

## Holy Meditations and Earthly Curiosities: Understanding Late Medieval Pilgrims to Jerusalem

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By the Late Middle Ages, relics and sites of holiness were scattered across the European continent. For centuries, these developed as places of veneration, attracting travelers from near and far. Whether they were worshipers or wanderers, pilgrims in Western Europe traveled extensively. One destination reigned supreme on the pilgrim's itinerary: the Holy Land. There were many worthy sites along the way, destinations in themselves, but Jerusalem in particular was unrivaled. It lured pilgrims to face death just to stand upon Mountjoy, that fabled vantage point overlooking the city.<sup>1</sup> But it was not merely the distant memory of Jesus' presence that brought these travelers to their knees. Their journey was expensive, dangerous, and painfully long. Their arrival was unwelcomed and their presence tolerated only grudgingly.<sup>23</sup> The accounts of the people who chose to embark on such a lengthy adventure are full of complaints. So why did they go?

Pilgrimage, as a practice, provided some very functional benefits to medieval Christians. The first was penitential. Sarah Hopper mentions that purgatory and hell loomed hauntingly in medieval consciousness. This fear of potential punishment after death was generally intended by the Catholic Church to guide Christians into obeying the teachings of the Bible. However, when proper instruction fell short and errors were made, often some form of penitence was needed to correct the blemish on one's heavenly slate. Sins could often be wiped clean, or at least reduced,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 69.

<sup>3</sup> Felix Fabri, *Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1897), accessed April 23, 2012, <http://faculty.colostate-pueblo.edu/beatrice.spade/seminar97/fabri.htm>, Introduction of Second Trip.

by suffering through pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> This penitential pilgrimage was often sentenced by the Church court, but many faithful worshipers volunteered themselves to relieve their sins. The practice grew to become a common punishment sentence, with possibilities of buying off a pilgrimage or paying for a substitute to make the journey instead. In many ways, this put pilgrims out on the road who had little interest in the spiritual treasures of their destination. However, others continued to make the journey with more pious intentions. They went on behalf of the dead or as a way to deal with personal grief over the death of a loved one.

Pilgrimage was also immensely important for its healing purposes. Rituals in the Holy Land, such as bathing in the Jordan River, could work miracles upon those weary pilgrims who had made it so far. On the other hand, most people in need of healing, unwilling or unable to devote a year of traveling for the remedy of their illness, often sought out closer pilgrimage sites.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, pilgrims of all ranks and occupations, both men and women, made their way to Jerusalem for various reasons. While these practical reasons may make pilgrimage seem like a quick jaunt or an easy task to complete, this was certainly never the case. To journey to Jerusalem was always life-changing. A person who had gone on such an expedition returned with many rewards, particularly the favor of God.

While pilgrimage was undoubtedly an intensely spiritual endeavor, it immediately becomes clear that there is a certain xenophilia, or passion for the unknown, which underlies the accounts of pilgrims to Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Late medieval pilgrims didn't hide their excitement and appreciation for faraway lands. When Felix Fabri titled his account of Holy Land pilgrimage *Wanderings*, he did so to communicate a particular message—pilgrimage was a multi-faceted

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Hopper, *To Be a Pilgrim: The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2002), 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 49-52.

<sup>6</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 72.

experience.<sup>7</sup> When Chaucer began his *Canterbury Tales* with a description of springtime as a perfect time for travel, it was to illuminate the fact that pilgrimage was never strictly about spirituality.<sup>8</sup> Criminals, who were often sent on penitential pilgrimage, were not exclusively occupied with thoughts of repentance, and those in search of healing always found an exhilarating adventure (and, not to mention, danger) along the way. As we will see, pilgrimage belongs to neither the earthly nor the spiritual realm. The journey was made in the name of God, but it was inseparable from the curiosities and fascinations of the medieval world.

Western Europeans had been embarking on pilgrimage to Jerusalem since the fourth century.<sup>9</sup> In the archaeological record, we see the full extent of a particular longing for distant places from very early on. Peter Brown illuminates the appeal of leaving one's home in search of internal transformation. As early as the third century, Christians like St. Anthony chose to abandon their former lives in the struggle to fight temptation and live up to the teachings of God. Choosing to spend the rest of his life out in the desert, Anthony was just the beginning of a long legacy of Desert Fathers whose spirituality drove them to venture away from comfort.<sup>10</sup> The pilgrims of the Late Middle Ages sought some luxuries in their journeys, unlike the ascetics of Late Antiquity. But it would be incorrect to sever the ties between these two generations of Christians; their transformative journeys into unknown lands were directly related.

