

## Reading Sacred Space: Egeria, Paula, and the Christian Holy Land

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Helena's visit to the Holy Land created a fashion among ladies of the Roman aristocracy. Many of them visited the Holy Places in Judea, Jordan, and Galilee, as well as the centres of monasticism in Egypt. Famous among them are Melania the Elder, her grand-daughter Melania the Younger, and Paula, but we also hear of Poemenia, Silvia, Fabiola, Flavia, and others.<sup>1</sup> Two of their journeys are known to us in detail: the journey made by Egeria in 381–384, and the one made by Paula in 385.<sup>2</sup> The accounts of Egeria's and Paula's journeys also mark the birth of a new literary

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<sup>1</sup> Helena's pilgrimage, as well as other fourth-century travels are described by E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire (AD 312–460)* (Oxford 1982); K. G. Holum, 'Hadrian and St. Helena: Imperial Travel and the Origins of Christian Holy Land Pilgrimage', in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. by R. Ousterhout (Urbana and Chicago 1990), pp. 66–83; F.X. Murphy, 'Melania the Elder: A Biographical Note', *Traditio*, 5 (1947), 59–77; N. Moine, 'Melaniana', *Recherches augustiniennes*, 15 (1980), 3–79; E. A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (Lewiston, 1984); P. Devos, 'La servante de Dieu Poemenia', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 87 (1969), 189–208; P. Devos, 'Silvie, la sainte pèlerine', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 91 (1973), 105–17; 92 (1974), 321–41.

<sup>2</sup> The standard editions of Egeria's travels are *Itinerarium Egeriae*, ed. by A. Franceschini

genre: the *itinerarium*, which appears simultaneously with the institutionalization of pilgrimage itself. Both accounts took the form of a letter. Egeria described her journey in a letter she wrote to a group of women whom she called ‘loving sisters’—friends who were nuns or who belonged to some other kind of religious sisterhood, and who had remained behind in her homeland.<sup>3</sup> Paula’s journey, on the other hand, is known to us from the obituary letter which Jerome wrote to Eustochium, Paula’s daughter, in 404, after Paula’s death.<sup>4</sup> The letter contains a biography of Paula and includes the account of her journey to the holy places. In what follows, I would like to examine the two letters, and especially their interpretive methods and means of deciphering sacred space, and to look at the means through which Christians appropriated the biblical-historical geography of the Holy Land, making it a Christian space.

The letters of Egeria and Jerome are very different from each other. Jerome wrote an elegant prose, following the rules of the Ciceronian literary tradition in which he had been brought up, while Egeria wrote a late vulgar Latin, very remote from the norms of classical Latin.<sup>5</sup> While Jerome and Paula represented the two cultures—the classical

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and R. Weber, CCSL, 175 (Turnhout, 1965), pp. 27–103; P. Maraval, *Égérie. Journal de Voyage*, Sources chrétiennes, 296 (Paris, 1982). The latest English translations are E. Gingras, *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrim*, Ancient Christian Writers, 38 (New York, 1970); J. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels* (London, 1971). The citations below are taken from Wilkinson’s translation. The literature about Egeria’s letter is vast. See M. Starowieyski, ‘Bibliografia Egeriana’, *Augustinianum*, 19 (1979), 297–318; S. Janeras, ‘Contributo alla bibliografia Egeriana’, *Atti del Convegno internazionale sulla Peregrinatio Egeriae (1987)* (Arezzo, 1990), pp. 355–66; Paula’s travels are described in two of Jerome’s letters: Hieronymus, ‘Epistula 46, Paula et Eustochium ad Marcellam’, ed. by I. Hilberg, CSEL, 54 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1910), pp. 329–44; ‘Epistula 108, Epitaphium sanctae Paulae’, ed. by I. Hilberg, CSEL, 55 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1912), pp. 306–51; also in *Saint Jérôme Lettres*, ed. and trans. by J. Labourt (Paris 1955); for an English translation of Paula’s travels, see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 45–52. The citations below are also taken from Wilkinson’s translation. See also J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> Egeria, 3:8; 5:8; 7:3; 19:19; 23:9; H. Sivan, ‘Who Was Egeria? Piety and Pilgrimage in the Age of Gratian’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 81 (1988), 59–72.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 118–19, 277–79; P. Nautin, ‘Études de chronologie hieronymienne’, *Revue augustiniennes*, 18 (1972), 209–18.

<sup>5</sup> Egeria’s language and style have been the subject of many scholarly works. See E. H. Löfstedt, *Philologischer Kommentar zur Peregrinatio Aetheriae. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der lateinischen Sprache* (Uppsala, 1911); W. Van Oorde, *Lexicon Aetherianum* (Amsterdam, 1929); R. A. Bastiaensen, *Observations sur le vocabulaire liturgique dans l’Itinéraire d’Égérie*, *Latinitas christianorum primaeva*, 17 (Utrecht, 1962); G. F. M. Vermeer, *Observations sur le vocabulaire du pèlerinage chez Égérie et chez Antonine de Plaisance*, *Latinitas christianorum primaeva*, 19 (Utrecht, 1965); L. Spitzer, ‘The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheriae’, *Comparative*

and the biblical—Egeria knew only the biblical. Egeria wrote her letter for certain specific women readers and for no one else. She was not a writer, and did not know she was writing an itinerary, as very few Christian itineraries had yet been written.<sup>6</sup> Jerome, on the other hand, was a famous author. The letter he wrote, though apparently addressed to Eustochium, was in fact intended for the entire Christian world. His writing was very self-conscious and well crafted. It was also didactic in nature, unlike Egeria's. Egeria wrote her letter in the course of her journey, soon after seeing the things she described. Jerome, however, wrote his account of Paula's journey nearly twenty years after it happened, from far away. The location in time also determined the atmosphere of the two letters: the emotional immediacy of Egeria as against the scholarly distance of Jerome.<sup>7</sup>

