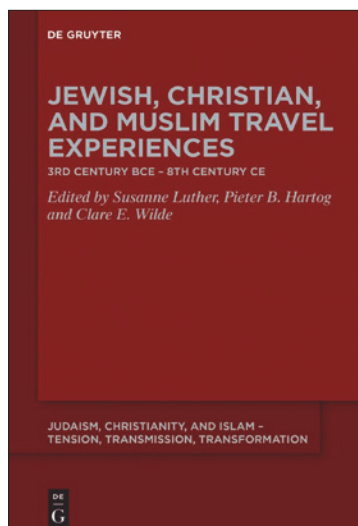


## JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM TRAVEL EXPERIENCES




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This volume consists of fifteen research articles and an introduction by two of the book's three editors, Pieter Hartog and Susanne Luther. Most of the research articles are based on presentations delivered in a conference organized by the editors in Groningen, the Netherlands, in 2020.

While the topic of travel in the ancient world has received growing attention for the past fifty years and especially during the past couple of decades, more work remains to be done. This volume, for one, seeks to respond to two specific shortages, as the editors explain in the introduction.

First, the volume joins studies that develop a comparative approach to ancient journeys, with a focus on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, though one article further investigates the veneration of Nehalennia in (what now is) Zeeland during the early Roman empire. Although the articles explore religious traditions, the editors stress that they are not limited to the question of pilgrimage, nor do they discuss only “earthly” travel as cosmic journeys too are examined (pp. 3-4). The editors identify the book’s novelty as pertaining to its *longue durée* approach and the inclusion of early Islamic travel into studies on travel in (late) antiquity (p. 8). The latter choice is indeed to be celebrated. A few more articles on Islamic texts (in addition to the current two) would have made the volume even more balanced, as half of the articles analyse (albeit not all exclusively) *New Testament* texts.

Second, another premise is the editors’ observation that the previous scholarship on ancient travel has mostly concentrated on two issues, including (1) the practicalities and material conditions of travel such as road networks or other infrastructure, and (2) literary representations of travel and space in written texts (pp. 4-5). While the articles of this volume, too, investigate various literary accounts, the editors emphasize their focus on the “experiential” aspect of travel, *i.e.*, how and for what purposes the texts portray related experiences (p. 5). This shift is indeed welcome, as statistical and narrowly historical-critical inquiries into ancient travel can only answer a limited set of questions and evidently leave much of ancient travel unexplored. However, the experiential aspect could perhaps have been further fleshed out in some articles, and more remains to be said about the related question of the subjective and affective aspects of ancient journeys and travel experiences.

The articles are not categorized into any sub-groups in the table of contents. In the introduction, however, the editors explain that they address four main themes: travel as a source of uncertainty, travel and experience of danger, travel as a source of wisdom and knowledge (whether human or divine) or true worship, and travel as a source of consolation (pp. 6-7). Meanwhile, many themes remain underexplored, including but not limited to the question of who actually travelled in the ancient world (pp. 7-8). The book’s articles certainly offer perspectives on the four intriguing themes identified by the editors, but they are not themes on which all the authors would explicitly reflect, and the connection between the categories (the two first of which also have some overlap) and a few of the articles remains slightly vague. To be fair, however, the editors never claim that these four themes would be the only way to classify the articles. Rather, given the range of questions they address, various thematic clusters could be observed. For example, I came to think of another set of three themes when reading the volume, with full awareness of how

some of the articles do not perfectly match my categorization, and of how some could be placed in several of my categories.

First, travel and mobility may shape the self-understanding and/or practices of a person or a group, and memories of past travel can become integral to collective identities. Three articles analyse the role of travel in identity construction in biblical literature: Robin Ten Hoopen reads the myth of Babel's tower as a story of identity formation among the Israelite, Pieter Hartog asks how movement and intercultural contact affects the early Christian movement in the book of *Acts*, and Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson argues that Jesus' portrayal as a travelling *pepaideumenos* in *Luke's gospel* turns him into an exemplum for early Christians who themselves embark on journeys and teach. Moreover, Clare Wilde asks what monasteries as travel loci for Muslims in Arabic literature may reveal about "a climate of confessional fluidity", whereas Paul Heck studies the tale of Zayd, which outlines pious travel in Arabia and highlights the Ka'ba as a site of divine power, as part of a collective memory in early Islam. Finally, Gert van Klinken discusses how the seafarers' cult of Nehalennia was shaped by Mediterranean concepts of the divine which made their way to the north along with travellers.

Second, ancient travel texts broadly understood may serve a myriad of rhetorical and ideological purposes, as is shown by five articles that bring authorial intentions to the forefront. Regarding Jewish texts, Eelco Glas argues that travel *topoi* in Josephus' historiography serve as interpretative clues for implicit criticism of the Flavians, while Catherine Hezser demonstrates that rabbinic geography is not about exact observations but an interpretative project resonating with the biblical tradition. Christoph Jedan, in turn, compares the use of travel imagery in Seneca's *Ad Marciam* and Paul's letters to highlight the authors' distinct aims, while Susanne Luther studies the *Letter of James'* global rhetoric aimed at reaching widely connected addressees. Finally, Tobias Nicklas examines Barnaba's travels in early Christian texts and shows how the authors are interested in neither factuality nor harmonization but provide itineraries serving their own specific purposes.

Third, as a literary motif, travel is not only about this-worldly movement but also covers mythical and cosmic journeys beyond this realm, as is illustrated by four articles. Two of them bring different traditions and *corpora* into a conversation with each other: Nils Neumann explores journeys beyond this realm in Menippean literature and the *New Testament*, whilst Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer analyse mythological patterns in Jewish rabbinic and Syriac Christian travel accounts, which associate sea voyages with the liminal. The other two articles take specific *New Testament* books or passages as their starting point: Theo Witkamp and Jan Krans consider the *Gospel of John's* resistance to the idea of humans' heavenly

ascents as well as the gospel's stress on Jesus as a traveller from and to heaven, whereas Benjamin Lensink analyses Paul's heavenly journey as it is portrayed in 2 *Corinthians* 12:2-4 and other early Christian literature from later periods.

The volume makes a significant contribution to the study of ancient travel, especially in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE, providing insights into travel as both a social practice and a literary motif. As in many edited volumes, the quality of the articles varies somewhat; most of them are very good, but a few would have benefitted from a more clearly formulated research question or structure; in a rare case, careful proofreading would also have been welcome. For the most part, however, the research is solid and stimulating, and all the volume's articles offer meaningful perspectives on a timely topic.