



Pilgrimage and Textual Culture

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In the last decade of the fifteenth century, the pilgrim and writer Felix Fabri offered advice for those who wished to make a pilgrimage and write about the journey along the way: don't trust your shipmates, "[f]or men are strangely apt to play the thief on board ship, even though they may abhor thieving when not at sea." He then gives this example:

[W]hile you are writing, if you lay down your pen and turn your face away, your pen will be lost, even though you be among men whom you know; and if you lose it you will have exceeding great trouble in getting another.¹

Fabri, who tells us that he never let a day pass on his journey without writing notes, whether at sea, in storms, or in the desert (often writing while sitting on a donkey or a camel), knew whereof he spoke. His garrulous descriptions of devotional journeys to Jerusalem and Sinai demonstrate the importance that pilgrimage—and writing about pilgrimage—held in medieval Europe. Pilgrimage formed a central motif of medieval culture and shaped a defining aesthetic of early literatures, not least in canonical texts such as Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Petrarch's *Itinerarium*, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.² Despite this centrality of pilgrimage, however, research remains in a preliminary state for many of the actual texts, manuscripts, and books of the pilgrimage route, which include accounts of devotional practices or guides for pilgrimage, as well as manuscripts and printed objects that were acquired or donated by pilgrims at pilgrimage sites or during the journey.

Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela, the "great pilgrimages," comprised the three main destinations of medieval Latin Christendom, and all had vigorous pilgrimage cultures associated with them in texts,

images, liturgies, and material artifacts. The status of one particular library in Jerusalem, that of the Franciscans of Mount Zion, offers an object lesson in the methodological difficulties involved in researching textual cultures of pilgrimage.³ In 1335, the Franciscans established the friary at Mount Zion, the sole Latin Christian house in the city as permitted by the Mamelukes. From its earliest times it had a scriptorium. The friary seems to have housed a kind of reference library for visiting Western, Latin pilgrims, while Franciscan friars acted as the main oral guides for pilgrims to the *loci sancti*.⁴ In 1551, the Ottomans expelled the Franciscans from Mount Zion, and the friars lodged temporarily in a nearby bakery. A few years later, in 1560–61, the Franciscans moved into the Old City, to what is still their main base and library, the Custodia Terrae Sanctae at St. Saviour's, formerly a Georgian monastery. In this turbulent period, almost all the holdings of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Franciscan library disappeared. Only four or five books, none of them pilgrimage or travel guides, can be securely connected with the holdings of the house's pre-Ottoman library.⁵

Several pilgrims say they read books and copied information at Mount Zion. Josephie Brefeld has searched in detail but unsuccessfully to find a common ancestor to these texts. Yet what Brefeld concludes is hardly surprising—that the pilgrims all copied each others' texts, which is well known to anybody who has looked at the travels of Marco Polo and John Mandeville, or similar writings.⁶ Two pilgrimage guides, the short *Libellus descriptionis Terrae Sanctae* (1427) and the longer *Peregrinationes Terrae Sanctae quae a modernis visitantur* (1459), also describe themselves as having been composed at or commissioned by Mount Zion; the latter book was emphatically not a *vade mecum*, but rather a reference work from which copies and new versions sprang forth.⁷ An anonymous French pilgrim, writing in the fifteenth century, explicitly states that he transcribed his book at Mount Zion on January 24, 1471.⁸ Measuring only 12 x 9 cm, this very small manuscript now in Versailles (Bibliothèque Municipale, MS Lebaudy L97) contains itineraries of the holy sites. However, it also contains other texts that are concerned with the history of the Holy Land: Jacques de Vitry's *Historia orientalis*, notes on the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, notes on the finding of the True Cross, Nicolas of Lyra's *Postillae*, tracts against the Greeks and Muslims, hagiographical and liturgical notes, and a genealogy of Christ—in other words, a great deal of local detail, but in essence a monastic compilation of others' texts. Its pilgrimage texts include Burchard of Mount Zion's guide to the holy sites and a formulary of prayers for a Jerusalem pilgrim, which are themselves copies of other authors' texts or are related to

them. This was clearly a codex produced in the Holy Land about the Holy Land, but it is far from being a diary, written as the pilgrim walked through the holy sites; rather, it is a collection of devotional texts for thinking in different registers about the Holy Land.