We know many facts about Paula, all derived from Jerome's letters. She belonged to one of the most eminent families of the Roman aristocracy, received a classical and Christian education, and after being widowed joined a group of aristocratic Christian ladies who chose an ascetic way of life and devoted themselves to the study of the Scriptures under the guidance of Jerome.<sup>8</sup> Like Jerome, Paula studied Hebrew. Jerome related with admiration that she learnt the language easily and sang the psalms without a foreign accent.<sup>9</sup> In the autumn of 385, after dividing her considerable property among her heirs, she followed Jerome to the East. After visiting the Holy Places and the abodes of the famous monks in Egypt—a journey which took about a year—they settled in Bethlehem. Paula lived a severe ascetic life and died in Bethlehem at the age of fifty-six in the year 404.<sup>10</sup>

Nothing is known about Egeria except the facts contained in her letter, and even the few biographical details one may glean from it are hypothetical. Her letter has reached us only in part. It was discovered in 1884, without beginning or end, and without any details that might identify the writer.<sup>11</sup> Textual analysis revealed that it was written by a woman: an aristocratic woman of some financial means from southern France or Spain. Her extreme piety and her enthusiasm for the lifestyle of hermits indicate that she had chosen an ascetic way of life. After various attempts at identification, the writer was

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*Literature*, 1 (1949), 225–58 (reprinted in idem, *Romanischer Literaturstudien* [vol. no.?] (1959), 871–912).

<sup>6</sup> M. B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World. Exotic European Travel Writing 400–1600* (Ithaca and London 1988), pp. 7–8, 20–33.

<sup>7</sup> On the atmosphere of Egeria's letter, see especially Spitzer, 'The Epic Style'.

<sup>8</sup> E. A. Clark, 'Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement: A Paradox of Late Ancient Christianity', in *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith. Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. by E. A. Clark (Lewiston, 1986), pp. 175–208.

<sup>9</sup> Ep. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 277.

<sup>11</sup> On the Codex Aretinus, VI, 3, see *S. Hilarii tractatus de mysteriis et hymni, et S. Silviae Aquitanae peregrinatio ad loca sancta*, ed. by G. F. Gamurini (Rome, 1887).

finally identified as Egeria, the protagonist of a letter which the abbot Valerius of Vierzo in Galicia wrote to his monks in the seventh century.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, while Paula came from Rome and belonged to both the senatorial aristocracy and the centre of Christian intellectual life, Egeria came from the provinces, and although she was a woman of status and wealth, she was not comparable in this respect with Paula. Her education, as far as one can tell from her letter, also could not be compared with Paula's. She wrote a vulgar Latin, and if she knew classical literature, it is not visible in her letter. She knew little, if any, Greek,<sup>13</sup> and she had no knowledge of Hebrew. Biographically and culturally, Paula belonged to the Roman imperial and Christian centre, while Egeria belonged to the periphery. This also determined the fate of the two letters. Jerome's letter became famous throughout the Christian world, while Egeria's was almost forgotten.

The two works discussed here describe pilgrimages by women, a common phenomenon at this particular time, soon to disappear and to surface again only at the beginning of the Modern Era. Since most of the religious literature in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages was written by men, these particular works may broaden our view, directing attention to the religious experience of the silent half of the believers.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it is hard to decide how far we are allowed to draw our conclusions. Although many

<sup>12</sup>Z. Garcia, 'La lettre de Valérius aux moines du Vierzo sur la bienheureuse Aetheria', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 29 (1910), 377–99; Maraval, *Égérie*, pp. 336–49 (Latin text and French translation). For an English translation, see Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, pp. 174–78. The identification of the author of the *peregrinatio* as the protagonist of Valerius's letter was made by Dom Ferotin in 1903: M. Ferotin, 'Le véritable auteur de la "Peregrinatio Silviae", la vierge espagnole Éthéria', *Revue des questions historiques*, 74 (1903), 367–97. For more details on Egeria, see Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*; Maraval, *Égérie*; and O. Limor, *Holy Land Travels. Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 41–54 [in Hebrew].

<sup>13</sup>C. Milani, 'I grecismi nell'"Itinerarium Egeriae"', *Aevum*, 43 (1969), 220–34; C. Milani, 'Studi sul'"Itinerarium Egeriae". L'aspetto classico della lingua di Egeria', *Aevum*, 43 (1969), 381–452.

