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Editor's Introduction: The Condition of Travel

IT WAS THE CLEVERLY FORMULATED insight of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) that diasporic experience is better understood through the prism of *routes* than of *roots*. Tracing the condition of extraterritoriality requires us to be attentive to constant and fleet movement rather than sedentary rootedness. A similar juxtaposition prompted Yuri Slezkine to propose his now-famous contrast between the landed Apollonian and the mobile Mercurian, of whom the Jew was the first among equals.

Indeed, travel has not only been a constant feature of Jewish history; it has been constitutive. Compelled to take flight from danger and lured by the prospect of new opportunity, Jews have traveled as a way of life, from the desert wanderings of the ancient Israelites to the sojourns of medieval and early modern Sephardim and Ashkenazim to the mass emigration of modern Jews. In the course of their travels, whether prompted by necessity or opportunity, they have spun an extraordinarily rich and interlaced web of social and economic relations—itsself the stuff of a long and colorful history.

In recognition of this rich history, the current issue of *JQR* is devoted to Travel. A graphic representation of the close association between Jews and travel is the sketch with which the Travel section concludes; drawn by the late artist R. B. Kitaj, it depicts his own life travels. For Kitaj, travel was not only the quintessential Jewish condition but also a key ingredient of cultural creativity and iconoclasm. In his view, the misfortune of exile could and did become, to a considerable extent, the virtue of boundary crossing.

The essays in this number remind us that travel is not only a condition but a practice, and particularly a practice of observation—both by and of Jews. Well-known Jewish travelers, from Benjamin of Tudela to Samuel Romanelli to David Solomon Sassoon, have chronicled the customs and peculiarities of diverse communities in their travelogues. By turn, Jews

and especially their homeland, Palestine, have been the object of intense interest by Christian travelers over centuries.

Elliott Horowitz evokes the style of the old *Jewish Quarterly Review* in tracing the overlapping narrative trails of Jews and Christians in pursuit of the Holy Land—and of a number of its geographic monuments such as the Jordan River and the Western Wall—from early modern to modern times. Meanwhile, Oded Irshai extends our interest back to the fertile terrain of fourth-century Palestine in a close analysis of the chronicle of the Bordeaux Pilgrim whose exacting eye (and pen) bear witness to the unfolding “Christianization” of Jerusalem and the Temple precinct.

Similar to Irshai’s essay, Ruth Gruber’s “Beyond Virtually Jewish” examines the way in which Jewish space is appropriated and reimaged by non-Jews—in the absence of Jews themselves. She juxtaposes the process by which the remnants of Jewish life in Krakow, Poland, are brought to life and performed to the keen and elaborately performed fascination with the American Wild West present throughout contemporary Central and Western Europe.

The final substantive essay in the Travel section, that of Galit Hasan-Rokem, examines a large body of twentieth-century Jewish postcards whose function and images convey the motif of mobility that is a hallmark of the modern Jewish Mercurian—and, of course, of the millennial Wandering Jew. This latter figure calls to mind the many corners of the world visited by Jews, but no less the orientalist condescension visited upon the Jews for their nomadic ways. In response to this perception, Jews have attempted over the past two centuries to uproot the Wanderer within, either by asserting indigeneity in their diaspora countries of residence or by reclaiming Palestine as their own. But travelers they have been and seem destined to remain, as Kitaj’s sketch reminds, continuing to traverse vast swaths of the world in person—while hovering above much of the modern imagination in spirit.

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