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In-between Spaces: Women, Travelling and the Christian Tradition

In ancient Christian pilgrimage, women started out on long voyages to see the *loca sancta* and the Egyptian monks, compelled by the burning desire to visit these places they had only been able to imagine in their readings of the Scriptures and other religious literature. This was not a mere matter of physical, earthly pilgrimage, but rather it was about an interior journey inspired by their faith, by the wish to see the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one, through the eyes of faith. Reading these women's itineraries, we can note that the traditional sites of the Old Testament are linked to the ones of the New Testament, giving life to a fascinating journey that, accompanied by the biblical *lectio*, further developed during the Middle Ages, until finally it reached our times with different goals but with the same spirit. In this paper, I propose to use gender as a category through which the theme of travelling and the physical/spiritual in-between may usefully be analysed, focusing in particular on women's experience and on what travelling means for women in the Christian tradition.

Preliminary Remarks on Pilgrimage

Being between a point of departure and a point of arrival, between the place that one leaves and another one in which one arrives: this is like to be both in motion and to stay in the same state, full of mixed feelings, floating between a sense of vulnerability and mental acuteness, between uncertainty and expectation. This is the condition that the traveller experiences, a psychological and mental state rather than a physical condition, which makes him/her feel not the citizen of a specific place, but of a dimension "in becoming", in which the only constant is changing.¹

¹ Cf. Victor W. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Columbia Press: New York 1978).

According to Heraclitus, “becoming” means changing, the transformation of things from one state into another. Before Heraclitus, the worldview of the ancient Greeks had been fairly static. The Olympic gods were as eternal as the world they were gazing down upon. Everything was firmly embedded into an indivisible universe. The principles of nature were perceived as everlasting and unchangeable, although what humankind knew about them was certainly limited. The Greeks before Heraclitus focused on the essence of things, their nature and being, which they deemed unchangeable. In contrast, Heraclitus said: “You cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.”² This simple statement expresses the gist of his philosophy, namely that the river is not actually the same at two different points in time. It is a radical position and Heraclitus was the first to conceive it. He looked at everything as being in a state of permanent flux and, hence, at reality as being merely a succession of transitory states: nothing is the same now as it was before, and thus nothing that is now will be the same tomorrow. With this he planted the idea of impermanence into Greek thought, and indeed, after Heraclitus, Greek philosophy was not the same anymore. In the Latin etymology of *devenire*, “becoming”, the word takes on different shades of meaning: *devenire* is composed of *venire* (“to come”) and *de-* (“down”) and can also mean “to come from”. These two meanings of *devenire* both take us back to our starting point: the desire to grasp, at least partly, what it means to be “in be-tween”, to dwell in a space “in be-tween” or better, as becomes evident in these metaphorical considerations, to be in a process that is able to redraw the boundaries of the notion of identity. Leaving the place of origin and experiencing another physical and cultural reality inevitably triggers a process of elaboration of the notion of identity and creates a sort of real-time editing, in which one is faced and followed by past and present, memory and knowledge, the “lot” that one brings from home and that often has to be reduced in order to be filled with what is collected along the way. The more time one spends on this path, the closer one gets to the idea of identity as something complex, multifaceted and hybrid.

It is well known that in every culture and religion there is the custom of visiting sacred places. Travel, designed as a religious itinerary, whose stages

² This is how Plato describes Heraclitus’s doctrine. See Plato, *Cratylus* 402A. This and the following translations from Latin and Greek texts are mine. The famous expression “everything flows” either was not pronounced by Heraclitus or did not survive as a quotation of his. This famous aphorism used to characterize Heraclitus’s thought comes from Simplicius, a Neoplatonist. See Simplicius, *In Aristotelis physicorum libros commentaria* 10, 1313.11.

are marked and consist of specific places in which the manifestation of the sacred is considered particularly intense, is a widespread practice, present already in the ancient world.³ In most cases the places visited in pilgrimage have a miraculous and prophetic significance (especially at Delphi). The concept of path or journey is also strongly associated with the search for wisdom, punctuated at times by metamorphosis and tests.⁴ In the case of Christianity, pilgrimage is deeply rooted in the idea that the believer has about human life on earth: Christians are pilgrims by definition and by vocation. If their real homeland is heaven, earthly life is nothing else but a pilgrimage or an exile, their true life being eternal life.⁵

A similar view is derived from reference to well-known Gospel passages, above all the affirmation of 2Cor 5:6: “As long as we are in the body we are in exile from the Lord.” But it is evident how the concept of being in exile derives not only from the New Testament, but especially from a typological reading of the central event of the Exodus, narrated in the Old Testament, particularly when it is reviewed in the light of the prophetic writings and the Psalms, where the condition of being a pilgrim is the same as the one of the person who believes in God: “Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my cry, do not be deaf to my tears, for I am a stranger, a foreigner as all my fathers.” (Ps 38:13).⁶ In this sense 2Cor 5:6 together with Lev 25:2 and Ps 38:13 are relevant texts.