The Holy Land was never just a place of veneration; it was also an expedition to tour the various sites of Christ's life, and pick up souvenirs at each stop along the way. Vials of holy water, samples of earth, and pilgrims' flasks illuminate a sort of proto-tourism. When we look at the decoration on these pilgrims' flasks, we see that they depict sites as they appear in the

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<sup>7</sup> Fabri, *Wanderings*.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *No Fear: The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Spark Publishing, 2009), lines 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body & Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 213-214.

medieval period, rather than in Christ's life.<sup>11</sup> This gives us a window into the conceptualization of what pilgrimage was all about. While Christ was certainly the main focus, what is particularly curious is the fact that the places he visited developed an allure of their own in his absence.

Though religion was at the heart of these travels to the Holy Land, it becomes clear that pilgrimage offered not only heavenly satisfaction, but also appealed to earthly delights.

To journey to the Holy Land was an incredible endeavor. In current historical debates, conceptions are changing about the extent of medieval popular knowledge of the wider world. It was formerly thought that the common medieval Englishman never traveled more than five or six miles from home, which would be true for the lowest ranking bonded peasant, but certainly not the standard. Ian Mortimer suggests that popular medieval knowledge of geography and demographic position in the world was more extensive. While few particular individuals might have any impressive world knowledge, any family unit as a whole could probably give an account of every town and its important inhabitants for thirty miles in every direction. This was due to the fact that marriage networks and market towns kept people on the move, and with different family members headed in different directions, their resulting collective knowledge would have been quite impressive. Yet, even giving credit to those upper and middle-class medieval travelers for their network of local geographic awareness, a trip to Jerusalem would have been absolutely astonishing. Those who had been in contact with merchants or soldiers may have heard of distant locations in the Christian world, but they would not have any solid

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Krueger, "The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium," in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 9-11.

knowledge of these places.<sup>12</sup> So, making the decision to set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would have been a long and treacherous journey into the unknown.

By the Late Middle Ages, there were many pilgrims who had made the journey before, and they were not humble about keeping their experiences private. The Holy Land came to occupy a place in the medieval imagination due to the volumes of descriptive, adventurous accounts written by pilgrims upon their return. These narratives, accompanied by the stories of family, friends, and religious advisors, served not only as incentive to embark, but were also logistical. Although accurate information was rarely contained in one place, the oral nature of medieval popular knowledge would ensure that you knew where you were going, how you were going to get there, and what you would find along the way.<sup>13</sup> And if there was nobody to help you before your departure, you could count on meeting many other pilgrims along the way. Heading out of London? The Tabard Inn in Southwark served as an excellent rendezvous for Chaucer and his party.<sup>14</sup>

All pilgrims leaving to Jerusalem set out on the road with the fullest intention of returning, but also a complete understanding that they might never do so. Pilgrims were encouraged to settle all debts before they went away. As they packed their bags and loaded up their horses, they were undoubtedly in an extraordinary mindset. They bid their families what might be their final farewell, and they offered up their own vulnerability in exchange for the experience of the Holy Land.<sup>15</sup> Though departure was an essential part of the journey, it was rarely easy for the pilgrim. The sentiment felt when a pilgrim left home was profound. Begging for his father's blessing, Felix Fabri writes, "during my embraces and sobs I heard my most

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Touchstone, 2008), 68-69.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, lines 715-720.

<sup>15</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 18-19.

beloved father's last words of advice, that I was not to forget him in the Holy Land, but that...I was to send a letter from the sea telling how I was, and to be sure to return soon.<sup>16</sup> Leaving home has been a solemn occasion throughout history, but the decision must always be made when in pursuit of the pleasures of the outside world.

From home, they headed through the continent and down to Venice. Pilgrims often made arrangements so that their return trip would be as new and exciting as their first, stopping in entirely different towns than the ones they set out from. On some legs of the journey, they made their way by horse or mule. However, when the opportunity arose for faster transit, it was not uncommon to take advantage of it. Ogier d'Anglure set out from Chambery in Champagne on a horse, but when he got to Pavia, he traded his weary companion in for a rowboat.<sup>17</sup> Though pilgrims made their way down to Venice by different routes, one part of the journey would almost always be non-negotiable. The ship from Venice to Jaffa would be long, unpleasant, and potentially deadly. With shifting itineraries depending on the season, the trip was organized by the captain of the ship. Pilgrims were encouraged to make contracts with the captain to ensure a successful voyage, but certain things were always out of the captain's hands.<sup>18</sup> Turkish and Barbary Pirates were out at sea in the Mediterranean, and if they could be avoided for the entire duration of the five-week trip, things were looking up for the pilgrim.<sup>19</sup> But such good fortune didn't remedy the intense overcrowding, unpleasant food and water, heat, disease, rodents or other causes for concern on board.<sup>20</sup> After all the dead were buried at sea, the remaining pilgrims reached the shore and continued carefully over land from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

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<sup>16</sup> Felix Fabri. "Jerusalem Pilgrimage in 1480: The Tribulations of Brother Felix," in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck (New York: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 18-20.