<sup>14</sup>On educated women in Late antiquity, see G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 130–38; P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1–26. Even today pilgrimage constitutes an expression of female devotion. According to the anthropologist Harvey Goldberg, who studies Jewish and Moslem pilgrimage to sacred tombs in North Africa, the initiative to set out on a pilgrimage comes usually from the mother of the family. This may derive from the fact that unlike the circumstances in institutionalized sacred spaces, like synagogues and churches, in which women can take no part in liturgy, near sacred tombs they are free to express their piety in the same ways as men. While in synagogues and churches there are rigid rules of religious behaviour, as well as a structured hierarchy in which women have no place, tombs create a more democratic space and allow an outlet for individual expressions of piety, both of men and of women (Harvey Goldberg, private conversation, October 1999).

women went on pilgrimage, and although the two journeys described here were undertaken by women, only Egeria wrote her journey in person. Egeria may well represent other women travellers of her time, but she may also be a unique voice. It is even harder to tell to what degree Paula represents other women pilgrims and women's piety in general. Paula's journey was related by Jerome, who travelled with her, and it is almost impossible to distinguish her viewpoint from that of Jerome. Because of the close friendship between Paula and Jerome, one may perhaps cautiously suppose that the religious point of view described by him was shared by Paula. Jerome wrote his account of Paula's journey as if he had seen the Holy Places with her eyes, while Paula saw the Holy Places with the eyes of her teacher, Jerome.<sup>15</sup>

The problem of the relationship between pilgrim (Paula), author (Jerome), and pilgrimage is even more complex. Although the pilgrimage described in letter 108 is the only long journey Jerome is known to have undertaken, and although he spent most of his time in his monastery, it is hard to believe that during the thirty-four years he was living in Palestine this was the only time he set out to tour the country, or at least to visit specific sites in it.<sup>16</sup> Jerome often went to Jerusalem, at least during the first years of his stay in Bethlehem. He also occasionally visited Caesarea, the imperial metropolis and the ecclesiastical centre of Palestine, and its famous library.<sup>17</sup> His scholarly meetings with Jews suggest travel, either to their places of residence or to other meeting points.<sup>18</sup> In his Latin translation of the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius, Jerome included many corrections and updates, which indicate familiarity with sites.<sup>19</sup> His knowledge could have been derived from visitors to Bethlehem, but it is more plausible that he had 'contemplated Judaea with his own eyes', to use his own phrase from the introduction to the Book of Chronicles.<sup>20</sup> Yet, Jerome never described his other travels. Moreover, although Jerome deals with Holy Places and pilgrimage to them in several of his writings, his two classical works devoted entirely or at length to travel in the Holy Land are mediated through Paula. The first one is letter 108, mentioned above, a long part of which describes Paula's pilgrimage in detail. The fact that Jerome himself also took part in this tour is almost concealed in this rather lengthy description. The other work

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<sup>15</sup> On the general problems of distinguishing the voices of medieval female saints from those of their male interpreters, see C. M. Mooney, 'Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity', in *Gendered Voices. Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. by C. M. Mooney (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 1–15.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wilkinson, 'L'appart de Sainte Jérôme à la topographie', *Revue biblique*, 81 (1974), 245–57.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> H. I. Newman, 'Jerome and the Jews' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Hebrew University, 1997), pp. 103–22.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *Das Onomasticon der biblischen Ortsnamen*, ed. by E. Klostermann, Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, 11 (Leipzig, 1904).

<sup>20</sup> See below.

dealing with Holy Land sites and with Christian devotion to the biblical sacred space is letter 46 addressed to the Roman lady Marcella, a friend who had stayed behind in Rome, written probably in 386, soon after Jerome and Paula had settled in Bethlehem.<sup>21</sup> Although the letter has been ascribed to Paula and Eustochium, most scholars agree that it was written by Jerome himself.<sup>22</sup> Letter 46 is considered ‘the classical expression of Jerome’s positive principal attitude concerning pilgrimage and visits to the holy sites of the Holy Land’.<sup>23</sup> Pilgrimage is described in this letter as both an emotional experience and a means for a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. The scholarly education of the Christian is not completed until he visited Jerusalem, ‘Christian Athens’.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, if letter 46 expressed Jerome’s convictions about pilgrimage to the holy places, why is it ascribed to Paula and Eustochium, as if the letter expressed their ideas, and not his?<sup>25</sup> And if Jerome took part in Paula’s pilgrimage described in letter 108, why did he conceal this fact? Did he consider pilgrimage an act of devotion more suitable for women than for men? Were fourth-century pilgrims primarily women? We have two detailed descriptions of fourth-century pilgrimages undertaken by women—the itineraries of Egeria and of Paula—but not even one personal description of a pilgrimage undertaken by a male pilgrim. Even the gender of the Bordeaux Pilgrim, the author of the *Itinerarium burdigalense*, the first Holy Land description by a Christian that is known to us (dated 333), was recently questioned. The possibility that the author

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<sup>21</sup> Note 2 above. [n. 2 also includes refs. to Egeria. List the specific refs.??]

<sup>22</sup> Dronke however believes the letter was written by Paula and Eustochium: Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 17, but see P. Nautine, ‘La lettre de Paule et Eustochium à Marcelle (Jérôme, Ep. 46)’, *Augustinianum*, 24 (1984), 441–49; Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, pp. 220–21; Lorenzo Perrone, ‘The Mystery of Judaea (Jerome, Ep. 46). The Holy City of Jerusalem between History and Symbol in Early Christian Thought’, in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. by L. I. Levine (New York, 1999), pp. 230–39.