Christian believers are thus in an in-between space: between earth and heaven. In fact, in the *Acta* and *Passiones*, the martyrs always look at the sky with a deep sigh when the judge asks them about their home, while in *A diognetum* 6,8 we read: “the Christians live as pilgrims in the frailty, waiting for heavenly incorruptibility.” Christian believers are resident foreigners, waiting to reach heaven.⁷

³ On pilgrimage see Bernhard Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirchen* (Antiquariat Th. Stenderhoff: Münster 1950); Edward David Hunt, *Holy Land and Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1982); Pierre Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient. Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Éditions du Cerf: Paris 1985).

⁴ See for example Apuleius, *The Golden Ass (Asinus Aureus)* or *Metamorphoses*, book 11.

⁵ Cf. Raniero Cantalamessa, “Polis, patria e nazione nel sentimento della grecità e del primitivo cristianesimo,” in: *Vita e pensiero* 54 (1972), 70(762)-76(768); Marco Rizzi, “La cittadinanza paradossale dei cristiani (Ad Diognetum 5-6): Le trasformazioni cristiane di un topos retorico,” in: *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 1 (1996), 221-260.

⁶ Cf. Pierre Maraval, “La Bible des pèlerins d'Orient,” in: Claude Mondésert (ed.), *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible* (Beauchesne: Paris 1984), 387-397.

⁷ Enrico Norelli (ed.), *A Diogneto* (Paoline: Milano 1991), 151-152.

Peregrinatio, the condition of those who live in a land as guests, the attitude of those who wander round the world, thus becomes a technical term which signifies the real dimension of believers in Christ. These preliminary remarks on the meaning of travelling and pilgrimage in the ancient world help to understand better the origins of the specific form of pilgrimage I want to concentrate on in this paper, namely the one aimed at retracing the places of the main events of Christ's life. The journey to the Holy Land, with a stop in Egypt in order to visit saints, who are the object of veneration just like the martyrs, becomes a central practice in the 4th Christian century. In fact, if during the first three centuries of our era, Christian pilgrimage routes went from East to West, attracted by Rome, *urbs caput mundi*, in the 4th century Christian journeys took the opposite direction: from West to East, the place where the Lord was born and from which the sun rises. The East means the Holy Land, equal to desire for Paradise, hope for resurrection.⁸ The travel from the West to the Holy Land had the value of a return to an ideal homeland, which in geographical terms was identified with Jerusalem and Palestine.⁹ Thus pilgrimage becomes a moment in which the concept of Church realises its universal dimensions. Pilgrims coming from different places have the opportunity of realising that their faith is one, although expressed in different forms and traditions. Many bishops and monks went to the Holy Land, animated by *pietas*, devotion to the historical roots of faith, adding an ascetic-penitential dimension to the physical journey.¹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea bears witness to this, when he writes that Bishop Alexander went on a journey to Jerusalem in order to pray there and to see the Holy Land, soon after the year 200. Even in his *Demonstratio evangelica* the Church historian points out that all people who believe in Christ come from all parts of the world to go to Jerusalem – not

⁸ See Derwas James Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: Oxford 1977); Davis S. Wiesen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist: A Study in Christian Thought and Letters* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca-New York 1964), 20-64, here 28-29.

⁹ See Elena Giannarelli, "Il pellegrinaggio al femminile nel cristianesimo antico: Fra polemica e esemplarità," in: Maria Luisa Silvestre / Adriana Valerio (eds.), *Donne in viaggio: Viaggio religioso, politico, metaforico* (Laterza: Roma-Bari 1999), 50-63, esp. 50-53. For the meanings of the East and for the identification with Christ see Franz J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum* (Aschendorff: Münster 1925; reprinted 1972), 258-272; Erik Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (Herder: Freiburg 1959), 15-35.