<sup>18</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 42-44.

<sup>19</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 16-22.

<sup>20</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 47-52.

By river or road, the path to the Holy Land was unpredictable. Perhaps one might encounter a French or Italian lord, making his way by sizeable caravan across the springtime landscape. There was nothing that could have prepared Symon the Irishman, traveling in 1323, for the paradisiacal smell of giant cypress trees he encountered en route to the Holy Land.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, not all encounters were so grand. It seems almost inevitable that a pilgrim would be mugged at some place or another. This was the case for Pierre Barbatre, a priest from Normandy, who was robbed of his wine flask by a traveling mercenary.<sup>22</sup> But robbery was petty when considered from the perspective of Saewulf, an English pilgrim heading to Jerusalem at the beginning of the twelfth century. Divine intervention caused him to evacuate from his ship just in time to scramble to shore and witness a terrible storm sinking all the vessels and their crews into the sea outside Jaffa.<sup>23</sup> In any case, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem required caution and calm awareness of potential danger as one ventured far from home.

Perhaps the greatest representation of medieval wanderlust was the numerous side-trips that could accompany a pilgrimage. Many saw it fit to begin on the long journey home after they had made it to Jerusalem. Others had not quite had their fill. For them, the desert invited those willing to step into its abysmal, open space and discover the unexplored. The real thrill of the desert was that it could not be tamed. There were no Christian guides or souvenir stands. It was necessary to carefully negotiate one's own passage into the desert with locals willing to lead the way. Many headed first to Gaza, from which they would depart in search of the Monastery of St. Catherine. While it served as a multicultural crossroad, many pilgrims found it to be a most unpleasant place. Felix Fabri, for example, refused to enter the city before nightfall for fear of

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<sup>21</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 18-20.

<sup>23</sup> Saewulf, "Saewulf Makes a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land" in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck (New York: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 309-311.

being stoned. In Gaza, pilgrims would purchase a bit of extra food which they could offer helplessly to the inhabitants of the desert if they were accosted. This provision did not replace the money that would have to be given daily to the Muslim guides who seemed to look for every excuse to exploit their pilgrim entourage. Choosing to embark on a side-journey from Jerusalem only compounded the difficulties of the pilgrimage. Once the excursion began, there would be no chance to turn back. Departing from the poor hospitality of Gaza, they headed to the fortress-monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai and finally made it into Egypt. From here, they either returned to the port at Jaffa to catch the next ship back to Venice, or continued the adventure in finding their own way back home.<sup>24</sup>

Such a demanding and impressive side-trip is crucial to understanding these late medieval pilgrims to Jerusalem. While St. Catherine's was undoubtedly a holy space and Egypt a legacy to the desert ascetics of old, these destinations paled in comparison to Jerusalem. Instead of heading immediately back to Jaffa to catch the ship to Venice, many pilgrims chose to make this supplementary excursion and further risked their lives doing so. Fabri made their motivations clear when he wrote, "There is always something new to be seen and fill you with admiration."<sup>25</sup> Nicole Chareyron had this curiosity in mind when she examined the accounts of pilgrims who made the decision to enter the desert. It is a passion for the exotic that not only drove pilgrims into the desert, but urged them to leave their home villages in the first place. In their itineraries, they describe the great beauty of the natural landscape and its animals. As they made their way through threatening terrain and negotiated with the untrustworthy people who called it home, pilgrims didn't seem to regret the journey. According to Chareyron, those who included it in their stories were participating in the creation of the desert as the modern literary symbol for

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<sup>24</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 127-155.

<sup>25</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 138.



emptiness, deprivation, and the impenetrable beyond.<sup>26</sup> But it was their amazement and awe that kept this side-trip functioning throughout the medieval period.

