

The Gospels Embodied: Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

'. . . behold a man clothed with Rags, standing in a certain place,
with his face from his own house, a Book in his hand, and a great
Burden on his back. . . .'

JOHN BUNYAN, *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*, LONDON, 1678

John Bunyan's classic Protestant allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* opens with the memorable image of Christian turning away from his own house to go on a journey, carrying a burden and a book. These two elements – the burden and the book – were radically to transform the nature of the pilgrimage traditions which Christianity inherited from the ancient world. The burden was original sin, from which God had redeemed man through Christ. The book was the Bible. The burden of sin would drive Christians to seek redemption through spiritual practices such as pilgrimage. The Bible, the book revealed to the Prophets and Evangelists by God, would define not only the path to salvation through Christ, but also the map of the Holy Land in which Christ had lived and to which his followers would come. As Christian memorably puts it on a later page of *The Pilgrim's Progress*,

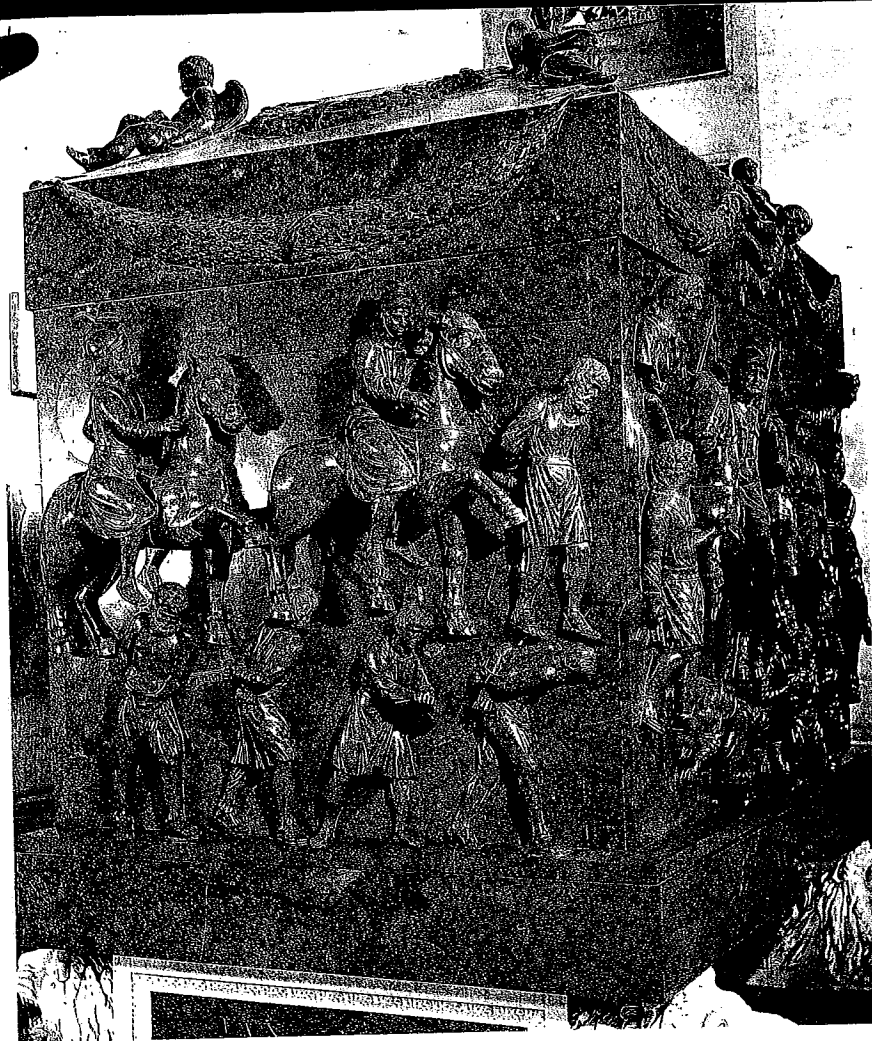
Here is a poor burdened sinner. I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to Mount Zion, that I may be delivered from the Wrath to come. . . .

Of course, *The Pilgrim's Progress* belongs to a very different period and context of Christianity from the time of Constantine's conversion. But within a few years of the legalisation of Christianity by Constantine in AD 312, the first Christian pilgrim of whom an account has survived was on her way to Palestine under this twin impulse of 'the burden and the book'. Constantine's mother, the empress Helena, visited the Holy Land in 326–7.¹ As Eusebius, bishop of Caesaria in Palestine and the imperial biographer, portrayed her:

Though advanced in years, yet gifted with no common degree of wisdom, she hastened with youthful alacrity to survey this venerable land.

(*Life of Constantine*, 3,42)

In part Helena went to discover the actual holy places where, as a still earlier Christian traveller, Melito of Sardis, had written, 'the deeds were accomplished and proclaimed'.² In part also she went to expiate the sins of the imperial family, which had led in 326 to Constantine's execution of



24 The sarcophagus of St Helena, 4th century AD, Vatican Museums. Carved in porphyry, this sarcophagus was found in the mausoleum of St Helena on the Via Labicana in Rome. It represents a battle of Romans and barbarians, with cupids holding garlands on the lid. The sarcophagus has no overt Christian imagery or symbolism. With such military subject-matter it seems likely that it was intended for a male member of the Constantinian dynasty, but was used instead for the body of Helena, the emperor's mother.

his eldest son, Crispus, for adultery, and the subsequent suicide of his own wife, Fausta.

Whatever other motives there may have been for this journey, which followed an age-old form of imperial travel, Helena's trip was to have fundamental consequences for the history of Holy Land pilgrimage. For she would not only find the site and the very remains of the True Cross (according to the legend which swiftly became widespread in the fourth century), but would inaugurate the building of a series of great imperial basilicas in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.³ Her voyage became the model for many.

CONTESTING THE VALUE OF PILGRIMAGE

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

(John 4:19-21,23)

Unlike Muhammad or the Buddha, Jesus had not recommended or enjoined pilgrimage upon his followers. In the years of secrecy and persecution after his death, the practice of pilgrimage had hardly been possible for Christians, and before the conversion of Constantine there had been little in the way of Christian travel to Palestine for specifically sacred purposes. Indeed, some of Jesus's sayings, such as that quoted above, seem to militate firmly against contemporary Jewish traditions of venerating the tombs of the Prophets.⁴ Later, however, other stories and sayings of Christ came to be associated with pilgrimage, not least his call to the apostles to 'follow me' (Matthew 4:19) and his journey with the travellers to Emmaus after the Resurrection (Luke 24:13-35).

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land began in earnest after the victory of Constantine over the pagan Licinius in the eastern half of the Roman empire (AD 324). This was a momentous event in the history of Christianity, for it united the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean for the first time under a Christian monarch. Swiftly Constantine set about adapting Christianity to its future role as the dominant religion of the empire. In 325 he summoned the Council of Nicaea, the first Ecumenical Council of the whole Church. Its purpose was to resolve some of the doctrinal disputes which split Christians in the fourth century. It is not surprising that one of these concerned the activity of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage was one of many novelties in Christian ritual created by the sudden and remarkable translation of Christianity from a persecuted sect to an officially accepted and imperially fostered religion. Others included the building of large basilicas, the creation of a public liturgy and the use of art in worship and church decoration. Like the use of images, pilgrimage became a source of debate between theologians.⁵

In particular, Gregory of Nyssa, brother of St Basil and an influential writer on mystical and ascetic themes, wrote a powerful attack on the practice of pilgrimage in the late fourth century. In his second epistle (PG 46,1009-16), Gregory points out that

when the Lord invites the blest to their inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven, He does not include a pilgrimage to Jerusalem amongst their good deeds.

(1009, paragraphs BC)

He argues that travel to Palestine 'is found to inflict upon those who have begun to lead a stricter life a moral mischief', for the journey offered many temptations – not least the sinful ways of those who lived in the Holy City and the dangers to women pilgrims en route of sexual misconduct with their male escorts. More deeply, he suggests that 'change of place does not effect any drawing nearer to God' (1013, B). The altars of Gregory's native Cappadocia are no less holy than those of Jerusalem:

What advantage, moreover, is reaped by him who reaches those celebrated spots themselves? He cannot imagine that our Lord is living, in the body, there at the present day, but has gone away from us (who are not there); or that the Holy Spirit is in abundance in Jerusalem but unable to travel as far as us. (1012, C)

Gregory's case, theologically, was that what mattered in spiritual terms was the individual's heart and not the places he or she happened to visit.



25 Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, 12th-century crusader façade. Originally built under the patronage of Constantine the Great and his mother Helena in AD 325–6, the Holy Sepulchre encloses both the traditional site of Golgotha, where Christ was crucified, and that of his tomb, known as the Anastasis, or Resurrection. The church was burned by the Persians in 614 and then razed to the ground by the Muslim Caliph al-Hakim in 1009. In 1048, when Jerusalem was still under Muslim control, the efforts of the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos resulted in a major rebuilding of the Anastasis rotunda. The Crusader conquest of Palestine in 1099 led to yet more extensive gothic reconstruction and refurbishment, of which this façade survives.

