

FROM PILGRIMAGE ACCOUNTS TO IMAGINARY JOURNEYS IN THE MIDDLE AGES. LITERARY AND AESTHETIC CLUES ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE AS AN EARLY PATTERNING OF TOURISTIC EVENTS

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This paper studies some of the primary sources related to medieval pilgrimage, especially concentrating in those passages which render visual and aesthetic details and, in doing so, transcend the practical and eschatological aims that the Christian hierarchy associated with pilgrim guides, such as the well-known *Liber Peregrinationis in Codex Calixtinus* (12th century). I believe that, to a certain extent, these passages would point to a human experience of travelling: a kind of precedent to later conceptions of the journey as a means to acquire knowledge, to explore the world, to fill one's curiosity or simply to enjoy oneself. The paper also deals with a proper literary text, like *Mandeville's Travels* (14th century), which, however, owes a lot to previous pilgrim guides to the Holy Land and, as such, clearly reflects the evolution of the genre.

A first section discusses the geographical and intellectual foundations of the itinerant self-contemplation of medieval people, thus providing the general framework for the discussion of pilgrimage and journeying in the Middle Ages. Attention is particularly given to the spatial mobility of the population in different errands, either to settle in new land, to barter and sell at the neighbouring marketplace or to participate in the itinerant courts. Such physical and geographical experiences of spatial displacement were certainly reinforced by the ecclesiastical view of the human being as *homo viator*: as pilgrim on earth on the way to the heavenly life whence s/he had been exiled at birth.

Then, in the second part, medieval pilgrimage is presented as an ascetic enterprise, which symbolically emulates the spiritual Christian journey to the heavenly home. As such, pilgrimages were teleologically oriented towards the aim of reaching the final destination with neither physical nor spiritual distractions, to the point that any enjoyment during the journey (*curiositas*) was proscribed. However, both ecclesiastical and literary sources confirm that this was not always so: the Church systematically expostulated those pilgrims who left their home as a means to acquire knowledge, to explore the world,

to fill one's curiosity or simply to enjoy themselves, while literary texts, like William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1360-1399) —B prol. ll. 46-49— or Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath, in the «General Prologue» (ll. 463-467) to *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387-1400), overtly or ironically criticized the behaviour of such fraudulent pilgrims. The widespread reference to this topic in texts from the 13th and 14th centuries may entail that it was a common reality, to the point that pilgrims often travelled with spurious purposes. The following sections analyse this dimension in some of the written sources dealing with pilgrimages —*itinerarius* or 'pilgrim guide'—, especially drawing on those textual samples where discourse construction transmits some aesthetic delight on the part of the author, non-necessarily religiously oriented, thus making audiences participate in a joyful conception of the journey, which somehow prefigures the Renaissance view of travelling and, with comparable distance, modern touristic activity.

This dimension is explored in book five of the *Liber Sancti Iacobi* or *Codex Calixtinus* —the twelfth century celebrated guide for pilgrims to Compostela. This is a proper *Liber Peregrinationis*: a repertoire of practical orientations for the journey, including references to the stages in which it should be divided, the villages and rivers on the way, the possibilities for provisioning that they offer, etc. These are accompanied by specific descriptions of the different regions and the customs of the people inhabiting them, as well as by a final thorough account of Compostela: the town and the sites related to the Apostle. Some references in these sections somehow prefigure the contents of contemporary tourist guides, provided that the author —possibly the Picard Aymeric Pecaud— indulges in the meticulous description of relics, churches and the treasures they contain. At first sight, this practice would not contradict the ascetic and symbolic aims of pilgrimages, provided that the author's emphasis on the majesty and magnificency of buildings and artifacts is parallel to the importance of the religious enterprise. However, a close reading of the language of these passages evinces an author visually relishing the objects he is describing and aesthetically enjoying their contemplation, thus contradicting the apparently purely religious aim of the journey.

Attention is then turned to the narrative account of *Sir John Mandeville's Travels* to the Holy Land and beyond. Written on the second half of the fourteenth century, this is a description of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, followed by the account of the trip to the exotic territories on the Far East, full of marvels (*mirabilia*). The analysis of the first section evinces a clear macrostructural relationship with contemporary pilgrim narratives. There are, however, important differences: namely the lack of references to practical aspects and the ubiquitous presence of strange and marvellous natural events or human artifacts. They clearly transcend the aim of traditional pilgrim guides to approach the broader aims of acquiring knowledge, exploring the world or filling one's curiosity on the way. The discovery that this is the anonymous account of an imaginary journey with literary intentions, attributed to the spurious narrator, Mandeville, helps make sense of this apparent contradiction. The final part of this paper concentrates in the sections (chapters 11 and 12) devoted to Jerusalem —the destination of medieval pilgrims *par excellence*— as a repository of biblical history and a symbol of eschatological revelation. Two aspects in the treatment of Jerusalem are highlighted. Firstly, the town is described in such a way as to break with the stereotyped descriptive tradition of the period (*descriptio civitatis*),

as enforced by the author throughout the preceding chapters, by meticulously dealing with the locations of Christ's passion and resurrection. Secondly, attention also focuses on the Temple, as the proper physical and spiritual centre of the world (*axis mundi*); as such, the text relies on biblical imagery, at the same time as the author indulges in his literary intentions by introducing the bloodthirsty story of king Herod Ascalonite or by accumulating visual details in the description of the building and its dependencies. Thus, the author transcends again the purely ascetic or religious motives and yields to aesthetic contemplation and enjoyment.