<sup>23</sup> Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, pp. 220–21; H. I. Newman, ‘Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem: Jerome and the Holy Places of Palestine’, in *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity*, ed. by A. Houtman, M. J. H. M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz (Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 1998), pp. 218–19; Perrone, ‘The Mystery of Judaea’; P. Maraval, ‘Saint Jérôme et le pèlerinage aux lieux saints de Palestine’, in *Jérôme entre l’occident et l’orient*, ed. by Y. M. Duval (Paris, 1988), pp. 345–53; Bruria Bitton-Ashkeloni, ‘Pilgrimage: Perceptions and Reactions in the Patristic and Monastic Literature of the Fourth–Sixth Centuries’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Hebrew University, 1995), pp. 85–98.

<sup>24</sup> Ep. 46, 9; see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 83–106.

<sup>25</sup> It is hard to determine with certainty that Jerome himself ascribed the letter to the two women. There is always a possibility that the title ‘Paula et Eustochium ad Marcellam’ is an addition of a later editor or scribe. Still, if the letter was written by Jerome, as most scholars believe, why should anyone ascribe this particular letter to another author?

of this text may well have been a woman, a possibility that had not occurred to scholars before, was taken up by three historians in the last decade.<sup>26</sup> As things stand now, we have no conclusive proof that the author was either a man or a woman, but at least we are aware of the problem.

This being the case, Jerome's use of Paula's eyes while describing the holy places is even more telling. Jerome chose Paula as a means, a medium to deliver information and to express ideas about sacred space. The reason why he changed voices on this particular subject is still to be explained.

Egeria and Paula reached the Holy Land from the north. Egeria came from Constantinople, and Paula came from Antioch.<sup>27</sup> Both travelled with a group, riding on animals.<sup>28</sup> Egeria's pilgrimage to the Holy Land took three years, from Easter 381 to Easter 384.<sup>29</sup> In those three years, she visited the Holy Places of Palestine, Egypt, and Transjordan, and stayed for long periods in Jerusalem, where she took part in all the ritual ceremonies of the Jerusalem Church. Her letter has two parts: one (chapters 1–23) describes her visits to Sinai, Mount Nebo, Carneas, and Mesopotamia, and the other (chapters 24–49) describes the Jerusalem liturgy. According to Petrus Diaconus's account, written in the twelfth century and partially based on Egeria, she visited all the sites in the Holy Land.<sup>30</sup>

Paula's journey was much shorter. It lasted for about a year,<sup>31</sup> and only included the sites west of the Jordan and a visit to Egypt, the home of Christian monasticism. In contrast to Egeria, who came to the East with the aim of visiting all the Holy Places and not returning to her country until her curiosity was satisfied, Paula's journey was only

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<sup>26</sup> The possibility that the writer of the *Itinerarium burdigalense* may well have been a woman, which had been first suggested by J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places. The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993), p. 313, was taken up by Laurie Douglass, who devoted an article to prove this assumption: L. Douglass, 'A New Look at the *Itinerarium burdigalense*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 4 (1996), 313–33. In a recent article, Susan Weingarten discussed the evidence brought up by Douglass and gave it a different and very convincing interpretation, yet did not exclude the possibility: S. Weingarten, 'Was the Pilgrim from Bordeaux a Woman? A Reply to Laurie Douglass', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7 (1999), 291–97.

<sup>27</sup> Egeria, 23; Ep. 108, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Egeria, 3:2; 11:4; Ep. 108, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Egeria, 17:1; P. Devos, 'La date de voyage d'Égérie', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 85 (1967), 165–94; P. Devos, 'Égérie à Édesse. S. Thomas l'Apôtre, le roi Abgar', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 85 (1967), 381–400; P. Devos, 'Égérie à Bethleem', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 86 (1968), 87–108.

<sup>30</sup> Petrus Diaconus, *De locis sanctis*, CCSL, 175 (Turnhout, 1965), pp. 37–47; 251–80 (at the foot of the *Itinerarium Egeriae* and of Beda venerabilis, *De locis sanctis*).

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 116, 124.

a step towards becoming a nun in Bethlehem, her journey's final goal.<sup>32</sup> Still, one aspect of her journey is worth mentioning: out of the 78 places she visited, 55 witnessed to Old Testament traditions and only 27 to New Testament traditions. This proportion is characteristic of this early period, but it also represents the special interest of Jerome, as an interpreter of the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

How did Egeria and Paula read sacred space? How did they make it their own? Egeria described her pilgrimage as a journey 'for the sake of prayer' (*gratia orationis*), a journey for liturgical purposes.<sup>34</sup> From this one may infer that Egeria believed that prayer in the Holy Places had a special quality: prayers offered there were more effective than elsewhere. The description of the liturgy of the Holy Places is the heart of Egeria's letter.<sup>35</sup> She says: 'It was always our practice when we managed to reach one of the places we wanted to see to have first a prayer, then a reading from the book, then to say an appropriate psalm and another prayer'.<sup>36</sup> Egeria describes here a well-organized 'practice' carried out by the monks in charge of the places. They would read to the travellers the passages in the Scriptures relating to the site, and recite prayers before and after the readings.