God could not be confined to Palestine. Other bishops agreed. St Augustine wrote (letter 78,3):

God is everywhere, it is true, and He that made all things is not contained or confined to dwell in any place.

St Jerome, one of the Church Fathers most in favour of pilgrimage, said in a sermon:

By the cross I mean not the wood, but the Passion. That cross is in Britain, in India, in the whole world. . . . Happy is he who carries in his own heart the cross, the Resurrection, the place of the Nativity of Christ and of his Ascension. Happy is he who carries Bethlehem in his own heart, in whose heart Christ is born every day.

(Homily on Psalm 95)

Throughout the Christian tradition, those who have most forcefully insisted on the spiritual have followed this argument, that, however useful holy sites, relics and images may be, they are not necessary for salvation. In nineteenth-century Russia, Leo Tolstoy wrote a story arguing precisely this case.⁶

Yet such theological meditations from the Church hierarchy failed to make any impression on those who wished to see and to worship at what Eusebius called 'the most marvellous place in the world' (*Life of Constantine* 3,31). From the imperial family (including not only Constantine's mother but also Eutropia, his mother-in-law, and a century later the empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II) to relatively humble men and women, from bishops and holy men to simple monks and nuns, from clergy to laity, a broad cross-section of the religious Christians of the empire were fired to make the arduous journey to Palestine.⁷ Perhaps above all they wished to witness, as Eusebius put it, 'a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which that spot had once been the scene' (3,28). Constantine himself inaugurated the process, not only by sending Helena to Palestine, but also by building a number of impressive basilicas at the most important sites – the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount of Olives (where the Ascension had occurred), Bethlehem and Mamre (where Abraham had entertained the three angels). When describing the Holy Sepulchre, Eusebius explicitly tells us the emperor's motives in building it: to be 'an object of veneration and attraction to all' (3,25).

Despite their doubts, even many Fathers of the Church found themselves wishing to go on pilgrimage or encouraging their congregations to do so. Both Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome went to the Holy Land, and Jerome settled there. Augustine, in his role as Bishop of Hippo, tested a priest accused of a sexual scandal by sending him to the shrine of St Felix at Nola, 'a holy place, where the more awe-inspiring works of God might much more readily make evil manifest' (letter 78,3). John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Antioch and later of Constantinople, recommended the holy sites as a way of bringing home the Gospel's lessons. He suggested the merits of visiting Job's dunghill in his Homilies to the Antiochenes (5,1) and argued that nothing could so effectively create a desire for chastity as the 'spectacle of universal desolation' which engulfed the site of the city of Sodom.

Perhaps it was St Jerome, who lived in Palestine in the last years of the fourth century, who caught the spirit of Holy Land pilgrimage most acutely. His account of the travels of Paula, a noblewoman from Rome, captures some of the extraordinarily powerful pull – almost a physical force – which came to be associated with the holy places:⁸

With a zeal and courage unbelievable in a woman she forgot her sex and her physical weakness, and longed to make there, amongst those thousands of monks, a dwelling for herself. . . . And she might have done so, if she had not been summoned away by a still greater longing for the holy places. . . .

(letter 108,14,3)

This longing, which elsewhere he describes as a 'burning enthusiasm' (letter 108,9,2), led pilgrims like Paula to prostrate themselves, kiss the holy spots and see visions. At Bethlehem

she solemnly declared in my own hearing that, with the eye of faith, she saw a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, weeping in the Lord's manger, the Magi worshipping, the star shining above, the Virgin Mother, the attentive foster-father; and the shepherds coming by night to see. . . .

(letter 108,10,2)

In Paula's vision, the whole sacred narrative comes alive in its proper, authentic place. For the more contemplative Fathers, Bethlehem may have been a place in the heart, the birth of Christ a daily event in the spirit; but for Paula such things had a tangible, verifiable, existence by being located and experienced in their original settings.

'VISIBLE PROOFS': THE BIBLE AS LANDSCAPE AND RELIC

Climbing Sion you can see the place where once the house of Caiaphas used to stand, and the column at which they fell on Christ and scourged him still remains there.

Inside Sion, within the wall, you can see where David had his palace. Seven synagogues were there, but only one is left – the rest have been 'ploughed and sown' as was said by the prophet Isaiah. As you leave and pass through the wall of Sion, towards the Gate of Neapolis, down in the valley on your right you have some walls where Pontius Pilate had his house, the Praetorium where the Lord's case was heard before he suffered. On your left is the hillock Golgotha where the Lord was crucified, and about a stone's throw from it the vault where they laid his body, and he rose again on the third day. By order of the Emperor Constantine there has now been built there a 'basilica' – I mean a 'place for the Lord' – which has beside it cisterns of remarkable beauty, and beside them a bath where children are baptised. . . .

(*The Journey of the Bordeaux Pilgrim* 592–4)

This quotation comes from the earliest surviving personal account by a Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem. Its author came to Palestine from Bordeaux in AD 333, less than a decade after St Helena.⁹ The Bordeaux Pilgrim described the Holy Land at a time before most of the churches and monasteries which would later fill it were built. Indeed, he even felt the need to explain to his readers what the unfamiliar kind of building called a 'basilica' was. Writing only twenty years after the legalisation of Christianity, the Pilgrim could not be sure that knowledge of its new forms of art and architecture had reached his intended readers. His text reveals many of the trends in pilgrimage to Palestine which would become current in the following centuries. He shows an interest in Old Testament sites and stories as much as those connected with the lives of Jesus and the Apostles; he focuses on natural wonders and miracles such as the saltiness of the Dead Sea (section 597) or pools where people have been cured (589); and he remarks on the settings of liturgy (for example the place of baptism at the Holy Sepulchre).

But above all, the Bordeaux Pilgrim anticipates those who were to follow him by seeing the landscape of Palestine as a physical manifestation of the Bible's text. In his account, and in those which came after it, Palestine became the Holy Land. He journeys through the city of Jerusalem not so much as it actually was in his time, but as it was recorded in the Bible, which described events at least 300 years before his trip. He maps scriptural events, such as Christ's scourging and trial, as well as biblical places, such as David's palace or the site of the Crucifixion, directly onto the topography through which he walks. The biblical event or place becomes synonymous with existing landmarks such as the column on Mount Sion identified as the column of the Flagellation or

the vault identified with the Tomb. Quite insignificant objects such as the 'walls where Pilate had his house' (presumably pretty unremarkable walls in their own right) become imbued with the significance of the Passion story. Spots which simply had no landmark or association at all before the Christianisation of the city suddenly acquire a literary reference that makes them holy, such as 'the place where once the house of Caiaphas used to stand'. In effect the biblical story could now be told through topography, by means of a walking tour through the city, in utterly tangible and experiential terms.

It was this tangibility that proved so overwhelmingly attractive. In the words of Paulinus of Nola, a correspondent of Jerome,

the principal motive which draws people to Jerusalem is the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was present in the body. (*Epistles* 49,402)

As Cyril of Jerusalem, who was bishop of the city for much of the second half of the fourth century, pointedly phrased it, 'others merely hear, but we see and touch' (*Catechetical Lecture*, 13,22). Repeatedly in his homilies, Cyril would refer to the place in which his congregation (many of them pilgrims) were standing, as proof of the facts of scripture. Likewise, Eusebius had seen the discovery of the Holy Sepulchre as 'a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which the spot had once been the scene' (*Life of Constantine* 3,25).¹⁰ The holy places, some of whose association with biblical events had been invented so as to map scripture onto the landscape, now became the testimony and witness for the truth of scripture.

Even as the Bordeaux Pilgrim was visiting the Holy Land it was being transformed to accord with the text which he – and everyone else – was using as a guide book. He describes no basilica on Mount Sion, but by the mid-fourth century there was a church there, where the feast of Pentecost was celebrated. By the fifth century, the site had become the setting for the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Many important scriptural events changed their locations in this way: the Bordeaux Pilgrim encountered the site of the Transfiguration on the Mount of Olives in AD 333, but by the time of St Cyril's homilies in Jerusalem (about 348) the site had shifted to Mount Tabor. In Palestine as a whole, several pilgrimage sites (such as the tombs of Jonah and Joshua) were duplicated and existed in competition with each other. Literally the whole land, and in particular the city of Jerusalem, was being reshaped to accord with the Bible, and with the demands of pilgrims to see the places which bore the Bible witness.

The result of this process was remarkable. If one knew one's Bible, then one had a key to finding one's way around. In perhaps the most endearing and valuable of all the early pilgrim accounts, written in the 380s by a woman traveller from Gaul or Spain called Egeria, a group of pilgrims visit Melchizedek's palace at Salem.¹¹ 'Then,' Egeria writes (15,1), 'I remembered that according to the Bible it was near Salem that holy John baptised at Aenon. So I asked if it was far away. "There it is," the Presbyter said, "two hundred yards away. If you like we can walk over there."' All one had to do was to think of a text, and the authentic

spot could be provided. Truly this was a world which one had but to 'see and touch'.