Much like traveling today, such a journey also allowed the pilgrim a chance to understand oneself in the context of international relations. After 1291, there were no more Christian territories in the Holy Land. Saladin, the sultan of Egypt, controlled Jerusalem, and it was only with his permission that one would be allowed to enter.<sup>27</sup> While pilgrims may not have been alive for the First Crusade, a trip to Jerusalem would come intertwined with a message of ethnic guilt. Anselmo Adorno, an Italian pilgrim to Jerusalem in 1470-71, wrote in his instructive account, “Some are foolish enough to think there is no country but their own.”<sup>28</sup> In the Late Middle Ages, pilgrimage was invaluable in its communication of international awareness. Although these later pilgrims wore the embroidered red cross of neutrality, so did the Crusaders who came before them, and after centuries of destruction and pillage, Muslim locals were wise to the game.<sup>29</sup> There would be no welcome celebration upon the pilgrim’s arrival in Jerusalem. Instead, it would be quite a solemn and uncomfortable affair for these uninvited foreign guests.

There was much literature which discussed the nature of Islam in medieval Western Europe. Coming to meet Muslims in person, however, was something quite different. Following the Crusades, pilgrims generally approached the Saracens of the medieval Islamic world with either fear or hatred. While these were often brief encounters, much like those between modern tourists and their local concierge, there were lessons to be learned. Anselmo Adorno, a champion of cross-cultural understanding in some sense, wrote “they are as polite to one as we are, but not

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<sup>26</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 136-145

<sup>27</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 69.

in the same way.<sup>30</sup> Many pilgrims, like Felix Fabri, seem to have ignored the topic entirely. While he explains what he did, where he stayed, and what he saw in the Holy Land, no mention is made of any local inhabitants or guides. Such an omission begs the question of whether pilgrims like Fabri experienced a humanity in the inhabitants of the Holy Land which contradicted popular education on the matter in Western Europe. But it goes without saying that many pilgrims had no difficulty writing of the Muslims as “Satan’s minions<sup>31</sup>” and “lamenting that such a most consecrated place was under Saracen guardianship.<sup>32</sup>” The educational value of a journey abroad varied greatly according to one’s openness to the outside world and its divergent ways. Pilgrims like Adorno, who sought to embody the true meaning behind the red cross of neutrality, found a world full of curiosities and new understandings.

In considering these traveler’s perspectives, late medieval Pilgrimage to the Holy Land cannot be entirely understood without a deeper context of the Crusades. While it is not my intention to discuss militant pilgrimage at length, the journeys of pilgrims in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were made in the shadow of the Crusaders who came before them. For a variety of spiritual and political reasons, Pope Urban arranged a council at Clermont in 1095 in which he skillfully appealed to all Western Christendom’s desires for glory, wealth, and salvation, and urged them to reconquer the Holy Land. His famous speech incited lords and knights, as well as lower class mobs, all over Western Europe to take up arms and head naively to their eastern destination. As the fight against Islam proved difficult and costly, the aggressive flame burned out at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> From there, Franciscan missionaries moved in and set up a

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<sup>30</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 111-114.

<sup>31</sup> Suzanne Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 36.

<sup>32</sup> Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (New York: HarperCollins, 1963), 289-301.

convent on Mount Sion, where they led the pilgrim itineraries and tours that Westerners like Felix Fabri would follow until their expulsion in 1560.<sup>34</sup>

While the Crusades were more or less over by the time we meet late medieval pilgrim-authors like Adorno, they were quite alive in the mindsets of these travelers. Suzanne Yeager makes the case that pilgrims to Jerusalem were participating in the creation of a communal Christian memory. Much like the legends of King Arthur, Western Europeans conceptualized themselves in relation to supposedly historical figures and events. After the Crusades, Western Christianity saw itself as the legitimate heir to the Holy Land.<sup>35</sup> Sir John Mandeville, the great travel-writer of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, writes bitterly, “now have the heathen men held that land [Jerusalem] in their hands forty year and more; but they shall not hold it long, if God will.”<sup>36</sup> Going to Jerusalem would be a statement not only of faith, but of one’s position as a Westerner in a territory which was all but lost to its former stewards. The treasure of Jerusalem had changed hands and pilgrims would be reminded of this lesson in political history as they purchased their Christian souvenirs from Muslim merchants and shopkeepers.

Franciscan friars came to regulate pilgrimage traffic in the Holy Land after the mid-fourteenth century, and they would be directly responsible to the authorities for any misbehavior of their spiritual flock.<sup>37</sup> There was no “free time” on the itinerary. Felix Fabri, reflecting on his first journey to Jerusalem in 1480, wrote, “I was by no means satisfied with my first pilgrimage, because it was exceeding [*sic*] short and hurried.” Entirely unprepared for the political climate of Late Medieval Jerusalem, Fabri needed two trips to experience the Holy Land—one to

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<sup>34</sup> Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative*, 3-11.