While Mount Zion offered an ideal library for pilgrim writers, it was unusual for serving as a place where texts relating to pilgrimage not only could be consulted but also were copied and written on location. In many cases, however, the actual generation of a text about the Holy Land happened before the pilgrim's trip (in reading) and afterward (in writing) rather than during the journey. If the moment of actual writing rarely occurred while on pilgrimage, how much reading took place on site? Brefeld documents a few isolated cases in which pilgrims passing through Venice to Jaffa noted that among the mundane necessities one needed to procure in Italy were paper, ink, and books.⁹ Some pilgrims did take books with them: for instance, Leonardo Frescobaldi (traveling in 1384) took "a small chest for certain of our useful things, as the books of the Bible, and the Gospels and the *Morals* [the *Moralia* of Gregory the Great]"; this chest also contained silver cups "and other delicate things."¹⁰ But evidence is very scarce for pilgrims taking books about pilgrimage with them to Palestine, that is, travel guidebooks; more common is evidence for purchasing souvenirs from the holy sites. Records suggest that pilgrims overwhelmingly preferred to rely on the oral, performative experience offered by local tour guides, either Franciscans, local Greek Orthodox Christians, or Palestinian Jews and Muslims.

That said, Venice became the hotbed of sharing and disseminating narratives connected to pilgrimage. The famous example of the 1458 Jerusalem voyage, embarking from Venice, remains an eloquent testimony to the busy, international world of textual production on a medieval pilgrimage. The voyage produced no fewer than six accounts: one by Gabriel Capodilista of Padua; another by Roberto da Sanseverino of Milan, a member of a cadet branch of the Sforza family; one by Giovanni Matteo Butigella of Milan, a courtier of the Visconti family; an anonymous Dutch account (London, British Library, Add. MS 10286); a German account by Anton Pelchinger of Tegernsee, Bavaria (preserved in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 3012); and the account in Middle English and Latin by William Wey (now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 565). Likewise, Venice boasted a very successful industry in the publication of pilgrims' guides—between 1500 and 1590, for example, some twenty-four editions of Niccolò of Poggibonsi's *Viaggio* were published there.¹¹

From the mid-fifteenth century, Mandeville's hugely popular *Book*

of *Marvels and Travels* (originally written in the 1350s) became widely read in northern Italy and multiply published in Bologna, Florence, Milan, and Venice. The evidence suggests that this was part of a humanist, or proto-humanist, culture of reading about origins, places, languages, alphabets, and curiosities, rather than a “practical” set of handbooks for the Jerusalem-bound pilgrim. Pilgrimage texts themselves were not always used instrumentally like a modern travel guide; they were also read encyclopedically to evoke places far from home.

Pilgrims, as can be seen, often consulted travel accounts before they departed on their journeys. They also consulted books during a pilgrimage itself, as was done at the library of Mount Zion. After their return, they inscribed their experiences in accounts for others to access. Mirroring this home-destination-home sequential geography of pilgrimage, this special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, “Pilgrimage and Textual Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Production, Exchange, Reception,” focuses on the production, exchange, and reception of such pilgrimage texts.

The production of pilgrimage texts is the focus of essays by Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Philip Booth, and Hannah Weaver, who discuss the influence that existing texts or oral traditions had on pilgrim-authors’ writing. For example, Gadrat-Ouerfelli explores the varied “physical and mental” library upon which Ludolf of Sudheim drew to create his fourteenth-century *De itinere Terre Sancte*, showing how Ludolph sets eyewitness and oral sources side by side with an abundance of textual sources. Philip Booth offers a spiritual, social, and literary recontextualization of the writings of Riccoldo of Monte Croce (ca. 1243–1320) better to understand this pilgrim-author’s aims as a Dominican educator. Hannah Weaver argues that the text and translations of the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* intentionally manipulate the generic expectations of readers to relieve doubts about the physicality of pilgrim experience at the Irish St. Patrick’s Purgatory site.

The article by Matthew Coneys takes up the way that different types of pilgrimage texts were exchanged in the process of composition. Coneys describes the unusual versified guides to the Roman pilgrimage written by Giuliano Dati (1445–1524), which circulated as printed pamphlets. Exploring the place of these ephemeral objects within the city’s devotional landscape, he reveals the permeability between print and oral performance cultures, connecting this to the complex relationship between salvation and self-promotion at a time of significant change for the Roman pilgrimage trade.