Before Egeria left the site, the monks gave her 'blessings' (*eulogiae*).<sup>37</sup> These were usually fruits which the monks had grown on their soil, and whose nurture on holy soil had somewhat sanctified them. Egeria does not inform us whether she regards these gifts as mere keepsakes, or whether she believes that they also have a special virtue, but perhaps her very silence in this matter reveals that such objects did not yet have the significance ascribed to them later. In the 560s, the anonymous pilgrim known as 'Antoninus' returned to his home town Piacenza with his bag filled with relics and souvenirs, all of which were said to have wondrous virtues, and especially the virtue of healing.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Egeria, 23:10; Ep. 108, 14.

<sup>33</sup> J. Wilkinson, 'Jewish Holy Places [and or : needed here?]' the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage', in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. by Ousterhout, pp. 41–53; J. Wilkinson, 'L'apport de Sainte Jérôme a la topographie'; Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, pp. 220–78; Limor, *Holy Land Travels*, pp. 23–25.

<sup>34</sup> Egeria, 13:1; 17:1.

<sup>35</sup> Egeria, 24–49; Starowieyski, 'Bibliografia Egeriana', nos 164–214; A. Renoux, 'Hierosolymitana. Aperçu bibliographique des publications depuis 1960', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 23 (1981), 10–15; Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, pp. 54–88.

<sup>36</sup> Egeria, 7:10.

<sup>37</sup> Egeria, 3:6; 11:1; 15:6; 21:3; B. Köting, *Peregrinatio Religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Münster, 1980), pp. 403–13.

<sup>38</sup> Antoninus calls these gifts 'benedictio'. *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini. Un viaggio in Terra Santa del 560–570 d.c.*, ed. by C. Milani (Milan, 1977); *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, ed. by P. Geyer, CCSL, 175 (Turnhout, 1975), pp. 127–74. See cc. 14, 18, 22, 23, 39, 40, 41, 42,



In relating Paula's pilgrimage, Jerome did not use any special terminology, and he even explicitly stated that he did not intend to write the description of a journey: 'I shall not describe her journey through Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, for I have not set out to write a travel-book about her, but am going to name only those places which are mentioned in Holy Scripture'.<sup>39</sup> When one compares the two texts, it is very noticeable that the liturgical aspect of the Holy Places, which is so important in Egeria's account, is entirely absent from that of Paula. For Egeria, a holy site is a 'ritual space', and is especially memorable on account of the ceremonies held there, which are 'suitable to the time and place' (*apte diei et loco*).<sup>40</sup> This special liturgical and theatrical experience—one that enacts sacred past events in the same time and in the same place in which they happened—is absent from the account of Paula's travels. For her, the visit is a purely textual experience, limited to seeing the place and reflecting on its significance. Similarly, Jerome does not mention any objects—benedictory gifts—which Paula takes with her from the Holy Places, and it seems that she keeps only memories and spiritual experiences.

These differences between the two texts may hint at deeper differences of attitude with regard to pilgrimage and the Holy Places. In contrast to Egeria, who is convinced both of the merits of pilgrimage and of the special qualities of the Holy Places, Jerome's ambivalent attitude is well known.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, Jerome repeated the Pauline view that one place is no better than another where closeness to God is concerned. But, at the same time, Jerome, as a biblical scholar, knew the value of sites as an aid to understanding the text. His famous words at the beginning of his introduction to the Book of Chronicles are in no need of explication: 'In the same way that those who have seen Athens understand the Greek histories better, [. . .] so he who has contemplated Judaea with his own eyes and knows the sites of the ancient cities, and knows the names of the places whether the same or changed, will regard Scripture more lucidly'.<sup>42</sup> And so, even if he does not believe that the holy places have any 'intrinsic holiness',<sup>43</sup> he considers

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<sup>39</sup> Ep. 108, 8.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase '*apte diei et loco*' (according to day and place [trans. is different from above]) is repeated fourteen times in Egeria's account. See especially Egeria 47:5; Limor, *Holy Land Travels*, pp. 48–50.

<sup>41</sup> J. Prawer, 'Jerusalem in the Jewish and Christian Perspective of the Early Middle Ages', *Settimane*, 26 (Spoleto, 1980), pp. 739–95 (revised version: 'Christian Attitudes towards Jerusalem in the Early Middle Ages', in *The History of Jerusalem. The Early Islamic Period 638–1099*, ed. by J. Prawer and H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 311–47); P. Maraval, 'Saint Jérôme et le pèlerinage aux lieux saints de Palestine'; Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, pp. 220–40; Newman, 'Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem'; Bitton-Ashkeloni, 'Pilgrimage', pp. 81–135.

<sup>42</sup> PL, 29, col. 423.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, p. 312.

them of great importance as an aid to the comprehension of the Bible.<sup>44</sup> Historical sites are solid evidence for the events that took place there.