<sup>36</sup> Sir John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), accessed May 6, 2012, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/tosjm10h.htm>, Chapter 10.

<sup>37</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 28.

experience the world itself, another to experience it spiritually. In this sense, pilgrimage really was what the pilgrim made of it.

With the intention of publishing an account, pilgrims like Fabri became dedicated ethnographers and careful observers. Aware not only of their personal experience, but their position in the medieval world as well, travelers to Jerusalem laid down their accounts for the pleasures of armchair travelers and prospective pilgrims alike.<sup>38</sup> Even Felix Fabri himself, one of the greatest authors of pilgrimage narratives, studied earlier descriptions of Holy Land pilgrimage to process his own experience and prepare for his second journey.<sup>39</sup> These traveling authors diligently recorded everything, in the hopes that one day they would return home and share their experiences with both those who sought to go on pilgrimage themselves and those who would never be able to.<sup>40</sup>

William Wey's *Itineraries* of his travels in 1458 and 1462 serve an excellent example of the variety of information found in pilgrim narratives. He devoted his entire first chapter to money exchanges, mentioning thirty-nine different types between England and Venice.<sup>41</sup> Stumbling across the continent, learning lessons the hard way, Wey sought to relieve future pilgrims of some of the difficulties of long-distance travel.<sup>42</sup> His third chapter, on the other hand, is a poem. It consists of 352 lines describing "the Way to Jerusalem and the Holy Places in That Same Country." But the logistics and poetic verse of chapters one and three are followed by a chapter which contains twenty-nine Latin hexametric mnemonic verses with their decoded

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<sup>38</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Renna, "Jerusalem in Late Medieval Itineraria," in *Pilgrims & Travelers to the Holy Land*, ed. Bryan F. Le Beau et al. (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), 122.

<sup>40</sup> Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> William Wey, *The Itineraries of William Wey*, ed. and trans. Francis Davey (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2010), 22-25.

<sup>42</sup> Cindy Polecritti, personal correspondence, 5/25/12.

message. These verses were a technique utilized by Latin educators to assist with memory.<sup>43</sup> Later on, a chapter was devoted to a glossary of 132 words and phrases in English with Greek phonetic translation.<sup>44</sup> Compiling a narrative after pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a common practice which followed the very uncommon achievement of such a long journey. Those who had been to the Holy Land were the keepers of a very unique knowledge, and how they shared that knowledge was entirely up to them. William Wey obviously saw it important to share some practical tips. He could not hold back a strange force which urged him to intersperse lists of words and coinage with strange Latin hexametric verses. As one of relatively few people who had been on such a journey, how he chose to publicize his knowledge of it was certainly his artistic license. Wey's account is worthy of investigation, and though few may easily understand the purpose of his mnemonic verses, his work offers more to uncover.

Wey's *Itineraries* reveal several important points in coming to understand the motivations for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Diana Webb communicates the essential understanding that "any attempt to disentangle 'devotional' motives from the more academic quest for information on the part of such visitors may be doomed to frustration."<sup>45</sup> Wey's account does little to segregate his spiritual and secular interests. Everything is interwoven, and if in one sentence he describes an earthly curiosity, in the next he attributes it to divine intention. In this entanglement there is something very illustrative of the medieval mind.

When Wey described the Holy Land, he described it as if its heroes and celebrities were there only moments ago. He spared no details: there stands the rock where St. Peter used to go fishing, around the bend is the spot where Mary used to sit and look out at Calvary, at the top of

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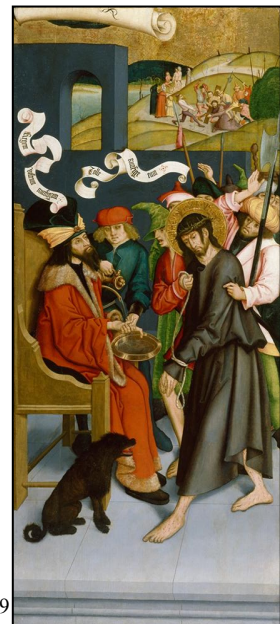
<sup>43</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 33-54.

<sup>44</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 150-153.

<sup>45</sup> Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 1.

the hill is the cliff where Jesus stood and reflected on Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> When Wey invited his reader to these places, the path he was taking really came to life. These are not the historical sites of modern Europe, requiring an information panel and a lot of imagination to be understood and appreciated. For these Late Medieval pilgrims, the Bible was more historical knowledge than spiritual literature. There seems to be no historical detachment in Wey's work. Jerusalem, as filled as it was with other pilgrims and local residents, was also inhabited by the characters Wey knew and grew up learning about his entire life. He dutifully reported to his reader, "There is a place in the wall where [St. Jerome] used to sit when he translated the Bible from Hebrew into Latin." The minutia Wey provided illuminates a particular understanding of time and events which is distinctly medieval.

