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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Travel and Pilgrimage Literature

Jan Willem Drijvers

Sidonius Apollinaris, prominent member of the provincial aristocracy in Gaul and later bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, arrived in the city of Rome late in 467. In response to a request of his friend Heronius, Sidonius reports in a letter about his journey from Lyon to the Eternal City (*Epist.* 1.5). Leaving Lyon Sidonius had the privilege of traveling by the public post service (*cursus publicus*); he stopped regularly at friends' houses along the way. After having crossed the Alps he went down to Ticinum (Pavia), where he embarked on a river boat. Sailing downstream on the river Po, he first reached Cremona and then continued to Ravenna, the imperial residence. He presents an impression of the latter city focusing on the large quantities of imported foodstuff and the polluted water conditions. After having crossed the Rubicon, he continued his journey via Rimini and Fano and then continued on the Via Flaminia to Rome. During the latter part of his journey Sidonius suffered from fever and fear of bad drinking water. Having arrived at his destination he offered thanks "at the triumphal thresholds of the Apostles," i.e. at the Basilicas of St. Peter and S. Paolo fuori le Mura, before entering the city (Fournier and Stoehr-Monjou 2014).

Although the letter is highly rhetorical and has an antiquarian imprint as well as reminiscences of Horace's journey from Rome to Brindisi (*Satire* 1.5), it gives a nice and probably trustworthy impression of traveling conditions in the late Roman Empire. These conditions seem to have been not very dissimilar from the circumstances in the early empire. What differs, however, is that in late antiquity there seems to have been a deeper sensitivity for geography than in the centuries before (Traina 2013, 2015) and that we have more

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testimonies of travel and physical movement than we do from the earlier centuries of the empire. Possibly there was also an intensification of both travel itself and of travel narratives, which could be explained, at least partly, by the introduction of Christian religious travel in the early fourth century. Seeing and interacting with holy places and objects, encountering holy men, and participating in religious festivals became a significant motivation for traveling for the increasing number of Christians. The Christianization of travel is also a distinguishing marker of late antique travel literature in comparison with that of earlier periods.

This chapter discusses a variety of late antique writings about travel, with a particular focus on texts about Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The letter of Sidonius demonstrates that traveling is closely associated with representations, both real and imaginary, of geographical space and the Christianization of the cosmos (Johnson 2014, p. 394).

The late Roman Empire was a very mobile society. People traveled for numerous reasons – commerce, government affairs, religion, education, military business, migration; they made use of the elaborate system of roads and the available modes of transport such as wagons, horses, and boats (Leyerle 2009; Dietz 2005, pp. 11–42). Although it is not easy to define travel literature as a genre, at least three kinds of texts can be characterized as specific travel literature: the *itinerarium*, the *periplous*, and the *periegesis*. Furthermore, reflections of journeys and travel can be found in a variety of texts such as letters, historical accounts, and the *vitae* of holy men and women. Travel and geography are not easily separated categories in late antique literature. Therefore travel narratives, geographical texts, and maps will all be reviewed in this chapter.

22.1 Letters

Epistolography had developed into a prominent literary art in late antiquity. We possess a large collection of letters that give insight into many aspects of late antique life. Some of them, such as the letter of Sidonius Apollinaris summarized above, provide information about modes of travel, routes, landscape, and aspects of a geopolitical and geohistorical kind. Synesius of Cyrene's *Letter* 5, dated 396/397 and addressed to his brother Euoptius, presents a dramatic account of Synesius's sea journey from Alexandria to his home town of Cyrene. The ship on which Synesius had embarked had a crew consisting of Jews and peasants who had hardly any experience in handling the ship. Apart from Synesius, there were some 50 passengers aboard, a third of them women, who were separated from the men by a screen. Among the

men were soldiers. Soon after its departure the ship was overtaken by a heavy storm and was nearly shipwrecked on the reefs. Even though the Jewish skipper stopped steering the ship because of the Sabbath, the vessel made it to a deserted shore. After the storm had calmed down, the vessel took to the sea again but was soon struck by another storm. Eventually the passengers and the crew made it to a coast where they were amply provisioned by women whose men had gone away on commercial business. Synesius concludes the letter by advising his brother never to trust himself to the sea.