In view of Jerome's known opinions, one might indeed expect that his account would reflect the intellectual aspect of the journey, and that he would regard places as merely instrumental to the understanding of the text. And since Egeria represented a less learned pilgrimage, one might expect her to value places over texts, and emotions over scholarship. Yet, it is doubtful if one can say that these two texts represent two different kinds of pilgrimage, or two different ways of relating to the Holy Places.<sup>45</sup> Jerome constantly stresses the fervour, enthusiasm, reverence, courage, and faith shown by Paula on her journey.<sup>46</sup> Like Egeria, Jerome too speaks of the Holy Places in terms of longing and desire. Egeria called the places to which she made pilgrimage 'the places of my desire' or 'longed-for places' (*loca desiderata*).<sup>47</sup> She did not consider the difficult ascent to Mount Sinai to be work, for obedience to divine commandments was for her a fulfilment of desire.<sup>48</sup> The stories of the monks she met in Jerusalem made her long to undertake the 'labour' of visiting Job's grave,<sup>49</sup> and there are other examples. And Paula, for her part, decided not to remain in Egypt, among the praised monks of Nitria, because of her 'greater desire for the Holy Places' (*maius sanctorum locorum desiderium*).<sup>50</sup> The same word—*desiderium*—also recurs in other letters of Jerome in reference to the Holy Places.<sup>51</sup> Thus, despite a certain difference between Egeria's curiosity and almost childish enthusiasm<sup>52</sup> and Paula's gloomy seriousness,<sup>53</sup> they both have a similar motive for going eastwards—a longing for the holy places. The intellectual value Jerome ascribed to them cannot overshadow this primary emotional attraction, which probably was also one of the reasons why he and Paula settled in Bethlehem.

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<sup>44</sup> The same idea is expressed in letter 46, 9; Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, p. 232.

<sup>45</sup> For the difference between scholarly travels to holy places before Constantine, and later pilgrimage for the sake of places, see Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*. It seems that the distinction Taylor makes between these two types of travel is too sharp.

<sup>46</sup> Ep. 108, 6; 7; 9; 11; 12; 13; 14.

<sup>47</sup> Egeria, 10:7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 3:2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 13:1.

<sup>50</sup> Ep. 108, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Letters [Ep.?] 8, 77; 22, 30. Jerome used the same words ('*desiderio sanctorum locorum*') in describing the motives of Alexander, the bishop from Cappadocia, for his visit of the Holy Places in 220: *De viris illustribus*, 62, ed. by E. C. Richardson, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der alterchristlichen Literatur*, 14 (Leipzig, 1896), p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Egeria says: 'tunc ego ut sum satis curiosa [. . .]' (16:3).

<sup>53</sup> For example the descriptions of Paula's visit to Gibeon (8), Beth Zur (11), and to Lot's cave (11).

Similarly, despite the fact that Egeria stresses the liturgical aspect of the holy places, at the heart of this liturgy, there was always a textual experience—the reading of the texts in the places they spoke of. The fragmentary sentence which opens Egeria’s account is particularly revealing in this regard: ‘sites were pointed out according to the Bible’.<sup>54</sup>

Egeria went around the Holy Land, and the Bible served her as a guidebook in her journey. Paula undoubtedly did the same. But Paula and Egeria adopted totally different interpretive strategies where the holy places were concerned. For Egeria, the appearance of a place was an illustration of the text. The height and steepness of a mountain, the size or width of a valley, or even the beauty of the places—all these had no value in themselves, but were visible characteristics which helped one to understand the events described in the text. The description of Mount Sinai is a good example:

[The Mount of God] looks like a single mountain as you are going round it, but when you actually go into it there are really several peaks, all of them known as ‘the Mount of God’, and the principal one, the summit on which the Bible tells us that ‘God’s Glory came down’, is in the middle of them. I never thought I had seen mountains as high as those which stood around it, but the one in the middle where God’s glory came down was the highest of all, so much so that, when we were on top, all the other peaks we had seen and thought so high looked like little hillocks far below us. Another remarkable thing—it must have been planned by God—is that even though the central mountain, Sinai proper on which God’s glory came down, is higher than all the others, you cannot see it until you arrive at the very foot of it to begin your ascent. After you have seen everything and come down, it can be seen facing you, but this cannot be done till you start your climb. I realized it was like this before we reached the Mount of God, since the brothers had already told me, and when we arrived there I saw very well what they meant.<sup>55</sup>

The sight of Mount Sinai and the experience of ascending it aroused Egeria’s wonder, but that was hardly surprising, as it was the place of the giving of the Law. Geography reinforced the text and gave material reality to the great events described in it. Egeria is convinced that the way the ‘Mount of God’ towers above the surrounding high mountains, so that it cannot actually be seen before one climbs it but only afterwards, ‘must have been planned by God’. It was here that the Lord descended to give the Israelites the Law, and the landscape itself reveals the uniqueness and sanctity of the place. The landscape is not just beautiful or sublime, but heavily charged with significance, demonstrating God’s grace in his creation. Mount Sinai is the place where the Law—the ‘Old Testament’—was given. Just as the formative historical event

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<sup>54</sup> Egeria 1:1; J. Ziegler, ‘Die Peregrinatio Aetheriae und die heilige Schrift, *Biblica*, 12 (1931), 162–98.

<sup>55</sup> Egeria, 2:5–7.

changed the face of human history and the march of time, it also left an impression on geography and the appearance of the site. For Egeria, as well as for other Christian observers, sacred space is a text, to be interpreted and deciphered, just like the Holy Scriptures and in parallel to them.<sup>56</sup>

Egeria does not give the difficult ascent of Mount Sinai the contemplative, ascetic, or penitential significance which can be ascribed to a religious act. Her pilgrimage is not a symbolical experience.<sup>57</sup> The abbot Valerius, who read her description in the seventh century gave significance of this kind to her journey.<sup>58</sup> In his time, it seems, pilgrimage and the dangers it involved were already regarded as having a value of themselves. For Egeria, however, the purpose of her visit was to understand the text. She was amazed to see how much the landscape reinforced an understanding of the text, and her compensation for the hard labour was merely seeing the place and not any benefits the act might bring her.