Take for example the following Late Medieval portrayals of the life of Jesus.



<sup>46</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 73-80.

<sup>47</sup> Bernhard Strigel, *The Arrest of Christ*, 1495-1500, oil on wood, 159 cm x 73 cm, The Walters Art Museum.

<sup>48</sup> Bernhard Strigel, *Christ Before the High Priest*, 1495-1500, oil on wood, 158 x 72 cm, The Walters Art Museum.

Jesus and his contemporaries were portrayed as medieval. The stockings and castles do not belong in ancient Jerusalem, but rather in Late Medieval Germany, like their painter. These images serve to show that chronological time was less distinct and segregated for pilgrims. Jesus and Pilate did not belong to a different era, as we see them today. Instead, when William Wey gave his account of the Holy Land, he was relaying the information as if the ancient world was close at hand. Like the concentration camps of Europe remind those in the twenty-first century of the lessons of the Second World War, the Holy Land served to remind pilgrims of the lessons of the Bible.

Something else valuable lies in William Wey's *Itineraries* when we compare them side-by-side. Wey went to Jerusalem twice: once in 1458, and again in 1462, and it seems he had quite different experiences each time. The way he described his first trip was almost exclusively characterized by the holy sites and what there was to see at them. His second account, on the other hand, stepped into a much different sphere of travel. It was as if, when he made the journey once more, it was with a fresh pair of eyes. Having laid down the rudimentary knowledge in his first trip, the second was filled with colorful portrayals of what he saw and what he heard. On the first page, he explained that his route to the Holy Land was blocked by "a war on the Rhine between two bishops."<sup>51</sup> Though he didn't go into detail here, it seems his perspective shifted from the Heavens to the world around him. In his second narrative, he included a purely secular account of the history of Venice, complete with an in-depth description of the workings of its political council.<sup>52</sup> Whereas in the first account, he described nothing that was not holy, his

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<sup>49</sup> Bernhard Strigel, *The Entry Into Jerusalem*, 1495-1500, oil on wood, 159 cm x 75.5 cm, The Walters Art Museum.

<sup>50</sup> Bernhard Strigel, *Pilate Washing His Hands of Guilt for Christ's Death*, 1495-1500, oil on wood, 158 cm x 73.4 cm, The Walters Art Museum.

<sup>51</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 118.

second account departed from his spiritual agenda. He described the great hounds of the Knights of Rhodes, who are let out at night to sniff out Turks among their noble masters.<sup>53</sup> He pointed out an island where all robbers die immediately, and was very clear about how to get to the very cave where St. George's dragon lurked, as well as the plain where Noah's ark was built.<sup>54</sup> In representing his trip to the Holy Land in 1462, William Wey was a storyteller. He shared with us his knowledge of the wonders of the world, and while he was clear that his mission was holy, his passages indicate a distinct appreciation for what the world was like at the end of the medieval period. He was looking onto his environment as a curious observer and delivering that knowledge to his readers. More importantly, his work pairs the two most critical aspects of pilgrimage. He is close to his faith, but he never neglects the wonders of the world.

The spiritual and secular facets of Wey's journeys to Jerusalem illuminate what it meant to travel so far and experience such a sacred space. But there was another type of pilgrimage which rivaled Wey's: meditative pilgrimage. In the medieval world, the Holy Land could be reached not only physically, but mentally as well. In fact, many texts were written with the intention of guiding the meditative pilgrim through the scenes of Christ's life. Pilgrims on the road also drew on this sort of meditation and the practice enjoyed significant popularity in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most popular works on spiritual meditation is a fourteenth century illuminated manuscript titled *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. Widely translated and spread in its time, the *Meditations* invite a very personal look at exercises in individual pious thought.<sup>56</sup> The work tells the story of Christ in such a way that it is easily accessible to the audience. It pauses regularly to

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<sup>53</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 127.

<sup>54</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 156-159.

<sup>55</sup> Suzanne Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13-15.