The reception of pilgrimage texts is addressed in essays by Marianne O’Doherty and Kathryn Beebe, and also by Weaver. In her article, O’Doherty approaches reception studies in a way that is informed by codicological and cartographic analysis to interpret what a Latin pilgrimage compilation—including, among other items, extracts from Mandeville’s *Travels* and a unique map of Jerusalem’s holy sites—meant to the members of fifteenth-century English learned circles. Analyzing the previously unstudied manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 426, O’Doherty shows how the running concerns in this manuscript with geography and cosmology are placed in the service of scholarly understanding and devotion. Beebe’s essay considers interpretations of the late medieval practice of imagined, or “virtual,” pilgrimage by both medieval practitioners and modern scholars. She argues in a historiographical discussion that what imagined pilgrimage meant as a sociocultural practice was and is, still, to scholars who study it, deeply connected to issues of gender, power, and religious reform. Serving as a link between the production and the reception of pilgrimage texts, Weaver’s article, mentioned above, also turns outward to think about how the textual tradition of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* shaped the historical pilgrimage to Lough Derg.

The originality of this special issue’s approach to understanding pilgrimage texts is the result of its organic development through the intellectual exchanges that took place among the scholars participating in the “Pilgrim Libraries” international research network.¹² Supported by the Leverhulme Trust’s International Network grant scheme, the 2016–18 Pilgrim Libraries Network project interrogated the surviving books that pilgrims read and wrote before, during, and after their pilgrimages to reveal what they can tell us about premodern transnational culture. At the heart of this project was the international and interdisciplinary networking of scholars of medieval bibliography, history, literature, and religion. By marrying archival bibliography with literary criticism and cultural history, the network brought questions about the survival of medieval texts into scholarly conversation about reading them beyond their immediate locality in transnational contexts. Network members also embraced contemporary concerns of religious hostility, devotional memory, migration, multiculturalism, nationhood, the curatorship of the past, and contemporary legacies of medieval pilgrimage. This special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* offers the first formal publication of the network’s findings.¹³

All the articles collected here are grounded in an intimate knowledge of a particular past. Each is an extremely detailed, fine-grained empirical study

of a particular text (or texts) and a specific sociocultural milieu. They also address theoretical and methodological issues involved in the interpretation of these texts. This concern is paramount for Beebe, who tests contemporary historians' (including her own) interpretations of what imagined pilgrimage meant to late medieval enclosed nuns against empirical findings and current ideas about gender and the influence of "resistance studies." The trend toward interdisciplinarity, new ways of thinking transnationally (beyond national borders, national archives, and national language-based research), as well as current debates over periodization and the late medieval/early modern divide, mean that the time is right for a critical assessment of what we know about archival remains of pilgrims' books.¹⁴ Our authors represent not only the disciplines of history, literature, and bibliography that one might expect, but they also draw on the insights of social anthropology and geography. In light of this, we have adopted a processual logic of home-destination-home to organize the essays, rather than one that is nationalist (e.g., German, English, or French).

By focusing on the production, exchange, and reception of pilgrimage texts, this special issue addresses deficiencies in the existing literature on pilgrimage. First, although pilgrimage can be considered a central motif of medieval culture and a defining aesthetic of early literature, scholarship continues to describe pilgrimage in curiously unmodulated terms, as if its meaning and its cultural forms were uncomplicated, conventional, and consistent; as the work of the Leverhulme "Pilgrim Libraries" project has shown, this is not the case.¹⁵ The articles here consider pilgrimage culture within its dynamic and changing contexts.

Another deficiency in the existing literature on pilgrimage is that little work has been done on the surviving books—guidebooks or otherwise—bearing evidence of pilgrims' use.¹⁶ Previous scholarship has addressed only in a halting and partial way questions about the material remains of the books that pilgrims acquired, used, and shared. Articles in this volume engage with actual books of the pilgrimage route—both those that pilgrims took with them *and* those that they acquired at the pilgrimage site—and elucidate dynamic interactions that were mediated through books and reading. For example, Coneys describes just such interactions between text and pilgrimage destination in his discussion of the vernacular pilgrimage poems composed for Roman pilgrims by Giuliano Dati.

One other deficiency in the literature on pilgrimage that this special issue addresses is that recent cultural-historical writing on medieval travel has tended to focus on the "writer" or author, rather than on the audiences, afterlives, and bibliographical aspects of travel culture.¹⁷ The lack of inte-

grated archival work on the books and surviving sources for understanding the pilgrimage route and the pilgrims' experiences has abetted the lack of attention to the reception of travel narratives. In an attempt to begin to remedy this lacuna, this issue delves into what pilgrimage texts meant *to* their audiences, examining the subjective and experiential dimension of the afterlives of these texts. Beebe's article, for example, discusses how enclosed nuns themselves understood their use of pilgrimage texts for virtual, or imagined, pilgrimage. Booth, meanwhile, explores the influence of Burchard of Mount Zion's *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* on Riccoldo of Monte Croce's writing and the role of the large library at the Dominican priory of Santa Maria Novella on Riccoldo's literary activity.