Just as the holy places became a collection of sacred texts criss-crossing the landscape, so they gathered within them objects and relics that were themselves key features of the Bible. A handbook to Jerusalem probably produced in the sixth century, called the *Breviarius* lists the more important relics in the great basilicas.¹² In the Holy Sepulchre was the True Cross, the lance 'with which they struck the Lord', the plate on which John the Baptist's severed head was carried and the horn with which David was anointed king. In the Sion basilica was the Crown of Thorns, the column of the Flagellation and the stones from the stoning of St Stephen. Many of these objects had their own clergy – the ninth-century *Commemoratorium* (a list of priests and monks attached to the Holy Land churches, compiled for the emperor Charlemagne) lists two priests for the Holy Cross and two for the Lord's Chalice (which had by then found its way into the collection at the Holy Sepulchre).¹³ Such relics gathered the tangible witness to a whole number of sacred texts together in places which were themselves living proof of the great biblical events. The *Breviarius* notes that the Holy Sepulchre was the site not only of the Death and Resurrection, but also of the creation of Adam and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

Such relics swiftly acquired complex rituals and miraculous properties. In the anonymous account of a pilgrim from Piacenza in Italy, written about AD 570, we can glimpse some of the circumstances of a first confrontation with the True Cross:¹⁴

In the courtyard of the basilica is a small room where they keep the Wood of the Cross. We venerated it with a kiss. . . . At the moment when the Cross is brought out of this small room for veneration, and arrives in the court to be venerated, a star appears in the sky, and comes over the place where they lay the Cross. It stops overhead whilst they are venerating the Cross, and they offer oil to be blessed in little flasks. When the mouth of one of the little flasks touches the Wood of the Cross, the oil instantly bubbles over, and unless it is closed very quickly it all spills out. When the Cross is put back into its place, the star also vanishes, and appears no more once the Cross has been put away. (*Travels of the Piacenza Pilgrim*, 20)

The miraculous appearance of the star and the remarkable behaviour of the oil were themselves proofs of the Cross. By their association with the Cross, these vials of oil acquired a sanctity ultimately derived from the fact that the Cross and the Holy Sepulchre itself were the material embodiments of scripture, which was itself divine revelation.

Little flasks of oil like these, lead and clay ampullae filled with water from the Jordan, boxes with earth from a sacred tomb, became the standard souvenirs – or 'blessings', as they were known – which pilgrims brought back from the Holy Land. Often decorated with scenes of scripture, such objects became a tangible link with Palestine for those back home who had not made the trip. They became talismans for warding off demons, and standard articles in medieval healing and medicine.¹⁵ In return for these, and for the blessing of pilgrimage itself, pilgrims left the holy places crammed with gifts. The Piacenza Pilgrim notes, at the Holy Sepulchre, that



there are ornaments in vast numbers which hang from iron rods: armlets, bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, plaited girdles, belts, emperors' crowns of gold and precious stones and the insignia of an empress. (*Travels*, 22)

Many of the icons and treasures still in the monastery at Mount Sinai, already in the fourth century an important pilgrimage centre (which Egeria visited) were originally acquired by donation in this way.¹⁶

For visitors to the Holy Land one of the most impressive ways in which the living and contemporary presence of scripture could be evoked was through worship. Egeria, in particular, devoted a large section of her account to describing rituals and liturgy.¹⁷ Scripture was continually recited, so that in every holy place Egeria visited the appropriate biblical passage was read aloud. She was particularly struck by the sensual vividness of the Jerusalem liturgy – churches 'ablaze with lamps' (24,9), the smell of incense (24,10), and the decorations 'really too marvellous for words' (25,8):

All you can see is gold and jewels and silk; the hangings are entirely silk with gold stripes, the curtains the same, and everything they use for the services at the festival is made of gold and jewels. You simply cannot imagine the number, and the sheer weight of the candles and the tapers and lamps and everything else they use for the services.

Particularly interesting is Egeria's account of the pattern of liturgical services. Worship was not contained in a single building, but moved through the churches of the city. Celebrants and congregation processed together through the holy places throughout the day, the bishop presi-

26 OPPOSITE Icon on the inside of the lid of a 6th-century Palestinian reliquary box, formerly in the Sancta Sanctorum Treasury, Vatican Museums. From bottom left to top right the scenes depicted are the Nativity, the Baptism, the Crucifixion, the women at the tomb and the Ascension. The image of the women at the tomb breaks from the narrative precedents in the Bible (which describe the tomb as a rock-hewn cave) and depicts the tomb as the *aediculum* built by Constantine's successors in the 4th century and visited by pilgrims.



27 Icon depicting Christ with the Abbot Menas, encaustic on wood, 6–7th century AD, Louvre. The inscriptions in Coptic identify the two haloed figures as Father Menas, Abbot, and the Saviour. Between the heads is a Christogram. Christ embraces the Abbot with his right arm in a gesture of protection. Menas holds a small scroll and with his right hand makes a gesture of blessing, which is sanctioned and supported by the presence of Christ. The icon thus offers its viewers a formal hierarchy of intercession, through the Abbot to Christ, who succours him.

ding at each church in turn. The topography of Jerusalem was experienced liturgically as a historical narrative of the Passion. In effect worship itself had become a kind of pilgrimage through the city as sacred territory, a pattern of liturgy that would become highly significant not only in Jerusalem but in Rome and Constantinople as well.¹⁸

'IMPELLED BY GOD': THE JOURNEY TO PALESTINE

Travelling about twenty miles a day, the Bordeaux Pilgrim must have taken about a year to complete his return trip. Of that year, perhaps no more than three months were actually spent in the Holy Land. These figures give some idea of the enormity of the undertaking involved in a pilgrimage to Palestine. It required money, courage and very hard work. And this was in the days of good Roman roads, a united empire patrolled and relatively well safeguarded by imperial troops and an established tradition of travel exemplified by the likes of Pausanias and Aelius Aristides in the second century AD.¹⁹ In later years, after the fall of Rome to Alaric the Goth in 410 and that of the eastern provinces of the empire to the Arabs in the seventh century, travel became still more difficult.

In effect, much more time was spent going to and from the sacred goal than in the holy place itself. In pilgrimage the act of travel acquired an importance perhaps almost as great as that of the rituals and relics at the sacred centre. To travel safely pilgrims often went in convoy, as a group of fellow-seekers rather than separate individuals. Swiftly, Christianity bred an ideology of solidarity with other pilgrims, and even of equality, whereby, whatever one's social station, as a pilgrim one was the equal of others on the same path. Egeria evokes something of this solidarity when describing her journey to Job's tomb (13,2):

So I set off from Jerusalem with some holy men who were kind enough to keep me company on the journey and wanted to make the pilgrimage.

Moreover, the journey itself began to be seen as an act of worship. In a vivid passage, Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

Our carriage was, in fact, as good as a church or monastery to us, for all of us were singing psalms and fasting during the whole journey. (*Letter 2, PG 46, 1013, B*)

When pilgrims converged on the holy places, this spirit continued. Eusebius described St Helena 'in simple and modest dress, mingling with the crowds of worshippers and testifying her devotion to God by a uniform course of pious conduct' (*Life of Constantine*, 3,45). Seven centuries after Helena, a Cluniac monk called Rudolf Glaber, writing in the 1040s, evoked a similar sense of mass pilgrimage in which all the social classes mingled:²⁰

At the same time from all over the world an innumerable crowd began to flock to the Sepulchre of the Saviour in Jerusalem – in greater numbers than anyone before had thought possible. Not only were there some of the common people and of the middle class, but there were also several very great kings, counts and noblemen . . . many noble ladies set out with the poor people. (*History*, 680)

These pilgrims paint a very different picture from the descriptive accounts of Pausanias and the author of *On the Syrian Goddess* (see Chapter 1). They are much more aware of the collaborative enterprise they are on, and of those they travel with. Travel itself becomes part of the ritual of pilgrimage, a holy activity whose practices include psalms and fasting, whose society is the company of holy men, whose very means of transport has become the equivalent of a church. From its earliest beginnings such travel was regarded as a sacred activity which bred a mutual atmosphere of being outside the ordinary licences of secular life.

One way of fostering such a religious spirit during the long months of travel, as well as guarding against the temptations of which Gregory of Nyssa had warned, was to stay in monastic accommodation en route. The well-paved roads of the Roman empire were provided with official rest houses and post stables where travellers on imperial business could stay the night and change horses. More humble folk stayed at inns. But as pilgrimage grew, benefactors (from pilgrims like Paula to the emperor Justinian himself) provided hospices for the use of Christian pilgrims. A network of travel from monastery to monastery, from Christian community to Christian community, came into being throughout the empire and became an alternative to the official routes and hostels. This specifically sacred network of places to stay made a profound contribution to the non-secular nature of the journey. Egeria's account, for instance, reveals her desire to keep wholly away from the profane. In a journey which spans the distance from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, there is hardly any intrusion of the secular world at any stage.

