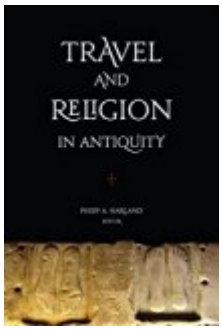
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Philip A. Harland, ed.. *Travel and Religion in Antiquity.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011. xii + 289 pp. $85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-55458-222-8.

Reviewed by David Frankfurter

Published on H-Judaic (June, 2012)

Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

Philip Harland has produced an exceptionally interesting and theoretically astute collection of essays, based on seminars of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies and thoroughly in dialogue with new work like Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford's *Seeing the Gods* (although too late for some of the participants to engage Catherine Heszer's new *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*).[1] In some ways the volume follows new questions in the area of New Testament studies about itinerancy and cult migration; and yet only two of the papers in the volume address New Testament materials. The collection is far more eclectic, including discussions of Mesopotamian mythology, Nabataean ritual, and Tacitus's interpretations of barbarian gods.

After a competently thematic introduction by Harland, Steven Muir asks how, in a world in which identity and religion were primarily localized, one could orient oneself ritually while on the road ("Religion on the Road in Ancient Greece and Rome"). He proposes that travelers' "linkage" to their natal religious landscapes could be achieved through both "mirroring"--recognizing similar structures in alien landscapes--and "anchoring"--recognizing a reference point or center back in the natal landscape to which one could return. Although the terminology might be improved, Muir's scheme makes an original contribution, and he illustrates it with such clever examples as herms and roadside shrines, portable shrines, and omens that the traveler might encounter or invoke as an indication of a god's presence. Susan Haber ("Going Up to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage, Purity, and the Historical Jesus") draws on the gospel accounts to examine pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the early first century CE, including the routes, intermediary stops, and purification practices involved. Wayne O. McCready ("Pilgrimage, Place, and Meaning Making by Jews in Greco-Roman Egypt") draws on a concept of "place" introduced by Edward Casey to develop a thematic approach to Egyptian Jews' pilgrimage around and beyond Egypt, especially Elephantine and Jerusalem. While building on such exhaustive studies as that of Allen Kerkeslager, McCready offers an intrigu-

ing social/spatial scheme for comparing various types of travel.[2] One might have wished the author had taken his scheme a step further to accommodate the kinds of local shrines and even shared shrines that would naturally have characterized Jewish life in Egyptian local landscapes before 117 CE. Karljürgen G. Feuerherm's essay on gods' "travels" depicted in Mesopotamian ritual texts avoids the kind of thematic experiments that make Muir's and McCready's chapters so provocative. While a comparative approach to ancient festival processions and their mythological librettos would have brought the topic of travel into a new and helpful dimension, Feuerherm instead focuses on myth/ritual structures in a culture and period somewhat apart from the other essays in the volume ("Have Horn, Will Travel: The Journeys of Mesopotamian Deities").

Three papers address the travels of particular charismatic individuals of the Greco-Roman period. Ian W. Scott ("The Divine Wanderer: Travel and Divinization in Late Antiquity") asks how integral travel claims and narratives were to the aretalogies of heroes and philosophers, focusing on the stories of Apollonius of Tyana, Pythagoras, Alexander of Abonoteichos, and Peregrinus. Rejecting the paradigm of the "itinerant apostle" (as framed elsewhere by Richard Reitzenstein), Scott shows that these characters' travels all involve some orientation to places and centers. Some integration of Muir's ideas about "anchoring" might have contributed to this larger point; but more importantly, does Scott's question somehow wrongly put the emphasis on the relationship to place instead of on a literary form that embraces the travelogue? One thinks of the Lukan and apocryphal Acts that do not so much imagine their heroes as itinerant as offer a parade of "Others"--sometimes quite monstrous--among whom the hero must prove himself. It is the travelogue or "odyssey" that governs this depiction of the apostle rather than his placelessness. Philip Harland himself addresses the famous Thessalos romance, a tale of an inquisitive Roman youth's journey to the temples of Egyptian Thebes to find enlightenment and magical wisdom, all prefacing a practical herbology ("Journeys in Pursuit of Divine Wisdom: Thessalos and Other Seekers"). Published in a critical edition by André-Jean Festugière in 1939, the Thessalos text has been discussed in some detail by Jonathan Z. Smith, Garth Fowden, this author, and now Ian Moyer.[3] Harland includes a new Greek text and, placing Thessalos--whose expectations of Thebes provide the essential background to what he finds there--in comparison with spiritual travelers in Lucian's stories, he shows that Roman myths of Egypt made journeys there a unique form of sacred travel. Ryan S. Schellenberg contrasts the intrepid traveller Paul in Acts to the more anxious one in the letters ("'Danger in the wilderness, danger at sea': Paul and the Perils of Travel"). While most scholarship tends to imagine Paul as Luke portrayed him, Schellenberg makes a convincing case that the apostle was no Indiana Jones and in fact disliked travel. James B. Rives's essay on Tacitus's representation of a particular German tribe and its gods ("Roman Translation: Tacitus and Ethnographic Interpretation") contributes less to the conceptualization of travel than to the larger understanding of how Romans understood others' religions and gods. "The process of interpretatio [Romana]," he argues, "was simply a specific case of the more general problem of correctly identifying a superhuman power" (p. 180).