In the later Middle Ages, thousands of European pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem, Rome, and many other destinations as part of a highly organized industry. However, despite the significance that the practice of pilgrimage held, scholars have not paid enough attention to the ways in which what pilgrims read and wrote before, during, and after the journey can illuminate premodern, transnational culture. This special issue makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the central importance of pilgrimage during the medieval and early modern eras, and it endeavors to fill in a gap in knowledge about the actual texts of the pilgrimage route. With fine-grained empirical studies that are pertinent to contemporary theoretical debates, this issue also seeks to engage a broad audience of scholars in medieval and early modern studies, as well as in related fields such as geography and anthropology, by addressing historiographical concerns about how current ideologies affect our interpretation of the past. Finally, we hope that our focus on the production, exchange, and reception of pilgrimage texts will further research into this most fertile of fields and inspire others to continue the journey.



Notes

- 1 Felix Fabri, *Wanderings in the Holy Land*, in *Felix Fabri, circa 1480–1483 A.D.*, trans. and ed. Aubrey Stewart, 4 vols. (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1892–97), 1:162.
- 2 See, for example, Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975); and Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700–1500* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2001).
- 3 For an important recent conspectus of the library at Mount Zion, covering its holdings and its history, see Luca Rivali, “Pèlerinage des hommes, pérégrinations de livres:

- La formation de la bibliothèque de la custodie de Terre Sainte a Jérusalem,” *Opera romanica* 16 (2015): 374–87.
- 4 See Bert Roest, *A History of Franciscan Education, 1210–1517* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 197–234.
 - 5 Rivali, “Pèlerinage des hommes, pérégrinations de livres,” 378; Michele Campopiano, *Writing the Holy Land: The Franciscans of Mount Zion and the Construction of a Cultural Memory, 1300–1550* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
 - 6 Josephie Brefeld, *A Guidebook for the Jerusalem Pilgrimage: A Case for Computer-Aided Textual Criticism* (Hilversum, Neth.: Verloren, 1994); see also Michele Campopiano, “Tradizione e edizione di una compilazione di testi sulla Terra Santa proveniente dal convento francescano del Monte Sion (fine del XIV secolo),” *Revue d’Histoire des Textes* n.s. 6 (2011): 329–59.
 - 7 Rivali, “Pèlerinage des hommes, pérégrinations de livres,” 377.
 - 8 *Un guide du pèlerin de Terre Sainte au XVe siècle*, ed. Régine Pernoud (Mantes, Fr.: Petit Mantais, 1940), 5.
 - 9 Brefeld, *Guidebook for the Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 58–59.
 - 10 Leonardo Frescobaldi, “The Pilgrimage of Leonardo Frescobaldi,” in *A Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria in 1384*, ed. and trans. Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1948), 35.
 - 11 See Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade, eds. and trans., *A Voyage beyond the Seas* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1945), xxxvii–xxxix.
 - 12 For details about the network, see *Pilgrim Libraries: Books and Reading on the Medieval Routes to Rome and Jerusalem*, at www.bbk.ac.uk/pilgrimlibraries/.
 - 13 Network participants have shared their findings previously through its blog and social media; see www.bbk.ac.uk/pilgrimlibraries/.
 - 14 For recent articulations about historical division-making, see Ronald Hutton, ed., *Medieval or Early Modern: The Value of a Traditional Historical Division* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).
 - 15 Much recent scholarship, for example, focuses on one pilgrimage location. Two examples of this tendency are Kathleen Ashley and Marilyn Deegan, *Being a Pilgrim: Art and Ritual on the Medieval Routes to Santiago* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2009); and Nicole Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). See the *Pilgrim Libraries* blog for examples of work in progress and insights from the network on the kinds of case studies that are possible, at www.bbk.ac.uk/pilgrimlibraries/posts/.
 - 16 Notable exceptions include Pernoud, ed., *Un guide du pèlerin*; Anthony Bale, “‘ut legi’: Sir John Mandeville’s Audience and Three Late Medieval English Travelers to Italy and Jerusalem,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38 (2016): 201–37; and various studies of the famous Santiago de Compostela *Codex Calixtinus*.
 - 17 See, for example, Mary Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Kim Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245–1510* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); and Shirin Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).