Egeria saw many holy sites, and in all of them the monks read her the appropriate passages from the Bible: 'Indeed, whenever we arrived, I always wanted the Bible passages to be read to us'.<sup>59</sup> After coming down from Mount Sinai, Egeria saw many other places, and she enumerated them until she became weary, and ended her description with the following advice: 'I know it has been rather a long business writing down all these places, and it is far too much to remember. But you, loving sisters, will better discern what happened in these places if you read the holy Books [capital correct?] of Moses'.<sup>60</sup> Here, Egeria used the word '*pervidere*' which means 'to look over', 'to survey', 'to discern', and it could be inferred from this that the pilgrimage was in fact unnecessary, as Egeria's sisters at home were able to see and understand all that Egeria had seen simply by reading the Scriptures. In another place she wrote: 'I already knew the land of Goshen from my first visit to Egypt, but I wanted to see all the places where the children of Israel had been [. . .]'.<sup>61</sup> Here again she used the word '*pervidere*', the word she used in connection with the reading of the text, as if she was suggesting that reading and travelling were in fact the same. Reading reflected the travel and vice versa.

For Jerome the connecting link between the place and the text was not the place's appearance, but its name. In his account of Paula's pilgrimage there is hardly any

<sup>56</sup> O. Limor, 'The Formation of the Christian Sacred Map' (forthcoming). On the meaning of the ascent to Sinai, see J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from Pagan World to Christianity* (London, 1997), p. 108.

<sup>57</sup> On these aspects of Christian pilgrimage, see J. Sumption, *Pilgrimage. An Image of Medieval Religion* (London, 1975).

<sup>58</sup> See n. 11 above.

<sup>59</sup> Egeria, 4:3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5:8: '[. . .] sed cum leget affectio vestra libros sanctos Moyse, omnia diligentius pervidet, quae ibi facta sunt'.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 7:1: '[. . .] tamen ut perviderem omnia loca, quae filii Israel tetigerant [. . .]'.

description of places. On the other hand, place-names are regarded as providing a key to an understanding of the text. The Christians inherited the taste of the ancients for etymology, and their belief that there was a connection between the names and their bearers.<sup>62</sup> A name was a condensation of an experience, its significance and its history, not just a word reflecting a thing. Names were considered a sort of key to the understanding of the figures or the places to which they belonged. Jerome wrote an etymological dictionary of biblical names, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, in which he gave the etymology of biblical names, including the names of places.<sup>63</sup>

This is also the approach in his account of Paula's Journey. Jerome gives the etymology of fifteen names: Zion means 'citadel' or 'watchtower'; Ariel means the 'Lion of God'; Bethlehem is the 'House of Bread'; Efrata is 'Karpophorus', a most fertile region; Tower Ader means 'of the flock'; Gaza means 'strength' or 'riches of God'; Esckol means 'cluster'; Kiriath-Sepher is the 'village of letters'; Caphar Barucha is the 'village of blessing'; Zoara means 'small'; the Samaritan is 'the Guardian'; Adummim means 'of blood'; Achor is 'tumult' and disturbance; Bethel is 'house of God'; Sior means 'muddy'. For many places he gives both the biblical and the present name, according to the didactic value he ascribed to the biblical geography: Acco–Ptolemais; Lydda–Diospolis; Emmaus–Nicomolis and so on. A name can have a positive significance. On arriving in Bethlehem, Paula exclaimed with joy mingled with tears: 'Blessed Bethlehem, "House of Bread", birthplace of the Bread that came down from heaven [. . .]'.<sup>64</sup> But 'she had no wish to go to Kiriath Sepher ("village of Letters")', for, despising the letter that killeth, she had found the spirit that giveth life'.<sup>65</sup> By this Jerome explicitly negated the literal reading of the text and exchanged it for an spiritual one.<sup>66</sup>

It would seem that the interpretation of these names—Bethlehem and Kiryath Sepher—contained the essence of Jerome's concept of the relationship between places and texts. Bethlehem was the goal of Paula and Jerome's journey. It was a spiritual goal, a lofty objective which involved also a deep religious meaning. The chapter describing Bethlehem is the most elaborated in the text, made up of a tissue of passages from various books of the Bible which are given together with a complex interlacing of

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<sup>62</sup> A. Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible. A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 103–04.

<sup>63</sup> Hieronymus, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, ed. by P. de Lagarde, CCSL, 72 (Turnhout, 1959); M. Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnise des frühen Mittelalters*, Biblioteca degli 'Studi Medievali', 4 (Spoleto, 1973).

<sup>64</sup> Ep. 108, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 108, 11.

<sup>66</sup> On the various Christian biblical interpretations, see H. De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols (Paris, 1959); on these specific words of Jerome, see P. Devos, 'Une fausse lecture dans la lettre 108 de S. Jérôme (Epitaph Sae Paula)', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 87 (1969), 213; Thiel, *Grundlagen*, p. 274.

meanings, and it shows us that it was no accident that the town was chosen as Paula and Jerome's place of residence.<sup>67</sup> As for Kiryath Sepher, the very meaning of the name was enough to make Paula decide not to go there. The essence of the Christian reading of the Scripture according to Jerome and the significance of Paula's pilgrimage was nothing else than a search for the 'spirit that giveth life'—the Christian allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures—and a negation of the 'letter that killeth'—the rival Jewish literal interpretation.