¹⁰ See Ottorino Pasquato, "Religiosità popolare e culto ai martiri, in particolare a Costantinopoli nei sec. IV-V, tra paganesimo, eresia e ortodossia," in: *Augustinianum* 21 (1981), 207-242, esp. 230-231.

to admire the beauty of the places, as it happened in the past, but to pray on the Mount of Olives. These accounts provided by Eusebius make clear that the wish to visit the Holy Places and to pray there is at the origin of the Christian pilgrimage, so that it actually becomes a concrete expression of one's faith and the answer to God's call.¹¹

Women Travelling: A Problematic Controversy

The situation regarding women's travelling was more controversial. At the beginning women enjoyed more freedom of movement than they would in the following centuries: according to the Gospels, women followed Christ when he wandered through the land, preaching. But to travel was for a woman a breach with traditional customs: in ancient times women had to stay at home; the most popular praise for a woman had been for a very long time: *domi mansit, lanam fecit*, not to mention the good wife of Proverbs 31.¹² Yet it is also true that Tertullianus presents a list of charitable activities and liturgical meetings which took a Christian wife out of her home.¹³ In so doing, women had to leave their homes and appeared in the public, assuming a position quite different from their traditional role limited to the private sphere.¹⁴

In early Christianity, women travel as pilgrims and this condition actually gives them relative freedom to manage their experience of devotion and faith, to follow Christ. If they do not travel as pilgrims, they are more restricted, generally travelling because taken along by somebody, usually a man (a member of their family, their husband), who leads the path, protects them from danger and sometimes is the travel organiser. The number of women among pilgrims is certainly larger than their number among non-religious travellers and this aspect is also central to the emerging phenomenon of pilgrimage and to its spread and modification with its subsequent social, economic and cultural impact. In the 4th century, especially in the Christian tradition, a dramatic increase in the number of pilgrims took place, especially in Palestine, a new phenomenon not only in the religious field, but also in the social and economic ones. Needless to say, the development of this devotional practice gains a

¹¹ See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio evangelica* 6,18,23.

¹² Eva Cantarella, *L'ambiguo malanno. La donna nell'antichità greca e romana* (Feltrinelli: Milano 2010).

¹³ See Tertullianus, *Ad uxorem* 2,4,2-3.

¹⁴ See Giannarelli, "Il pellegrinaggio al femminile", 160.

particular impulse from Constantine, who transforms the features of the city of Jerusalem by building churches and holy sites, finding and locating relics etc., giving it, so to say, a Christian face. Not only did this prove successful, but the example of Saint Helena, Constantine's mother, also contributed to the development: her pilgrimage to Palestine becomes legendary and a part of history. According to an old popular tradition, Helena made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and here she recovered the relics of the Cross.¹⁵ Following Helena's example, further compelled by the well-known legend of the Holy Cross, more and more devoted women started a journey to the Holy Places throughout the ages, increasing the amount of pilgrimages. This provides the background to understand why the presence of women becomes a problem too: in the writings of several important Christian writers, the controversy about pilgrimage in general and on women travelling was born in the 4th century.¹⁶

Gregory of Nyssa,¹⁷ himself a pilgrim to the Holy Land, argues against the superficiality of those who try to attribute a redeeming value to pilgrimage that it cannot have. He disapproves of this for two different reasons. First of all, because the pilgrimage to Jerusalem is not part of the true faith, since it is not referred to in the Holy Scripture, but it is his second reason that is interesting here: pilgrimage is actually harmful to the spirit, especially for those who have chosen monastic life. Their saintly life can be realised only in the total separation of the sexes; when women and men mix, they cannot protect themselves from indecency. But this praiseworthy separation of the sexes is impeded by practical necessities when travelling together. Due to their physical frailty, women cannot go on pilgrimage without being escorted by men, who cannot avoid having direct physical contact with them (for example when helping them to get on and off a horse). Pilgrimage is therefore discouraged, because it

¹⁵ See Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the Cross* (Brill: Leiden 1992); Franca Ela Consolino, "Elena, la locandiera," in: Augusto Frascetti, *Roma al femminile* (Laterza: Roma-Bari 1994), 187-212; Noel Lenski, "Empresses in the Holy Land: The Making of a Christian Utopia in Late Antiquity," in: Linda Ellis / Frank Kidner (eds.), *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Ashgate Publishing: Aldershot 2004), 113-124.

¹⁶ See Leonardo Lugaresi, "'In spirito e verità': luoghi santi e pellegrini nel cristianesimo antico," in: Marino Mengozzi, *Pellegrini e luoghi santi dall'antichità al Medioevo* (Il Ponte vecchio: Cesena 2000), 19-50, here 38-40; Giorgio Otranto, "Il pellegrinaggio nel cristianesimo antico," in: *Vetera Christianorum* 36 (1999), 239-257, esp. 255-256.