GUIDANCE AND IDEOLOGY: THE CHARISMA OF HOLY MEN

Unlike the priests who looked after sacred centres in the classical world, the clergy who were the caretakers, guides and often the star attractions at the holy places of Christianity belonged to arguably the most coherent and formidable organisation the western world had yet known. Professing a single Creed, ruthlessly uprooting all heretical deviations from its doctrines, and basing its views on one sacred scripture, the Church was a force of powerful ideological and cultural cohesion. It established an ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops and theologians which soon existed parallel with, and often replaced, the temporal hierarchy of the state. In the monasteries which rapidly came to span Christendom from Egypt to Britain, the Church trained an élite of active intellectuals and administrators who manifested all the energy of religious fervour and recent conversion. In its liturgy and sermons, the Church presented to its congregations a religion that was simultaneously personal and universal. In other words, by contrast with pagan antiquity the holy sites of Christendom were in the hands of a single, immensely powerful, organisation.²¹

In the Holy Land, the priests and monks who tended the sacred sites were the pilgrims' guides and interpreters. They provided not only knowledge but also liturgy. They turned Palestine into a religious



28 Ruins of the Church and Monastery of St Simeon Stylites, Qal'at Sim'an, Syria c. AD 475–500. One of the largest churches built in the eastern Mediterranean before the 6th century, this cruciform church celebrated the site where the Stylite lived atop three successively taller pillars. Pilgrims came from as far as Arabia and Gaul to hear him preach and to receive blessings.

experience, an experience whose meanings were coherent from site to site and with other holy places such as Rome. Throughout her account, Egeria repeatedly mentions the holy men, priests and bishops with whom she has talked. They are her guides at Sinai (1,2), her hosts in Arabia (9,1), her companions to the land of Uz (13,1). They give her mementos (19,19) and discuss the Bible (20,9). But perhaps most interestingly, they become part of the actual goal of pilgrimage. 'God also moved me with a desire to go to Syrian Mesopotamia', Egeria writes (17,1), for

the holy monks there are said to be numerous and of so indescribably excellent a life that I wanted to pay them a visit.

The sight of these monks is a high-point of her trip (20,6):

We had the unexpected pleasure of seeing there the holy and truly dedicated monks of Mesopotamia, including some of whose reputation and holy life we had heard long before we got there. I certainly never thought I would actually see them . . . these are of the kind who perform many miracles.

The holy men of Syria and Egypt were more than just the Church's representatives in the east.²² They were living proof of the contemporaneity of miracles, of the charisma of the sacred. For Christians, these ascetics and 'athletes of Christ', as writers christened them, showed that the era of the apostles and the martyrs was by no means over: the power of the faith to control the forces of nature and to witness the presence of the Lord could be seen in the flesh. When a young pilgrim called Daniel went to Palestine, he got no further than the column of Simeon the Stylite at Telnesin near Antioch. St Daniel, as this young pilgrim was to become,

never reached Jerusalem. The confrontation with Simeon, the living example of ascetic renunciation, in his element – 'the wilderness of the spot and the height of the pillar and the fiery heat of the scorching sun' (*Life of Daniel*, 7)²³ – was enough. Daniel was called, not only to the holy life but to that of the Stylite saint. He set up his pillar not in Palestine but in 'a second Jerusalem, namely Constantinople' (ibid. 10).

Such ascetics were much more than sacred paradigms of a renunciation which others could never achieve. They heard petitions, arbitrated in law-suits, gave blessings and sermons and performed miracles. Their prestige was so immense that they would be visited by patriarchs, generals and emperors. Although their way of life, perched at the tip of a pillar, and even some of their functions, relate them to the phallus-climbers at the temple of the Syrian Goddess several centuries earlier (see Chapter 1), their social status and cultural meaning was radically different. As the supreme exemplars of Christianity's teaching of monastic abstinence, their fame (in both decorated tokens and literary hagiographies) swiftly traversed Europe and they had extraordinary power. This was not confined to firing the religious imagination by their example; on the contrary, they were prime advisers to temporal authorities as well. While the phallus-climbers occupied their pillars for a week, the Stylites braved the elements on their columns for a lifetime. They were not famous by virtue of the temple where they lived, but in their own right, as physical, visible, tangible proofs of the amazing power of the Holy Spirit to tame the mortal flesh.

THE IMAGE OF PILGRIMAGE

We have seen that, as pilgrimage to the Holy Land grew, the holy places and relics were not the only goals sought by the early Christian pilgrim. Apart from the basilicas and splendours with which the cream of the pious nobility had endowed Palestine, there were also the monks, the liturgy and the holy men. In the sixth-century *Life of St Nicholas*,²⁴ Abbot of the monastery of Holy Sion in Lycia (Asia Minor), the saint visits Palestine twice (27),

to adore the venerable wood of the Cross and all the holy places and the venerable fathers.

By the sixth century, the sainted inhabitants of the Holy Land, living and deceased, were as much goals of pilgrimage as the relics of Christ himself. Soon the very act of pilgrimage itself became a paradigm for piety, for holiness. Someone who had been on pilgrimage could be held up – not only in his or her lifetime, but perhaps even more so after death – as an 'athlete of Christ'.

In the earliest hagiographies – the lives of the great founders of Egyptian monasticism such as St Anthony and St Pachomius – the image of Jerusalem (if it occurs at all) echoes as a quotation from biblical texts. Such saints did not need to go to the Holy Land. But soon, a pilgrimage to Palestine became a standard feature of a saint's life. Eastern saints such as Nicholas or Theodore of Sykeon, and westerners such as the English

missionary St Willibald made the trip.²⁵ More to the point perhaps, their biographers were careful to record these journeys in their hagiographies. The pilgrimage to Palestine became in its own right a sign of the piety and religious fervour of the individual.

The most interesting instance of the record of a pilgrimage becoming sanctified is what happened to the account of Egeria. Her manuscript survived with the nuns to whom she sent it, probably in Spain. There, at the end of the seventh century, it was picked up by a monk called Valerius, who used it in a letter on the holy life to his brethren at Vierzo in Spain.²⁶ For Valerius, Egeria's account is a paradigm in spiritual virtue:

We revere the valorous achievements of the mighty saints who were men, but we are amazed when still more courageous deeds are achieved by weak womanhood, such deeds as are indeed described in the remarkable history of the most blessed Egeria, who by her courage outdid the men of any age.

(*Letter in Praise of Egeria*, 1)

By the seventh century, Egeria had become a saint.

Valerius recounts Egeria's travels at some length, emphasising her 'longing for God's grace', her 'greatest application', her 'unwearying thanks' and fearlessness. He remarks on the distances she travelled, the mountains she climbed (3):

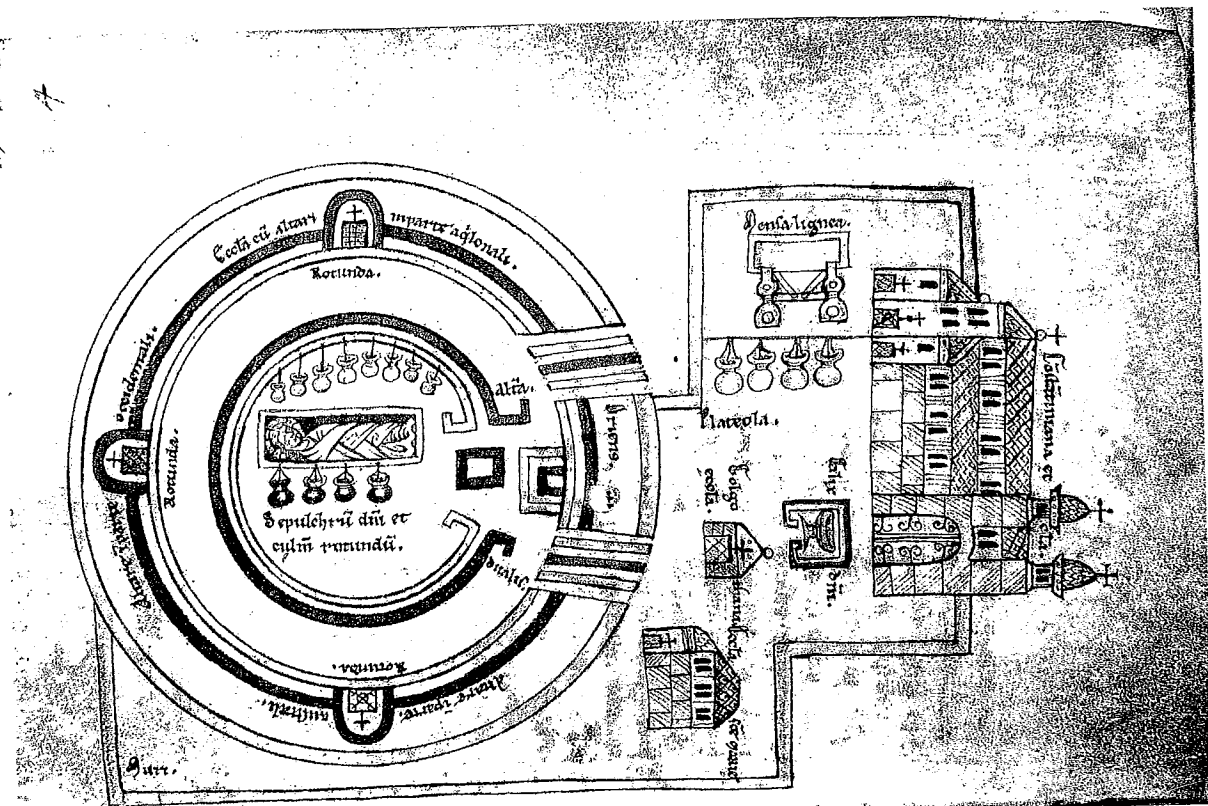
Nothing could hold her back, whether it was the labour of travelling the whole world, the perils of seas and rivers, the dread crags and fearsome mountains, or the savage menaces of the heathen tribes, until with God's help and her own unconquerable bravery, she had fulfilled all her faithful desires.