Obviously the line between fact and fiction in the letter is not clear, and this makes the historicity of the unfortunate journey doubtful. Synesius has enriched his account with many comic and tragic tropes as well as with Homeric elements. There are also reminiscences of Paul's sea journey from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:1–44). This makes the letter very much a literary construct appreciative of older epic, tales of sea journeys in Greek novels, and biblical stories (Johnson 2014, p. 396) while simultaneously presenting practical information about sea travel.

Jerome's *Letter* 108, written on the occasion of the death of Paula in Bethlehem in 404 and addressed to her daughter Eustochium, is of a nature other than that of the letters of Sidonius and Synesius since it is, in essence, the narrative of a religious journey. Jerome describes the journey of Paula, an extremely wealthy woman from a prominent Roman senatorial family, from Rome to Bethlehem. After she was widowed, she decided not to remarry and to dedicate her life to the Christian faith. Around 386 she departed from Ostia by ship and arrived in Antioch by way of Cyprus. From there she traveled southwards to the Holy Land, where she visited numerous holy places from both the Old and the New Testament (Hunt 1984, pp. 171–172; Dietz 2005, pp. 126–132). Jerome describes all of this but pays particularly close attention to her sojourns at Jerusalem and Bethlehem. After a journey through Egypt, where she paid visits to the many holy men who were living in the monastic communities there, she settled in Bethlehem and founded a double monastery in the city. Her journey as described by Jerome occurs in an exclusive Christian context. She visits biblical holy sites, laments Jesus's suffering and death at Jerusalem when she is shown the Cross, and stays at monasteries and in the residences of bishops. Because Jerome's purpose was not to write an all-embracing travel account but a report of Paula's visit to the biblical places (*Epist.* 108.8.1), the letter does not, for instance, provide information about travel conditions, apart from the fact that Paula traveled in a group of virgins (and probably with a substantial entourage). It also says little about the hazards of travel. In that respect one of the letters (*Epist.* 2.5–7) of the Greek church father Gregory of Nyssa is more illuminating. He warns his readers, that is, monks and virgins who wanted to see the

sacred sites in the Holy Land, about the dangers of travel and, in particular, all the lurking (sexual) passions. These were profound because men and women did not travel separately, women needed help getting on and off their mounts, and the servants in hostels and inns were indiscriminate.

22.2 Religious Travel

Religious travel was not specific to Christian monotheism. In Greco-Roman polytheistic society people traveled, for example, to honor the gods by attending religious festivals, to visit oracles and healing sanctuaries, or to get initiated into a cult (Elsner and Rutherford 2005; Harland 2011). Leaders or founders of cults toured around for missionary reasons in order to promote and diffuse the cult of their deity on the religious market (Stark 1996) just like the apostles who traveled to gain adherents for the Jesus movement.

Paula was neither the first nor the last aristocratic lady who embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She was preceded by Melania the Elder, who settled and founded a monastery in Jerusalem and would be followed by, *inter alia*, Poemenia, Melania the Younger, and the empress Eudocia (Dietz 2005, pp. 107–153). A few years before Paula made her religious journey through Palestine and Egypt, Egeria had come to the Holy Land. She stayed in Jerusalem for about three years (381–384), from where she made various trips to holy places. The account of her travels, written for her fellow sisters and only preserved fragmentarily, is a fascinating report about the expanding Christianization of the landscape and traveling in a religious context. She visited places like the Thebaid in Egypt (where many holy men lived), the Galilee, Mt. Nebo, Carneas, the Jordan River, and Mt. Sinai (Maraval 1982; Wilkinson 1999). On her return journey she made a detour to Edessa, which by the end of the fourth century had become an important center of religious tourism because letters of Jesus from his correspondence with King Abgar of Edessa were preserved there. From Edessa she traveled on to Seleucia in Isauria to visit St. Thecla's martyrrium (Davis 2001). Her account ends with her arrival in Constantinople. Whether she continued her journey from there to Aquitania or Galicia whence she probably came is uncertain.