Egeria was not concerned with the interpretation of names. None of the names she mentioned was given an interpretation. It seems that etymologies did not form part of her cultural universe. She went from place to place and stopped in order to read the Scriptures, or, more exactly, to hear them read to her by the monks. Egeria spoke of reading and listening, Jerome of memory and reflection. Paula, in the holy places, 'meditated, remembered, recalled'.<sup>68</sup> Egeria saw a place and listened to a text; Paula came to a place and thought of its significance. For her, the places were important not only because of the events that took place there, but because of the meaning of these events for believers. Paula's visit to Gibeah is a good example: 'At the city of Gibeah, which was razed to the ground, she paused to remember her own sins, and those of the concubine who was cut into pieces and remembered also the six hundred Benjamites who were spared on account of the Apostle Paul'.<sup>69</sup> In the holy places, Paula meditated on the text.<sup>70</sup>

Was Egeria then ignorant of allegorical reading? It should be pointed out that the liturgical part of Egeria's letter shows that spiritual interpretation was by no means unfamiliar to her and could gain her admiration.<sup>71</sup> She had no knowledge of Jerome or his interpretations, but she listened on many occasions to the sermons of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, which she praised highly.<sup>72</sup> Just as Paula accepted Jerome's authority as a teacher, so Egeria accepted that of Cyril, who advocated a spiritual understanding of prophecy.<sup>73</sup> This being the case, the straightforward historical approach of the geographical section of the work is even more striking. For Egeria, the exodus from Egypt, the journey across Sinai, the giving of the Law, the death of Moses—events that had received allegorical and typological interpretations in early Christianity—were represented as historical events with a geographical locations, and nothing else. Egeria

<sup>67</sup> Concerning the reasons for Jerome's choice of Bethlehem, see Newman, 'Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem', pp. 224–27; Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 127–28; Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 173–74.

<sup>68</sup> 'recordata est' (8, 11, 12), 'contemplata est' (11), 'venerata est' (13), 'mirata est' (13).

<sup>69</sup> Ep. 108, 8. See Jude 19–20; Romans 11. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Dronke, *Women Writers*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Egeria, 24–49.

<sup>72</sup> Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus, *Catecheses*, PG, 33, cols 331–1128; Although probably very old, Cyril was still bishop when Egeria visited Jerusalem.

<sup>73</sup> See especially Egeria, 46.

was well versed in the Bible, and knew how to read a text. One may suppose that her preference for the historical meaning of the text and her avoidance of typological interpretation was deliberate and reflected her personal inclination.

There is another difference between Jerome and Egeria. Jerome was a teacher and his letter had a didactic aim. He taught Christians how they should look at holy places, and how they should understand them. Egeria's reading was much more private. She wanted to share her experience and her knowledge with her sisters, but she did not try to give her experience a universal or doctrinal status. In the following centuries, Jerome would be accepted as the biblical scholar *par excellence* of the Christian world. His way of reading the Bible and his exegetic methods became authoritative, and moreover, the only possible ones. Indeed by translating and interpreting the Hebrew text, Jerome made an enormous contribution to the Christian world, but this contribution had its price. It closed off other possibilities of reading. Christians in the Middle Ages did not have to approach the Hebrew Bible by themselves. They had Jerome. They read the Holy Scriptures, and especially the Old Testament, through Jerome's eyes. Egeria, who did not know Jerome, tells us, in her humble and naive way, about other possible ways of reading the Bible that were in use in her time, and for that we are greatly indebted to her.<sup>74</sup>

Three elements are indispensable for the creation of sacred space: place, ritual, and text.<sup>75</sup> While Egeria puts great emphasis on liturgy, Jerome concentrates on the interpretation of the text and on its deeper meaning. The absence of the liturgical dimension and the benedictory gifts in Paula's journey and the absence of the typological dimension in Egeria's point to the variety of religious experience, and to the different ways of representing the encounter with the holy places right from the beginning of Christian pilgrimage. Paula and Jerome, generally speaking, continued a tradition of scholarly pilgrimage (represented by Melito of Sardis in the second century and Origen in the third century)<sup>76</sup> whose purpose was chiefly a better understanding of the text, while Egeria's experience was already closer to the type of Christian pilgrimage known in the Middle Ages—that is, pilgrimage as a religious act in its own right.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, Egeria's unmediated relationship to the biblical text, and her constant emphasis on the connection between place and text, make her pilgrimage a textual experience as well, and the fact that Paula and Jerome settled in Bethlehem 'where Mary and Joseph found nowhere to lodge'<sup>78</sup> endows the place with a special

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<sup>74</sup> As a matter of fact, Egeria shows us how the Jewish historical reading of the Bible could have been accepted as a Christian reading.

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Smith, *To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London 1987), p. 86.

<sup>76</sup> Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 3–4, 100–101.

<sup>77</sup> On these later aspects, see Sumption, *Pilgrimage*.

<sup>78</sup> Ep. 108, 14.

significance. Furthermore, even in the following centuries, when pilgrims came to the holy places for the sake of their benedictory, remedial, or penitential virtues, the places never lost their textual character. This after all was the essential difference between pilgrimage to other places and pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which remained always a 'textual pilgrimage', a pilgrimage to the Land of the Text.