<sup>56</sup> Isa Ragusa, trans. *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), xxii.



guide one in meditating and imagining particular actions of Christ. During the last supper, for example, the reader is encouraged to focus and visualize specifically the dining, the washing of the feet, the consecration of the Eucharist, and the sermon given over the meal.<sup>57</sup> The entire text seeks to calmly draw the reader into the same world as Christ. The people described are to be seen as friends. When Christ sits down at the table to eat, the reader is to sit beside him, observing the way the scene unfolds. This open accessibility provided in the *Meditations* is precisely the mindset that writers like Wey are utilizing when they describe the details of the Holy Land. Wey writes, “When you approach Mount Olivet...does not that angelic voice, which was heard at the elevation of Our Lord by the amazed bystanders, echo in your ears?<sup>58</sup>” When we understand that the life of Christ could be accessed through deep thought, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem seems to hold immense weight. This guide to meditation was not intended for pilgrims specifically, but when its practices were used by them, the personal depth of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land becomes clear. It is not about a simple visitation of the sites where Christ was a thousand years before, but rather a gateway to a separate, divine form of existence.

Margery Kempe provided quite an interesting case of this meditation and how it functioned in pilgrimage. Her sacred trip to Jerusalem in 1413 was preceded by visitations from Christ and the Virgin Mary, and on the journey itself, she was rebuked for her somewhat ostentatious devotion.<sup>59</sup> Colin Morris makes the point that perhaps Kempe has more to offer us about the internal experience of pilgrimage than she is given credit for. While this intensely

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<sup>57</sup> Ragusa, *Meditations*, 310.

<sup>58</sup> Wey, *Itineraries*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. and trans. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 31-36.

personal and meditative spirituality is encouraged in late medieval Catholicism, Kempe was the only one to provide a narrative which represented such an attitude.<sup>60</sup>

William Wey's account is very matter-of-fact and instructive, but Margery Kempe's explodes with emotion. Though she moved along the very standardized route which Felix Fabri found cold and rushed, Kempe instead "saw [Christ] truly before her in her soul by means of contemplation, and that caused her to have compassion."<sup>61</sup> That compassion was reflected in incessant weeping, writhing, and shouting as she arrived at each site, much to the dismay of her fellow travelers and guide. Wey sought to provide a guidebook to the Holy Land, but *The Book of Margery Kempe* was itself a meditation on what it meant to be spiritual and to express that spirituality. She wrote that it might be strange when she cries to see a crucifix; but she also urged her readers to consider whether they, too, would cry if a dear friend had been brutally murdered and they stood before the site of execution.<sup>62</sup> Though Kempe at first seems a bit wild and excessive, she was actually guiding her reader by the hand through a very comprehensible process of internal devotion. Morris insists that though Kempe was the only one brave enough to write about such spiritual depth, it could not have been uncommon. The centuries of the High and Late Middle Ages were accompanied by a growth in spirituality, and it was Franciscan teachings like those present in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* that were most popular.<sup>63</sup> It is this devotion and unique meditative spirituality that is crucial in coming to understanding late medieval pilgrimage.

Though few pilgrims behaved like Margery Kempe, there is much evidence to suggest that many were moved just as profoundly as she was. When Bernhard Strigel painted the panels

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<sup>60</sup> Collin Morris, "Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in late Middle Ages," in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 149-150.

<sup>61</sup> Kempe, *The Book*, 36-37.

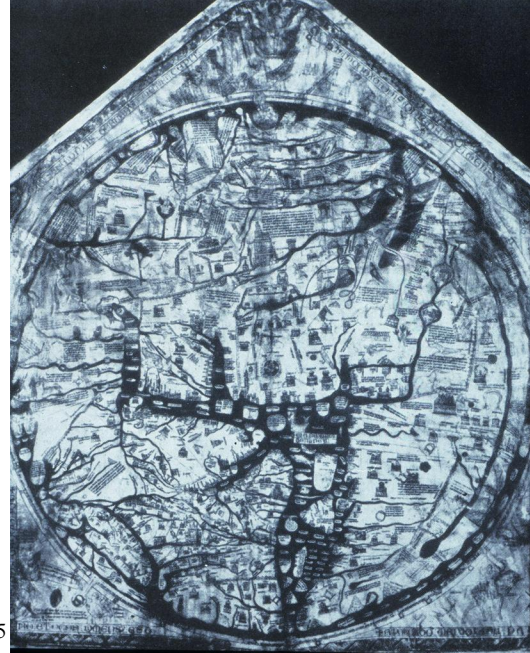
<sup>62</sup> Kempe, *The Book*, 37-39.