When Egeria and Paula made their pilgrimages the number of holy sites in the Holy Land had increased considerably since the time that the emperor Constantine (306–337) had ordered churches to be constructed at sites related to Christ's life and crucifixion. In Bethlehem the Church of the Nativity was built and in Jerusalem the Church of the Holy Sepulcher at the supposed spot of Golgotha and Jesus's tomb. Another one had been built on the Mount of Olives (Eusebius, *VC* 3.25–43). At least by the beginning of

the fourth century, but probably somewhat earlier, an interest arose in the religious geography of the Holy Land by linking biblical places to their geographical location, of which the *Onomastikon* (On the Place-Names in the Holy Scriptures) by Eusebius is the first literary evidence (Freeman-Grenville 2004; Stenger 2015). At the end of the fourth century this topographical index of biblical sites was translated into Latin and extended by Jerome under the title *Liber locorum*. Interest in biblical topography is also expressed in the *Topography of the Holy Land* by Theodosius from around 518 (Geyer and Cuntz 1965, 1.115–125). Earlier, around the middle of the fifth century, a letter ascribed to Eucherius, bishop of Lyon, reflects a similar interest in the significance of the topography of Judaea and Palestine (Geyer & Cuntz 1965, 1.237–243). Later Adomnán (before 683) and Bede (ca. 702) consulted Eucherius's letter for their works on the holy places. The city of Jerusalem was at the center of Eucherius's and Theodosius's biblical geography. Apart from holy sites and relics, Eucherius conveys an interest in living holy men and women and their monasteries, thereby expressing attentiveness for both the Christian past and the present (Johnson 2014, p. 401).

The new Christian passion for the geographical identification of holy sites (Markus 1994; Sotinel 2005) and the imperial interest in Palestine shown by the emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, who had visited the region in 327/328 (Drijvers 2011, pp. 137–143), were a great stimulus for Christian religious travel in late antiquity. Increasing numbers of pilgrims traveled from all over the Roman Empire and beyond to the Holy Land. They also visited other sites, such as martyr's graves, the holy men living in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts, and the shrines of living saints (e.g. that of Symeon Stylites close to Aleppo). With this travel they sought to deepen their faith and come close to the divine at these tangible testimonies of the Christian faith. The earliest existing pilgrim's report of this sort is the *itinerarium* by the anonymous Bordeaux pilgrim who traveled to Jerusalem in 333.

22.3 Itineraries

Itineraria were road maps presenting details for a given route that included cities, villages, and other stops along the way as well as the distance between them. The land itinerary seems to be a principally Roman phenomenon (Salway 2001, p. 26) since all of them are in Latin apart from the Greek account of Theophanes (see below). There were written itineraries and graphic ones. The *Antonine Itinerary* (Cuntz 1929, pp. 1–85; Löhberg 2010), probably compiled in the version as we have it at the end of the third century but in all likelihood going back to early imperial times, is the most

elaborate provincial and maritime itinerary now preserved (Salway 2001, pp. 39–43). It encompasses a series of itineraries and is based on the Roman network of roads and the provincial system; it serves to chart journeys from one place to another and back. The itinerary was evidently a successful and hands-on way of presenting geographical information for use of travel and transport (Brodersen 2001, 14). *Itineraria* predominantly describe routes over land, but sea and river routes are not excluded. However, charts for navigating on sea and rivers seem not to have existed in antiquity (Salway 2004).

Since the itinerary is a linear narrative and can be accessed at random points to start a journey, new data and routes could be easily included in the text. In late antiquity it was probably available in codex form, which made it easier to consult and use en route. The genre of the *itinerarium* has been drawn on to argue that the Roman worldview was “hodological” and that Romans perceived geographical space principally not by shapes but by the lines of the itineraries. Based on the itineraries, Romans could create a mental map of geographical space (Whittaker 2004, pp. 63–87).