¹⁷ See Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistula* 2,5-10. Gabriele Marasco, "Gregorio di Nissa, Gerolamo e gli inconvenienti del pellegrinaggio," in: Marco Mancini, *Esilio, pellegrinaggio e altri viaggi* (Sette Città: Viterbo 2004), 21-37.

is dangerous not only physically, but also – according to Gregory of Nyssa – spiritually because pilgrims must endure temptations and delusions, and live a life considered far from ascetic. Obviously these arguments against pilgrimage increase in significance, when the pilgrims are women, who are considered more affected than men by the risks of adventurous and dangerous journeys. Women are frailer and thus more vulnerable to the risks of long voyages; but they are also considered morally weaker than men and thus less able to resist the temptations, moral delusions and disgrace that almost inevitably are part of a journey. Because of their feminine nature and possible beauty, they provoke erotic excitement and passion in the men they cannot avoid to enter into contact with; hence, attempts at their virtue can be avoided only by great care and modesty, ultimately even by renouncing to go on pilgrimage. Jerome¹⁸ also tries to diminish the importance of religious journeys: what is praiseworthy, according to him, is not the journey to Jerusalem itself, but how a person behaves once s/he has arrived there: *non Hierosolymis fuisse, sed Hierosolymis bene vixisse laudandum est*.¹⁹ Using similar arguments, Jerome tries to quench the burning desire of his friend Paulinus of Nola to go to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. God's almighty power cannot be limited by the narrow borders of a specific place, and in the same way believers are not appreciated by God simply because of the place they dwell in. They will be judged only by their behaviour and lifestyle. The heavenly site can be found in Jerusalem like in any other place, because God's reign is already among us (*regnum Dei intra nos est*). This aspect is illustrated in some *exempla*. Holy men, such as Antonius, have never seen Jerusalem, while Hylarion, who was from Palestine, went there only once and for one day. Yet Jerome also states that a believer, who wants to live a perfect life like Paulinus, ought to look for the solitude of the deserts and not for Jerusalem, a city full of prostitutes, actors and jesters, like many other cities are. From his point of view, pilgrimage should be avoided, because it offers the chance for sin and transgression; it encourages sensuality, promiscuity and lust, and it puts women's chastity to a hard test.²⁰

¹⁸ On Jerome see John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Harper & Row: New York 1975); Ferdinand Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: Sa vie et son œuvre* (E. Champion: Paris 1922).

¹⁹ See Jerome, *Epistula* 58,2.

²⁰ See Jerome, *Epistula* 58,3-4. In his allegorical analysis of some passages of the Holy Scriptures, Jerome associates woman and the weaker sex also with matter (*materia*), explaining that "women are next to material things" (*Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* 2,8).

This view on pilgrimage as an occasion for women, especially young women, to be subject to all kinds of risks, is continued during the following centuries.²¹ In a letter from 747, addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Boniface forbids both lay and consecrated women to go on pilgrimage. He writes that many English women on pilgrimage to Rome lose their way back home, and their virtue as well. From his point of view there are but few cities in Lombardy, France or Gaul, in which one would not find an English adulteress or whore; most of the pilgrims fall into sin and few remain chaste.²² Many years later, Saint Bernardine of Siena, in Sermon 28, also warns of the possible dangers of women's travelling.²³

However, this controversy about women's pilgrimage shows that women indeed did travel and felt all the charm of the *loca sancta*.²⁴ Many noble women were motivated to venture on this kind of journey by their wish to see the Holy Places. In the centuries before the cloistering of women became widespread, a life of devotional itinerancy offers an alternative to marriage and a religious vocation in a society that excluded women from positions of spiritual leadership. In the 4th and 5th centuries some aristocratic ladies, including a number of *continentes*, *virgines* and *viduae*, inspired by their dedicated study of the Bible, express a strong interest for the places and sites mentioned in the Scriptures and wish to see them with their own eyes.²⁵

In Christian literature, there is one document dealing with a woman's pilgrimage written by herself, an authentic letter of a woman written to her sisters in faith, a sort of handbook, belonging to a totally feminine sphere:

²¹ See Giles Constable, "Opposition to Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages," in: *Studia Gratiana* 19 (1976), 123-146.

²² See Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, "Lotta politica e profezia: Pellegrine e mistiche a Roma alla fine del Medioevo", in: *Studi Romani* 52 (2004), 18-41, esp. 21.

²³ See San Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena del 1427*, ed. by Carlo Delcorno (Rusconi: Milano 1989), 252. See also Francesca De Caprio, "Caterina di Svevia a Roma: Agiografia e pellegrinaggio," in: *Donne sante, sante donne* (Rosenberg & Sellier: Viterbo 2007), 103-120, esp. 112-114.

²⁴ The process by which Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other biblical sites came to be regarded as "holy" by Christians in Late Antiquity is discussed by Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (Yale University Press: New Haven 1994), and by Robert Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?," in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 257-271.