For Egeria, the 'labours of pilgrimage' brought the rewards of sainthood 'in the choir of heavenly virgins with the glorious queen of heaven, Mary the Lord's mother'. As an 'exemplary woman' her model served to exhort the brethren not just to pilgrimage but to greater rigour and abstinence in their own monastic lives.

First-hand texts such as Egeria's became models for the compilations and travel books about the Holy Land that were so popular in the Middle Ages. As the Venerable Bede wrote (describing Adomnan's seventh-century account of Bishop Arculf's pilgrimage to Palestine), such works were 'very useful to many people, especially to those who live far away from the places where the Patriarchs and Apostles used to be, and can know the holy places only from what they learn from books' (*History of the English Church*, 5,15). Bede himself used Adomnan for his own compilation *On the Holy Places*,²⁷ while in the twelfth century Peter the Deacon, librarian of St Benedict's great monastery of Monte Cassino, used extracts from Egeria herself in his *Book on the Holy Places*.²⁸ Holy Land pilgrimage, though still practised vigorously by many, was not possible for the mass of the pious. It was something to be accessed through books; it had become a literary image, a religious paradigm, more than a fact.

In the twelfth century, the Russian abbot Daniel, who visited Palestine in about 1106, wrote:²⁹

I have written this [account] for the faithful. For if anyone hearing about these places should grieve in his soul and in his thoughts for these holy places, he shall



receive the same reward from God as those who shall have travelled to the holy places.
(Pilgrimage of Daniel, 1a)

In medieval thinking, even to read about pilgrimage – if it brought about the proper spirit of contrition – had become equivalent to making the trip oneself.

The way first-hand accounts, like Egeria's or Arculf's, were transformed into exemplary lives and distillations of sacred knowledge indicates something of the remarkable paradox in Christian pilgrimage to Palestine. On the one hand travel to the Holy Land was pilgrimage *par excellence*, the model for all sacred journeys in Christendom, the supreme site of martyrdom, the supreme treasure-house of relics beside which all the martyr-tombs, reliquaries and cathedrals of the world paled. Indeed, the great pilgrim centres of the east (such as Constantinople with its great collections of relics and churches) and the west (like Rome and Compostela) were to a large extent modelled on and related to the Holy Land. Many of their prime objects came from there. On the other hand, pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the great exception. It was travel to another world, where people by and large spoke a different language from Latin or Greek, and which was for much of the time under non-Christian domination. By the high Middle Ages in Europe, most Christian pilgrimage was local or national. The Holy Land was very far away. Its importance was as a model, as a paradigm for the superhuman effort involved in living a good life, as an example of how all people could – if

29 Arculf's plan of the Holy Sepulchre, Vienna Codex 609, fol. 4v., 13th century. Several manuscript copies survive of Adomnan's late 7th-century account of Bishop Arculf's pilgrimage to Palestine between AD 679 and 688. This 13th-century version elaborates upon its model by illustrating the tomb and other features of the church. This is not an accurate copy or plan, but rather a vivid insight into the way in which the Holy Sepulchre was imagined in western Europe in the later Middle Ages.

they had the dedication of Egeria in Valerius's eulogy – become one of the holy.

THE PILGRIM AND THE SWORD: THE CRUSADES

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17)

Christian pilgrimage, as a religious activity, was peaceful in its origins. Unlike the Muslims with their concept of *Jihad*, or holy war, Christians had never seen war as an essential or even a laudable component of their piety. Early Christianity's many soldier saints, such as St Martin of Tours, were saints despite, not because of, their profession. Early Christian pilgrimage, which was established in the long peace of the *Pax Romana*, was practiced within a single empire by people who were citizens of that empire, whether they came from Rome or Bordeaux, from Spain or Constantinople.

But in AD 638, only sixteen years after the death of Muhammad, the caliph Omar entered Jerusalem, riding upon a white camel. After being in Christian hands for just over 300 years, Palestine had fallen to the Infidel. By 717, a little more than eighty years after the Prophet's death, the Arab empire stretched from the Pyrenees through the whole of North Africa and Syria as far as India in the east and the very walls of Constantinople to the north. It was a phenomenal military and religious achievement by any standards, and a terrible shock – both political and psychological – to Christendom.

The Arabs were in fact very tolerant of Christianity.³⁰ They allowed worship in the holy places, the continuity of monasteries and ecclesiastical structures, and the practice of pilgrimage. Unlike the Byzantines, they permitted a freedom of Christian worship in which sects that had been pronounced heretical by the Church could flourish in peace. Monophysites, Nestorians, Maronites, Jacobians and Copts continued their traditions alongside the Orthodox. In the eighth century, when Byzantium was in the grips of the Iconoclast controversy, the foremost apologist in the Orthodox iconophile party was John of Damascus, himself a monk based under Muslim domination in the Monastery of St Saba in the Holy Land. Just as the Church under Islam maintained its orthodoxy, so it also maintained its images. The few icons to have survived Iconoclasm in the east did so because they were in the collection of the great monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai – a monastery in Muslim territory (see Fig. 76).

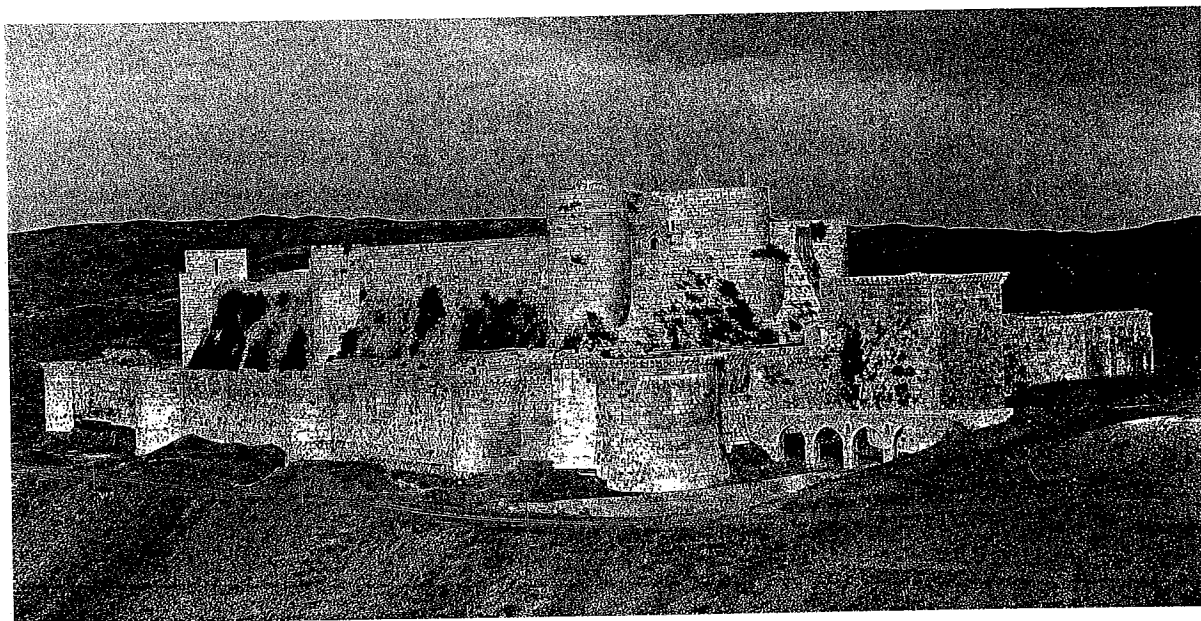
But Christians were second-class citizens under Islam. They had, like Zoroastrians and Jews, to pay special taxes. Their holy places took second place behind the holy sites of Islam. For instance, the Muslims took over the great cathedral of St John at Damascus. Jerusalem was the third of the Muslim holy cities, the site of Muhammad's ascent to Paradise. On the Temple Mount, where Solomon's Temple and the Holy of Holies were believed to have stood, the Arab caliphs built the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque in the late seventh century. Christianity's most holy places were now surmounted by spectacular Muslim buildings, whose entry was barred to Christians.