Late antique Christian narratives of religious travel follow the format of the *itinerarium*, and the Bordeaux pilgrim was the first to adopt it. The traveler from Bordeaux must have been a person of some importance since she/he was allowed to make use of the transport facilities of the *cursus publicus* (Kolb 2001; Lemcke 2016). The Bordeaux pilgrim traveled overland from Bordeaux to Palestine noting the stopping places and the mileage between them. On average the traveler journeyed 24 miles per day. Occasionally she/he notes points of Christian and other interest. Upon arriving in Jerusalem she/he mentions, among other things, Sion, the Siloam pool, Golgotha, Christ’s tomb, the praetorium of Pontius Pilate, and the churches built by Constantine. Her/his information reads as a topography of the city and is a testimony of the Christianization of the city’s urban space. Jerusalem is the most important halting place for the traveler from Bordeaux and her/his *itinerarium* is “a work of remarkable ideological innovation” (Elsner 2000, p. 194) signifying the new Christian Constantinian empire of which Jerusalem was the religious focal point. Jerusalem as capital of the world of late antique Christendom is also at the center of the itinerary of the Piacenza pilgrim. Apart from the now traditional sites in and around Jerusalem, in Judaea, and Mt. Sinai, he also traveled to Suras at the Euphrates in order to honor St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, who suffered martyrdom there, as well as to Haran since it was considered the birthplace of Abraham.

The Bordeaux pilgrim, Egeria, Paula, and the Piacenza pilgrim are just a small representation of the many religious travelers who visited Jerusalem and the other biblical sites in the Holy Land in late antiquity (Maraval 1985). On the one hand, their pilgrim’s narratives were not only personal impressions of

their contacts with the Christian past and present at holy sites but also functioned as guide books for others who made similar journeys, because they contained practical information about stopping places, distances, locations, and hostels. On the other hand, these travel narratives could and did function to make a pilgrimage in the mind instead of a real one for those who were not able to make the physical journey.

The memoranda of Theophanes's itinerary preserved in the Archive of Theophanes from the early fourth century (Matthews 2006) represents a special case. The archive contains a variety of papyri concerning the undertakings of Theophanes, a wealthy gentleman from Hermopolis in the Thebaid in Egypt. These include financial records, household inventories, building documents, and personal papers as well as an account of his voyage from Hermopolis to Syrian Antioch and back ca. 320. This protracted but not uncommon journey – many people must have made this and similar trips – took about a year. Theophanes's account of what most probably was a business trip provides valuable information about the conditions of traveling in the late Roman Empire. It details, among other things, stopping places along the Via Maris, the diet en route, and the daily expenditures on a variety of items such as food, wine, oil, firewood, fodder for pack animals, and the use of bathhouses.

22.4 Maps

The Christianization of the landscape is not only conveyed in pilgrims' narratives but also in the sixth-century Madaba map, a floor mosaic in the church of St. George in Madaba in Jordan. It contains the oldest cartographic impression of the Holy Land and presents a rather detailed representation of the urban landscape of sixth-century Jerusalem (Donner 1992).

The itinerary of Theophanes, as well as other *itineraria adnotata*, shows a fashioning of conception of space that is also reflected in maps, or *itineraria picta* (Vegetius, *De re militari* 3.6). The third-century leather shield from Dura Europos (found in 1922) fits well into this category of *itineraria picta* and into cartographical thinking, even though it had a decorative and not a practical purpose. It presents stations along a coastal route in the northern Black Sea and the distances between them as well as pictures of ships (Dilke 1985, pp. 120–122; Brodersen 2001, pp. 14–16). It is, however, imaginable that illustrated itineraries have existed for practical use. The best known example of an *itinerarium pictum* is without doubt the unique *Tabula Peutingeriana*, named after its one-time owner Konrad Peutinger (1465–1547). It is the best example of what comes close to a modern-day map, although we should

realize that, if the Romans had maps, these were completely unlike contemporary scale maps because of an entirely different Roman conception of geographical space (on maps see Dilke 1985). The multicolored copy of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* dates from ca. 1300 (e.g. Albu 2014), but most likely goes back to a late antique original. Its dimensions are extreme: 672 cm long and 33 cm high. It consists of 11 segments stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to India and depicts a detailed plotting of land routes, that is, a linear representation of place names and figures of distance. Apart from the network of roads that is at the base of the map, it shows mountains, rivers, seas, and islands. Cities, imperial capitals, hostels, and baths are indicated by pictorial symbols of various kinds. The map seems to be a representation of the entire road network and topographical organization of the late Roman world (Johnson 2014, p. 5), and appears to be based on written itineraries (Salway 2001, p. 47). Because Rome is at the center of the map, this is most likely an impression of the *orbis Romanus*, the inhabited world under Roman control. The foreshortened (north–south) and elongated (east–west) Peutinger map, which, for instance, shows the Mediterranean Sea as a narrow strip of water and Italy as wholly horizontal, cannot have had any practical use and was, like the Dura Europos shield, of a decorative nature. It has been suggested that the original was part of a scheme for a public space, in particular an imperial palace from the Tetrarchic period (Talbert 2010, pp. 142–157).

