11:2, Ten Hoopen shows how travel is central to Israel's foundation narratives. Thus, he concludes, "the human itinerary towards Babel is to be taken as a theological journey that founds Israel's history in Mesopotamia," but "the divine descent of the universal Israelite deity YHWH depreciates Babel's role as the center of the world" (28). Hartog shows how uncertainty about one's sense of belonging is a key experience for travelers, and how the book of Acts explores this uncertainty to create a dialogical self for the early Jesus movement. Nicklas, lastly, shows how various literary writings touch on the image of the apostles of Barnabas as a traveler. By so doing, they write the churches that Barnabas visited—particularly the church of Cyprus—into early Christian narrative space.

Second, the experience of danger and uncertainty is central to Glas' article. Yet as Glas shows, Josephus' portrayal of Vespasian's indecisiveness to travel to Rome and claim power (*JW* 4.588–663) does not serve the construction of identity. Instead, Vespasian's hesitancy to journey during the winter season—in itself a sensible decision, given the dangers ancient literature associated with journeying in winter<sup>15</sup>—characterizes the emperor doubtful, and so offers a subtle critique of the Flavian dynasty. In this case, then, features that may at first glance appear fortuitous—the ability to restrain one's impulses and a judicious calculation of danger—appear in a context where they serve not only to commend, but simultaneously to criticize, the character of a protagonist.

Third, journeys provide access to true worship, wisdom, or knowledge. The experiences of the traveler thus entail the transformation of either the traveler or his audience—or both. Through his journey in search of true worship, Zayd Ibn 'Amr, whom Heck discusses, transformed earlier forms of worship at the Meccan Ka'ba. Whilst Zayd was on a search to learn wisdom, Luke's Jesus rather appears as one who teaches wisdom. As Jónsson shows, the *Reisebericht* in Luke's gospel (Luke 9:51–19:40) portrays Jesus as a *πεπαιδευμένος* who teaches while travelling. "Throughout the Travel Narrative," Jónsson concludes, "we are reminded that Jesus is travelling. . . , to where he is travelling . . . , that he is teaching. . . and most impor-

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Philo, *Leg.* 190, with comments by Pieter B. Hartog, "Space and Travel in Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*," *SPhiloA* 30 (2018): 71–92 (85–87).

tantly that his influence grows both geographically . . . and with regard to the size of the crowds” (91). In addition to these earthly journeys, heavenly journeys also offer access to knowledge. Visionary experiences that take the shape of otherworldly journeys are a welcome source for literary description. Lensink shows how two early Christian apocalypses—the Apocalypse of Paul and the *Visio Pauli*—take up 1 Cor 12:2–4 and actualize the virtual meaning of the Pauline passage in different ways. Each writing offers its own spatial description, even if both emphasize the importance of the visionary experience for obtaining wisdom. Witkamp and Krans recognize a similar dynamics in the Gospel of John. Drawing out similarities and differences between the gospel and Jewish apocalypses, Witkamp and Krans demonstrate how “[t]he visionary is given extraordinary heavenly knowledge and insight which only he can receive” (157).

Fourth, the experiences associated with travel can bring about consolation, as Jedan’s contribution demonstrates. Offering a detailed reading of the travel motif in Seneca’s *Ad Marciam*, Jedan shows how an extended analogy between life and an imagined journey to Syracuse, his description of which Seneca lards with touristic information, is to bring consolation to Marcia after the loss of her son Metilius. Moreover, Seneca describes Metilius’ afterlife as a journey and an ascent to the sphere of the heavenly bodies. The centrality of travel in Seneca’s *Ad Marciam* contrasts, so Jedan argues, with the absence of explicit travel motifs in the Pauline literature. Jedan explains this difference by pointing to the different cosmological views of Paul and Seneca and by exploring “the possibility of Paul expressing aspects of what he could achieve with travel motifs by other linguistic means” (49).

## Journeys Beyond This Volume

We hope and expect that the contributions in this volume contribute to the advancement of the comparative study of travel in the ancient world. Notwithstanding the contributions that this volume aims to make, many themes remain rather underexplored in the study of ancient travel. By means of concluding this introduction, we therefore take the opportunity to reflect on the directions which future research on this important theme may take.

To begin with, this journey does not make explicit the question who travelled in the ancient world. As Laura Nasrallah has shown, travel often was the prerequisite of the elite or those who travelled in a professional capacity.<sup>16</sup> For the majority of inhabitants of the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine worlds—in larger part regard-

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<sup>16</sup> Nasrallah, “Imposing Travellers.”



less of their religious or cultural affiliations—extensive journeying was out of the question, and travelers could even prove a burden on local communities.<sup>17</sup> These important observations invite the application of socio-historical models in the study of ancient travel. Such models have, of course, extensively proven useful for the study of the ancient world, but they rarely feature in studies on ancient travel.

This plea for exploring new methodological frameworks can be extended to the specific focus of this volume: the experience of travel. Psychological concepts and methodological lenses have been put to good use in the study of antiquity, but have not really made an impact in the study of ancient travel. Seeing however that journeys—as this volume shows—entailed a variety of psychological and other experiences, their study may well benefit for applying such concepts and lenses more fully in future years.

Finally, this volume confirms the value of developing a *longue durée* approach to travel and its various aspects. The volumes by Harland and Niehoff already lead the way in this regard, and this volume—with its inclusion of early Islam—demonstrates once more the intricate cross-connection between different religious and cultural traditions in the ancient world. Moreover, contributions in this volume testify to continuities between ancient and modern travel: consider, for instance, Jedan's observation that "Seneca's list parallels what today's travel guidebooks still highlight as Syracuse's key sights" (38). A long-term perspective remains a desideratum, therefore, for all who wish to trace continuities and ruptures in the development of travel and mobility, from antiquity up until the modern day.

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<sup>17</sup> See the works quoted in n. 2 above.

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