Christian pilgrims still came to Palestine after the Arab conquest. But it was a much harder trip, fraught with many difficulties. St Willibald, who went to the Holy Land in the 720s, was arrested by the Muslim authorities on suspicion of spying. He was frequently ill, although the holy places did their work in this regard: simply entering the Holy Sepulchre cured him of temporary blindness (*Life of Willibald*, 24).³¹ While the holy places themselves were kept in good repair, many Christian towns suffered. A pilgrim called Jacinthus, writing in the mid-eighth century, remarks that 'the city of Bethlehem is destroyed, even though there are still a few houses there' (*Pilgrimage of Jacinthus* 323,1).³² And there were pirates and bandits to be avoided, many of whom were Muslims and saw Christians as fair game.

By the eleventh century, Christendom itself had been transformed. What had been ostensibly a single faith when Omar conquered Jerusalem was now a religion in schism. There was war between Pope and Emperor in the west, with generations of antipopes being nominated by the emperors and the papacy itself often having to flee Rome. Moreover, there was a deep doctrinal, liturgical and theological split between the Greek-speaking Orthodox Church in the east (comprising the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem) and the Latin-speaking Catholic Church based in Rome. This conflict led to mutual dislike, distrust and excommunication.

One of the effects of the deeply bellicose history of medieval Christendom, both in its relations with outsiders like the Arabs and in its internal disputes, was a transformed attitude to the relationship between religion and war. In the early Church, despite the concept of a just war, military activity was not seen as an important part of the Christian life. To 'put on the whole armour of God', as St Paul put it in the Epistle to the Ephesians (6:11), was seen in spiritual terms as waging a war against the sins of the

30 Krak des Chevaliers, Palestine, 13th century. View of the south and west fronts. One of the most impressive of all crusader castles, Krak des Chevaliers was built by the Knights of St John of the Hospital. It possessed a chapel, chapter-house and cloister in accordance with the rules of the Order, whose brethren took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The impressive concentric castles built by this and other orders were effectively the main line of defence for Christian Palestine.



flesh. But by the high Middle Ages such scriptural injunctions began to be interpreted literally. Ironically, the first religion to invent the notion of a holy war had been Islam, with its concept of the *Jihad*. But by the eleventh century in Christendom, 'the breastplate of righteousness' came to be perceived as the armour one wore in a military struggle blessed by the Church against the Infidel or even against another Christian group.

In 1095 Pope Urban II preached a Christian holy war against Islam.³³ His purpose was to rescue the Holy Land from its long captivity in the hands of the Arabs. In advocating a crusade, he united the spiritual paradigm of pilgrimage to Jerusalem (which Valerius so emphasised in his reading of Egeria) with the chivalrous ideals and opportunist potential of war. Not only was this a pious war, a war fought to rescue the holy city of Jerusalem, but it was a war sanctioned, blessed and advocated by the apostolic successor of St Peter himself. Many of those who went on crusade, in a mixture of piety and aggression, religion and opportunism, gained little save, perhaps, salvation itself. Others had the image of booty, and even of carving themselves a kingdom in the east. But politically, Palestine was relatively unimportant to Christendom beside those Muslim lands much closer to home: its significance was supremely as a symbol.

Yet this symbol brought together remarkable gatherings and alliances among the crowned heads of Europe, not to speak of lesser noblemen. The Second Crusade, preached by St Bernard himself, the leader of the Cistercian Order of monks, took King Louis of France and King Conrad of the Germans to Palestine. The Third Crusade, summoned to save Christian Palestine after Saladin had retaken Jerusalem for Islam, attracted Richard the Lionheart of England, Philip II of France and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Other distinguished crusaders were the emperor Frederick II and St Louis of France, whose dying words (on crusade against the Infidel at Tunis in 1270) were 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem'. Such monarchs spent many months away from home, in alliance with potentates who were their worst enemies back in Europe. What they gained on crusade was a prestige that afforded a rare glory in the union of perhaps the two supreme ideals of medieval Europe – pilgrimage and chivalry.

To go on crusade was always seen as an act of pilgrimage, for which the Church granted remission of one's sins. Yet the Crusades involved carnage on a huge scale. Just over a hundred years after the conquest of Jerusalem from Islam in 1099, Byzantium itself became considered a fair target for a Christian holy war, when (in the disaster of the Fourth Crusade in 1204) the crusaders turned their arms on Christendom's greatest city to set up their own empire in Constantinople. The paradox in modern eyes of combining piety and war was already seen in the taking of Jerusalem by the First Crusade in July 1099. Before the final assault the crusaders fasted. They walked barefoot round the city following their priests, who carried holy relics and preached sermons on the Mount of Olives. On the day of the conquest, a week later, having stormed the city, they massacred the Muslim and Jewish population, man, woman and child.

Once conquered, Palestine was transformed into the Frankish kingdom of Outremer. Its pilgrims were always liable to enemy raids. Saewulf, who visited the Holy Land around 1101-3, just after the triumphs of the First Crusade, remarks of the road from Joppa to Jerusalem:³⁴

It was very dangerous too, because the Saracens, who are continually plotting an ambush against Christians, were hiding in the caves of the hills and among rocky caverns. They were awake day and night, always keeping a look out for someone to attack, whether because he had not enough people with him, or was fatigued enough to leave a space between himself and his party. (Travels, 8)

The Latin-speaking crusaders set up their own ecclesiastical hierarchy, with their own clergy, bishops and patriarchs, often in direct competition with the established Orthodox priesthood. The local Christians of the east were both liberated by the Crusades and at the same time turned into second-class citizens, even in a Christian kingdom. In the long term, this exacerbated the split between the Churches in the east and the west. In the short term, it had liturgical repercussions. Abbot Daniel, a Russian pilgrim who visited Palestine in the early twelfth century, tells of the descent of the holy light at Easter by which 'the grace of God comes down unseen from heaven and lights the lamps in the Sepulchre of the Lord' (*Pilgrimage of Abbot Daniel*, 97). He himself placed a lamp in the Tomb, 'at the place where the most pure feet of Our Lord Jesus Christ lay', while 'at the head stood the lamp of the Greeks and at the breast the lamp of the monastery of St Saba'. Despite the presence of the crusader king Baldwin I of Jerusalem, 'by the grace of God these three lamps were lit, but of the Frankish lamps which had been hung higher up not one was lit'. This account reveals a certain pride in having participated in a miraculous act as well as the particular bias of a single pilgrim towards the Greek rite (later Abbot Daniel describes the Orthodox monks singing vespers, while 'the Latins on the great altar began mumbling after their own fashion'). It points to liturgical rivalries between the different Christian sects. The Latins may have occupied the high altar but the holy light still favoured the Greeks.

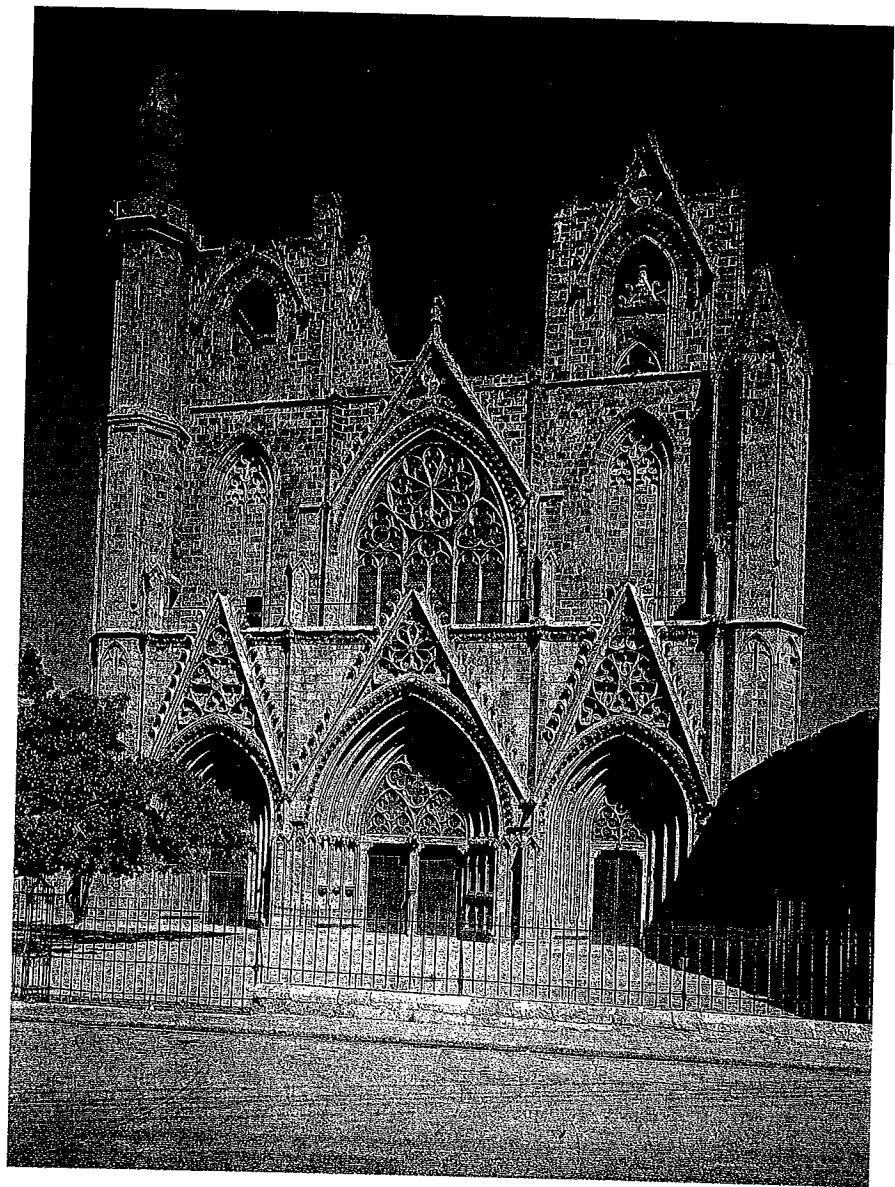
Nor were pilgrims during the period of the crusader kingdom always well served by Christians who had come to settle in Outremer. Burchard of Mount Sion, a Dominican friar of German origin, who came to Palestine in about 1280, was mordant about the kinds of people attracted to make a new life in Palestine.³⁵