22.5 Periegesis and Periploi

The *oikoumenè*-based perception of space as displayed in the Peutinger map is challenged by the literary geographies of the *periegesis* and *periplous*. A *periegesis* was a descriptive journey – in prose or in verse – around a place or an area or even the known world. The best known is that of Dionysius Periegetes, who composed a *periegesis* in Greek of just under 1200 hexameters in Alexandria in the time of Hadrian (117–138). It is an exquisite specimen of ancient geography, but, like many works of geography in the Greco-Roman world, it is evidence that the elite’s view of the geography of the world was very much a literary one. Dionysius’s text was not meant for practical use. Instead, as a composition of didactic poetry it was learned and studied in schools. The work was still very much en vogue and widely read in late antiquity. Its popularity was such that it was at least twice translated into Latin prose, first in the fourth century by Avienus, whose translation is known by the title *Descriptio orbis terrae* (Van de Woestijne, 1961), and then, some 200 years later, by Priscian, a grammarian working in Constantinople (Van de Woestijne 1953).

Like the *periegesis*, the *periplous* is Greek in origin. A *periplous* is a circumnavigation or a description of a coastal voyage. *Periploi* are like *itineraria* lists of routes, ports, river mouths, coastal markers, peoples, and occasionally references to myths. The earliest *periploi* date from Greek classical times, but the genre was still very much alive in late antiquity. We have the *Ora maritima* of the fourth-century senator Rufus Festus Avienus, which describes the coastline from Marseille to Cadiz (Murphy 1977). Rutilius Claudius Namatianus (fl. fifth century) describes a coastal voyage from Rome to Gaul undertaken in 416 in a poem (in elegiac meter) known as the *De reditu suo* (Doblhofer 1972–1977). Marcianus, who came from Heraclea Pontica, wrote around the year 400 a *Periplus maris exteri* (Periplus of the Outer Sea, i.e. the Ocean) in two books (Müller 2010, pp. 515–562). The work, which inter alia uses Ptolemy's *Geography* as a source, is now incomplete and the distances between the coastal stopping places and significant geographical markers are given in stades (Dilke 1985, pp. 141–143). *Periploi* could also be mixed with other literary forms, such as novels or historical works. Ammianus Marcellinus's description of the Black Sea (*Res gestae* 22.8) is essentially a *periplous* (Drijvers 1998).

Periegesis and *periploi* could have a practical use, but they also are clearly literary in character. Like the *itineraria*, they seem to reflect the late antique fervor for cataloguing the world (Racine 2010, pp. 29–76, 133–147) while organizing and systematizing knowledge in an encyclopedic form (Formisano 2012, pp. 512–520). The *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, by an anonymous author and dated to the mid-fourth century, is perhaps the best example of this (Rougé 1966). The text focuses on the *mare nostrum* and its periphery and presents a description of provinces, cities, and peoples from the far east to the west. Cities like Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome are elaborately described, but the descriptions of places become increasingly fantastical and mythical as they extend into places on the periphery of the *oikoumenè* (Romm 1992). Like Theophanes mentioned above, the author of the *Expositio* was probably a merchant, an identification supported by his reporting on the commercial possibilities within the Roman Empire (Rougé 1966, pp. 27–47). Other examples of the late antique dedication of systematizing knowledge are the *Notitia dignitatum*, the *Notitia urbis Constantinopolis*, *Laterculus Veronensis*, and the *Notitia Galliarum* (Seeck 1876).