In one of the truly original contributions to this volume, Jack N. Lightstone ("Migration and the Emergence of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism") proposes that such cultural institutions as hellenistic urbanism, festival observance, the idealization of temple symbols, and the Septuagint itself together allowed diaspora Judaism to attain a consistency across many lands, which was then--contrary to past models of the exportation of rabbinic influence--reintroduced to Palestine after the temple's destruction. Jewish travel, attested in early rabbinic and other literary sources, provided the major impetus to the consolidation of a di-

aspora-inspired Judaism in the second and third centuries. This is an innovative approach to the reconstruction of Jewish life in late antique Palestine, and one awaits further development and discussion of the thesis.

Harland is to be commended for including an essay on nomads in a volume on travel and religion, and Michele Murray's review of Nabataean religion ("Religion and the Nomadic Lifestyle: The Nabateans") certainly asks the most interesting questions about the integration of mobility into religious practice and symbolism. Nabataean religious artifacts show a distinctive (generally aniconic) iconography of baetyls, and literary sources describe their use of circumambulation, a kind of "ritual travel" in Murray's view. The final contribution addresses Christian travel by way of the Oxyrhynchus papyri ("Christians on the Move in Late Antique Oxyrhynchus"). Lincoln H. Blumell finds that almost all the mentions of travel in this corpus had secular purposes rather than, e.g., pilgrimage. But one wonders, in this case, what status to attribute to this single representation of Christian documents. One of the most famous early Christian letters regards the journey (or transport, if a corpse) out to the Kharga oasis of an anonymous city-woman and her reception among the mortuary workers there (P. Grenfell 73, late third century), certainly a case of travel. Monastic writings (like the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*) are replete with stories of inter-hermitage visits, such that we might well imagine travel--to monks, at least--to have served as a virtual myth of Christian literary culture in late antique Egypt. If Blumell's selection is not a rarefied sample but shows this myth to be entirely idealized, then it might have helped to underscore its implications. The stational procession led by a bishop around the shrines of Oxyrhynchus in the mid-sixth century (P. Oxy. XI.1357, re-edited by Arietta Papaconstantinou and overlooked by Blumell), offers an even more interesting image of "travel" as a component of the Christian religious (and performative) imagination in late antiquity.[4] One of the contributions of Harland and most of the others is to provoke new ways of thinking of "travel," and Blumell could have offered more on the subject of late antique Christianity, if only to show the absence of the literary themes in ordinary letters.

All in all, Harland has assembled a rich, lucid, and thought-provoking book of essays, the kind that can be recommended for general perusal rather than for a few isolated essays. (Indeed, the absence of an index requires the reader tackle the essays in entirety rather than for their brief coverage of one topic or another). ***Travel and Religion in Antiquity*** is more than an essential resource for graduate and good undergraduate libraries. Indeed, a paperback edition would make an invaluable addition to an upper-level or graduate course on travel and pilgrimage.

Notes

[1]. Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford, ***Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Catherine Heszer, ***Jewish Travel in Antiquity*** (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2011)

[2]. Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt," ***Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt***, ed. D. Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 99-225.

[3]. A.-J. Festugière, "L'expérience religieuse du médecin Thessalos," ***Revue biblique*** 48 (1939): 45-77; Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Temple and the Magician," ***Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*** (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 172-89; Garth Fowden, ***The Egyptian Hermes*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 162-76; David Frankfurter, ***Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chapter 5; and Ian Moyer, ***Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter 4.

[4]. Arietta Papaconstantinou, "La liturgie stationnale à Oxyrhynchos dans la première moitié

du 6 è siècle. Réédition et commentaire du P.Oxy XI 1357," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 54 (1996): 135-59.