Whenever someone was a malefactor such as a murderer, a robber, a thief, or an adulterer, he used to cross the sea, either as a penitent, or else because he feared for his skin and therefore did not dare to stay in his own country; and so they came thither from all parts, such as Germany, Italy, France, England, Spain, Hungary and other parts of the world. And while they change the sky above them they do not change their minds. Once being here, after they have spent what they had brought with them, they have to acquire new (funds) and so, they return to their 'vomit', doing the worse of the worst. . . . (Pilgrimage of Burchard, 13.1)



31 The transference of the Holy Fire, outside the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, Easter Saturday. The feast of the Holy Fire takes place as part of the Orthodox celebration of Easter. A candle is lit within the Holy Sepulchre on Easter Saturday, signifying the coming of the Resurrection. Thousands of pilgrims and locals throng outside the church, eager to receive the flame.

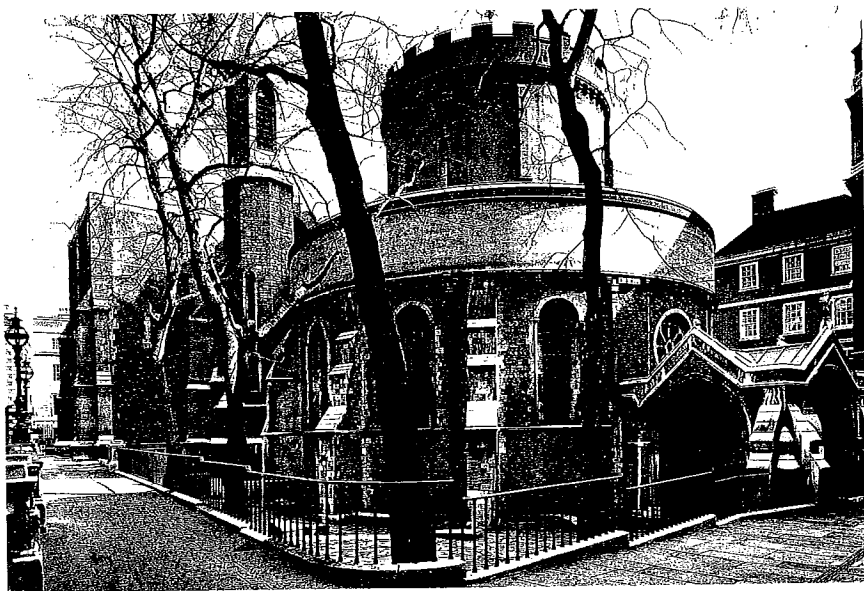
32 West façade of the crusader Cathedral of St Nicholas, Famagusta, Cyprus, 14th century. After the fall of Acre, Famagusta became the chief trading centre in the Christian Levant and its temporary opulence was marked by a number of magnificent churches reminiscent of the gothic architecture of mainland France. After the Turkish conquest of the island in the 16th century, the cathedral was converted to a mosque.



Burchard believed such settlers 'tread the holy places with polluted feet'. In the hands of such hosts, 'pilgrims who do not know how to take care of themselves, trust their hosts and lose their goods and their honour'.

CONVERTING THE HEATHEN: A LEGACY OF THE CRUSADES

Jerusalem remained in Christian hands for less than a hundred years. In 1187, Saladin reconquered it for Islam. Yet the image of a holy war, like the image of peaceful pilgrimage itself, became a formidable ideal in Christian culture. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was the dream of monarchs and churchmen, pious yeomen and even children, to liberate



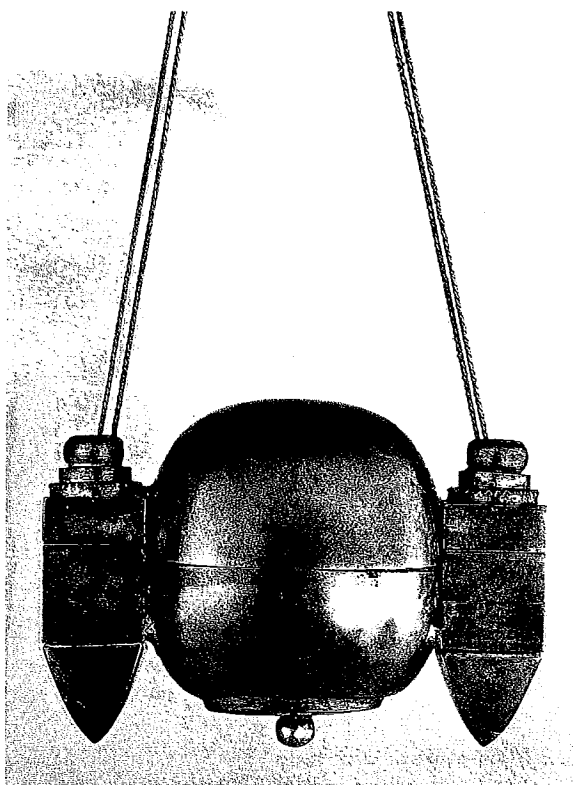
33 Rotunda of the Temple Church, London, 12th century. The Templars built a number of circular churches as part of the tradition of architectural 'copies' of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (and in particular the distinctive shape of the Anastasis rotunda) which survive from the Middle Ages throughout Europe.

the Holy Land by miracle or by war. Henry IV of England, on whose soul lay the heavy sin of murdering his anointed predecessor Richard II, dreamed that he might rescue Palestine in expiation and die in Jerusalem. In 1212, a boy visionary of about twelve years old, called Stephen of Cloyes, preached a children's crusade. Contemporary estimates that 30,000 children followed his preaching and gathered in a children's army at Marseilles are certainly exaggerated. But they give some idea of how strongly the image of liberating Jerusalem appealed to people of all ages, social classes and stations. The crusade was a disaster: the children were sold into slavery in North Africa by the ship owners who had offered them free passage to Palestine.

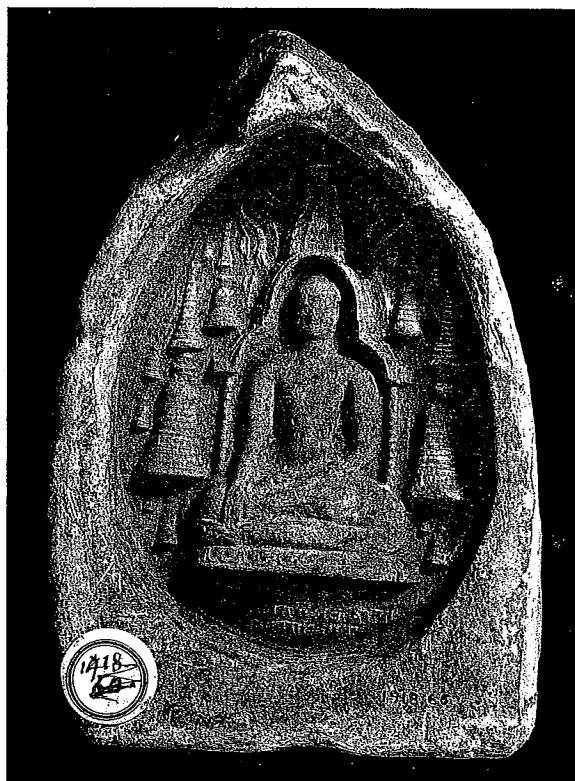
But those hundred years of a Christian Jerusalem were a potent inspiration to the cause of Christianisation. Pilgrimage itself was never the ancestor of missionary conversion, but crusade – military pilgrimage to the land of the Infidel – was the mother of missionary zeal. The Teutonic knights, the last of the military Orders set up to fight for Christendom in Palestine, conquered vast tracts near the Baltic and brought Catholicism to the Slavs. In 1219, during the Fifth Crusade, St Francis of Assisi went to Egypt in an attempt to convert the Sultan. He failed to persuade him, despite offering to undergo an ordeal by fire.