Two centuries later, during the reign of Justinian, another merchant and later monk by the name of Cosmas wrote about his travel experiences in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean on his way to India (hence his epithet Indicopleustes). Cosmas Indicopleustes possibly came from Alexandria, but, if he did not, this was at least the city where he settled after his travels. He then became a monk and wrote his *Christian Topography* (Walska-Conus 1968–1973). This elaborate work, which is in essence a *periplous*, presents

a wealth of geographical, cosmological, and natural historical information about the eastern regions beyond the borders of the empire. It is, however, also a Christian polemical text since it denies the sphericity of the universe. Cosmas argues against his second-century fellow Alexandrian Ptolemy that the world is flat instead of spherical and that it was formed after the Mosaic tabernacle: He imagined the world as a box covered by a canopy with the sun turning around a mountain standing in the center. Even among Christians Cosmas's worldview was not influential and did not have many adherents, though his travel narrative remained striking enough for the text to live on.

22.6 Historiography

The historiographical work of Ammianus Marcellinus shows clearly the interdependence between historical and geographical descriptions. His *Res gestae* contains several geographical digressions. Apart from the one on the Black Sea mentioned above, there are excursuses on the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the Bodensee, Gaul, Persia, Egypt, and Thrace (Feraco 2004, 2011). The lost books of the *Res gestae* also contained geographical digressions, and it has been suggested that together these digressions presented the complete *oikoumenè*. In antiquity there was no clear distinction between history and geography, and descriptions of the physical world were often an integral part of historical narratives. Since the pioneering work of Herodotus, geography and history were mutually dependent in a way that was still the case in late antiquity as the historical writings of, for instance, Orosius, Jordanes, Procopius, and Isidore of Seville demonstrate (Merrills 2005). However, historical accounts provide geographical and travel information not only in digressions but also in reports about military expeditions or journeys of emperors and high officials. These reports can give practical evidence about routes and geographical circumstances, such as mountain ranges, the course and navigability of rivers, their crossing points, and many other such details.

22.7 *Vitae*

One might not immediately think of Christian biographic and hagiographic writings (*vitae*) about holy men and women as travel accounts, but many of these texts certainly merit such consideration. Holy men and women made a mental journey by ultimately making the decision to renounce the world and dedicate their life to God, and many also undertook physical journeys to the Egyptian or Syrian desert or to the Holy Land. Some of them remained in these

locations, choosing an anchoritic life, settling in monasteries, or adopting other forms of religious coenobitism. Apart from monks living in monasteries or anchorites in the desert, there were the so-called wandering monks, who did not live under monastic rule. They either wandered perpetually as beggars, teachers, or religious enthusiasts or journeyed from monastery to monastery with their traveling interrupted by short stays of only a few days at a time (Caner 2002; Dietz 2005, pp. 88–105). A prominent example of a wandering monk is Barsauma whose Syriac *vita* presents his journeys through the eastern provinces in the first half of the fifth century and can, therefore, be seen as a travel narrative. He visited, for instance, Jerusalem four times, the last time to expel the Jews who had taken over the Temple Mount, allegedly with the consent of the empress Eudocia. Together with his gang of monks, Barsauma did not refrain from intimidating behavior in association with verbal and physical violence in converting pagans, Jews, and Samaritans to Christianity (Hahn and Menze forthcoming). In contrast to Barsauma's violent travels stand the peaceful journeys of John Moschus some two centuries later, as described in his *Spiritual Meadow* (Wortley 2010). John, a monk at the Theodosius monastery in Jerusalem, traveled to, among other sites, the Jordan River, Cilicia, Cyprus, Antioch, the Sinai desert, Alexandria, Antioch, Thessaloniki, and Rome before probably ultimately settling in Constantinople. He took this trip to observe diverse monastic practices, and his account of his trip contains many tales of religious practices and miracles.

The culture of movement in late antiquity was diverse, and this diversity is reflected in the late Roman travel literature, which essentially organized and archived geographical knowledge of the *oikoumenè*, or parts of it, in textual genres (Johnson 2016). People traveled for many reasons and made use of a variety of transportation, as they did in the early empire. The Christianization of Mediterranean society brought a new dimension and framework to the culture of traveling and to geographical thinking about space. Christian travel developed into a significant and distinguishing feature in late antiquity, which then generated a new dynamism that expanded the scope and power of travel literature.

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