<sup>63</sup> Morris, "Pilgrimage to Jerusalem," 149.

of Christ's life, it seems highly possible that he was drawing on meditative spirituality. Medieval artists and writers like Strigel and Wey were not necessarily ignorant of the fact that much had changed since the time of Jesus. They were simply participating in a very personal form of spirituality which brought them closer to the Holy figures they admired. Wey was visualizing St. Peter fishing on the rock, and sharing that image with his readers. Strigel was standing before an empty canvas, imagining that he was there, looking down from the walls of Jerusalem as Christ was being captured by soldiers. In this sense, Jerusalem was not so far away in medieval Christianity. With some quiet, careful reflection, the pious believer could find him or herself sharing a bench with Christ as he ate his last meal.

It serves as testament to this development in Christian spirituality that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were characterized by art and architecture which sought to lure the faithful into this meditative world. Anselmo Adorno, the tolerant and culturally sensitive traveler of 1470-71, returned to participate in such a work. His experiences in the Holy Land influenced his participation in the development of a chapel in Bruges which would be called "the Jerusalem Church." The chapel featured architectural similarities to the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, inviting passersby to enter that meditative world and reflect on the importance of the Holy City. Within the church as well was a piece of the Holy Cross and an altar which depicted the hill of Calvary. Colin Morris makes the case that this church, and other Jerusalem-themed relics and artwork like those inside, was itself a product of pilgrimage. Morris continues to describe other eastern architectural imports and "spiritual theme parks" which assisted in this attempt to reaffirm meditative Christianity. It seems the journey was so monumental that it never left the pilgrims as they reintegrated themselves into Western European society.

While architecture certainly furthered the message of Jerusalem's sacred value, the people behind these works were utilizing a fundamental perception already present in the medieval mind. World maps from the High Middle Ages often place Jerusalem at the center of the earth and the universe as well.<sup>64</sup> Take for example the central dots on the two following maps of the world, both English in origin and dating to the late thirteenth century.



These dots represent Jerusalem, at its home as the focal point in the universe. In the map on the left, Jesus stands flanked by two angels, staring over Jerusalem and his surrounding kingdom on earth. Considering their creation after the Crusades, the maps represent the sort of ideology that Fabri, Kempe, and Wey were setting out with. Not only was the earth created by God, but it was created with Jerusalem as its very heart. To be somebody of medieval Christian faith, Jerusalem represented the center of humanity and God alike. Wey's careful descriptions of everything he

<sup>64</sup> Keith D. Lilley, "Cities of God? Medieval urban Forms and Their Christian Symbolism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004), 306, accessed May 29, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> *Psalter. Map of the World*, c. 1265, pigment, ink on velum, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Haldingham, *Map of the World*, c. 1280, University of California, San Diego.

sees and hears, as well as Kempe's intense emotional episodes, become much more understandable when we conceptualize them in the context of such a world-view. It is easy to conceive of these pilgrims as leaving home to journey to the exotic East, into lands which were foreign and peripheral. Looking at these maps, however, there was nothing peripheral about the journey. They were retracing the steps of humanity back to its heart at the center of the universe.

It is through this colorful array of pilgrim-authors that we come to understand the motivations for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In essence, it was a duality of intentions. On the one hand, pilgrimage was a way to see faraway places. The diverse corners of the medieval world were not open to many, but those who had the opportunity to observe this diversity up close and in person could not hide their brilliant fascination. As Felix Fabri departed from his father's sobbing embrace, he turned to the open road and set out on a journey that had so much to offer, he had to make it twice. William Wey could not settle on one channel through which to express what he saw. It seems that neither hexametric verse, nor poetry, glossary, nor prose did justice to the wealth of knowledge he sought to convey. But to consider the secular amazement of pilgrims like Fabri and Wey to the exclusion of those more spiritually inclined would be misleading. The weeping of Margery Kempe reminds us that there was something else entirely different in the motivations of pilgrims bound for the Holy Land. Late medieval spirituality valued an intensely personal use of the Bible. The characters and stories it contained could be explored through deep thought and meditation. Jesus and his apostles were not mere role models; they were ever-present friends in the minds of the faithful. A visit to Jerusalem brought one closer than ever to these companions in a way that was powerful enough to usher flowing tears to Margery Kempe's eyes. To travel to Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages was to engage with a mysterious and exciting world. It was both treacherous and rewarding, and it was rarely made alone. Some

friends were left at the gate of the pilgrim's hometown, some came along with, and others were found along the way. Among the pilgrim's earthly entourage was also the holy guidance of those in heaven, for whose sake the journey was initially made. To understand late medieval pilgrimage to Jerusalem means learning to grasp both the profound depth of the world's diversity and the comforting essence of spiritual devotion. It functions on holy meditations, but it is always inextricable from earthly curiosities.

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