But the combination of conquest and conversion, whose paradigm was crusade against Islam, had a profound impact on the history of Europe. After the end of the Middle Ages, the great age of European expansion justified its conquest of the Indies and the Americas not as imperialism but as the bringing of Christian salvation to the heathen. It was this child of the Crusades, the aim of universal conversion, that was to inspire the missionaries who fostered and furthered the work of colonisation. The colonies – especially in Latin America – were not only conquered by European powers, but transformed into Christian countries by the missionary crusade of the Church.

IV. Containers of the Sacred: Ampullae, Souvenirs and Tokens



a. Small silver container for a linga to be carried on the person, from Karnataka.



b. Buddhist plaque from Bodhgaya, found in South-East Asia.

Pilgrimage is as concerned with taking back some part of the charisma of a holy place as it is about actually going to the place. One of the most characteristic aspects of pilgrimage art in all the world religions is the proliferation of objects made available to pilgrims and brought home by them as reminders and even as tangible channels of connection with the sacred experience. In this way, the influence of the site can be retained in the domestic or mundane context to which a pilgrim has returned. Such souvenirs may themselves be collected into large accumulations of sacred mementos, such as the collections of sixth-century Byzantine lead ampullae from Palestine probably given by the Lombard queen Theodolinda to the cathedral treasuries at Monza and Bobbio in Italy in the first quarter of the seventh century. Like the relics of saints and the narratives written by

pilgrims, the souvenirs brought back from pilgrimage have an afterlife: they are reminders of pilgrimage; they may act as advertisements for the pilgrimage site, encouraging others to make the journey; they may even (as in the case of the ampullae) become relics in their own right.

Some souvenir boxes actually contain material from or even fragments of the pilgrimage site in the form of natural matter to be found there, such as water, earth and bits of wood or stone. Other kinds of reliquaries contain things produced at a pilgrimage site, such as holy oil or images. Such material may then be reincorporated into local ritual practices at home: holy oil or water was often used in medieval Christian healing and likewise the amulets blessed by Buddhist saints are used for cures in Thailand. Fragments can also be used to link special sites in a network of sacred geography, so that for



c. Medieval lead pilgrimage token, depicting the head of St Thomas of Canterbury.



d. Byzantine clay pilgrims' ampulla.

instance the waters of the Ganges are dispersed to other pilgrimage centres throughout the whole of India, while relics such as the earth from near St Martin's tomb in Tours were sent to the major churches of France in the sixth and seventh centuries AD

Containers of matter from a sacred place are notable not just for what they hold, but because they record its nature or origins. In a modern example of a plastic ampulla from Palestine (Fig. IVe), the body of the container indicates that it is filled with 'holy water from Nazareth', while the Crucifixion image on the lid is labelled 'Jerusalem'. Here, in a culture of high literacy, texts are used to recall Palestine as a sacred unity. In less literate cultures, such as that of most Byzantine pilgrims in the seventh century AD, images were used to evoke a story, a place or a holy figure, as in the case of a clay ampulla with a

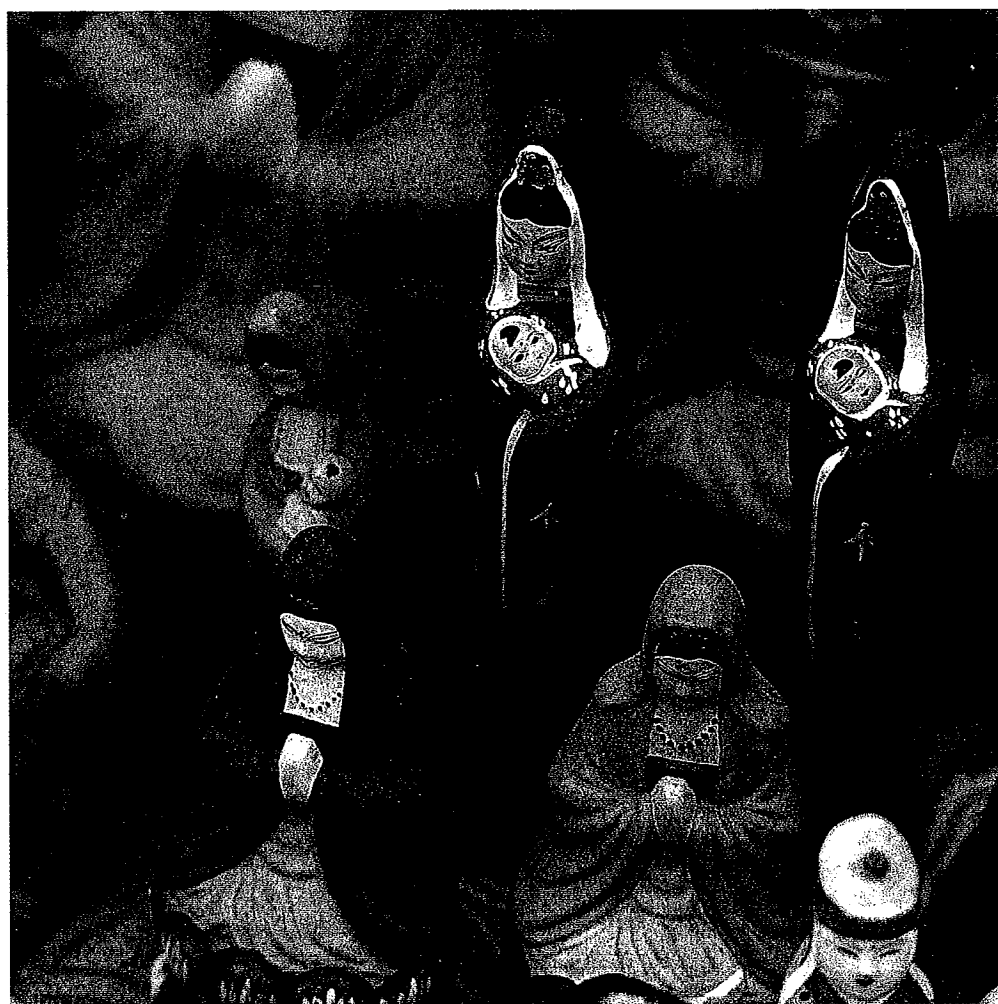
bearded saint holding a book (Fig. IVd). Whether using labels or images to adorn the casket, such ampullae condense within a single object not only part of a sacred site but also a narrative connected with that site. Moreover, unlike more elevated forms of art, they are affordable by pilgrims of almost every financial level. As is evident within much pilgrimage practice, the use of such objects acts to widen access to sacred forces, to spread the imagery and the experience of the holy to a broad constituency.

Souvenirs which contain fragments from a place may be contrasted with those whose value derives largely from the fact that they represent a figure significant to the sacred centre where they were bought. On sale at most Shiva temples in India are small, affordable, clay or glass images of the central icon of Shiva, the *linga*. Such objects – other examples include the Christian



e. Modern plastic ampulla, with water from Palestine.

f. Modern Buddhist pilgrims' souvenirs from Jiuhuashan, China.



statuettes of Mary available at Walsingham (Fig. IVg) and the gaily painted images of Kuan Yin, the goddess of Compassion, for sale at the Buddhist sacred mountain of Jiuhuashan in contemporary China (Fig. IVf) – are above all portable. They may be taken home as gifts, or to adorn a shrine, and their value rests in their origins at a pilgrimage centre. However, rather than offering a portion of the site transferred to one's home, such objects act as metaphors stimulating the religious imagination to remember the experience, the statue or the place which the image recalls.

The memorabilia of pilgrimage are also a means of marking the pilgrim's identity as one who has made the journey. For instance the numerous kinds of lead amulets available at the tomb of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury throughout the Middle Ages (see, for instance, Fig. IVc) were worn by returning pilgrims as a

sign of their penitential journey. Like ampullae containing water said to have been tinged with St Thomas's blood, the Canterbury badges and amulets, after being worn round a pilgrim's neck, were often dedicated in their local church as a kind of popular relic. Often tokens reproduced the miracle-working image at the centre of pilgrimage, such as the shrine of Becket or the Schöne Maria at Regensburg in Germany, where in one year (1520–1) over 100,000 clay and almost 10,000 silver pilgrimage badges were produced. This atmosphere of mass production can lead to an inflation of image-making, both democratising and diffusing the power of the image. Such production of souvenirs was often controlled by the religious élite at a given site, and certainly broadcast its fame. Yet by removing the image from its original context, pilgrims could more easily reinterpret the image in accordance with their own assumptions and needs.

g. *Modern Christian pilgrims' souvenirs from Walsingham.*