²⁵ See Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Edwin Mellen: New York 1986).

the *Peregrinatio Egeriae*.²⁶ Egeria, the author, is a woman, and women are the addressees. This work was composed by Egeria at the end of her pilgrimage, while she was planning a new journey. She is fascinated by the *mira-bilia* and the beauty of the *loca sancta*, and enjoys a series of experiences inspired by Scripture as well as by real life.²⁷ Egeria writes only because she is a pilgrim. She wants to describe the places she visited to her sisters in faith, who would like to be with her in order to experience the same feelings. Thus through her writings, the real pilgrimage of Egeria is linked to a mental and spiritual pilgrimage, imagined by her *sorores*. Not only: in the *Letter* of Valerius of Bierzo, Egeria becomes the protagonist of a wonderful history and is praised for her courage that is superior to that of all the men of her time. Thus, travelling and pilgrimage also serve to illustrate the strength of a woman who measures herself with an enterprise typical of men.²⁸

In fact, another aspect of women's pilgrimage is worth pointing out: pilgrimage can be an occasion for a woman to reach a different dimension. The background for this is provided by the Stoic theory of the "virile woman", *mulier virilis*: a woman who becomes a man, just like a child becomes wise as an old man (*puer senex*), the transformation of the so-called *infirmi* into their opposite. According to Seneca, Musonius Rufus and others, philosophy was necessary for the female human being in order to acquire strength and ataraxy, not to fall into despair, to distance herself from all that was usually defined in Greek as *gynakeion*, typical of women and blameworthy, or *muliebre* and *puerile* in Latin, typical of women and childish.²⁹ The *imbecillitas feminea*

²⁶ For the text, see Agustin Arce (ed.), *Itinerario de la virgen Egeria (381-384)* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos: Madrid 1980); George E. Gingras, *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (Newman Press: New York 1970); John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Ariel Publishing House: Jerusalem 1981); Pierre Maraval (ed.), *Égérie, Journal de voyage (Itinéraire)* (Les Éditions du Cerf: Paris 1982), Sources Chrétiennes 296; Nicoletta Natalucci (ed.), *Egeria, Pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa* (Nardini: Firenze 1991); Elena Giannarelli (ed.), *Egeria, Diario di viaggio*, (Paoline: Milano 1992).

²⁷ See Giannarelli (ed.), *Egeria, Diario di viaggio*, 91 and note 27.

²⁸ See Valerius of Bierzo, *Letter* 1-6.

²⁹ See Elena Giannarelli, *La tipologia femminile nella biografia e nell'autobiografia cristiana del IV secolo* (Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo: Roma 1980), 13-25; Elizabeth Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in: Julia Epstein / Kristina Straub (eds.), *Bodyguards: The Cultural Contexts of Gender Ambiguity* (Routledge: New York 1991), 29-49; Clementina Mazzucco, *'E fui fatta maschio': La donna nel cristianesimo primitivo (secoli I-III)* (Casa Editrice Le

or *imbecillitas muliebris* is more precarious than the general *imbecillitas humana*: to human infirmity, women add the infirmity typical of their sex, and they have to overcome this one at first, in order to reach an equal position with men. Precisely because of the weakness connatural to their body and their soul, women require a greater effort to reach the condition of virtue and perfect sanctity, to which all creatures of God are destined.³⁰

Athanasius of Alexandria's *Letter to the virgins who had gone to pray in Jerusalem and who had come back* offers some further insight into women's being in an in-between space during their way to the Holy Land. It is addressed to female ascetics who lived in Egypt and who just came back from the Holy Land.³¹ The entire community, or a great part of it, visited the Grotto of Nativity in Bethlehem and the holy sites in Jerusalem, Golgotha and the Saviour's tomb. On their way home the virgins also visited Mount Sinai. The result of this long journey is interesting: the women left the Holy Land reluctantly and in deep sorrow. The nuns were suffering because they were forced to leave those holy and unforgettable places, and so the bishop tries to console them writing that tears and sadness are normal reactions resulting from missing those places, but they must then cease. Physical presence in the Holy Land is not necessary, because wherever one lives

Lettere: Firenze 1989); Umberto Mattioli, *Asthéneia e andreia: Aspetti della femminilità nella letteratura classica, biblica e cristiana antica* (Bulzoni: Roma 1983); Umberto Mattioli, "La donna nel pensiero patristico," in: Renato Uglione (ed.), *Atti del convegno nazionale di studi 'La donna nel mondo antico'* (Regione Piemonte. Assessorato alla Cultura: Torino 1987), 223-242. See also Klaus Thraede, "Frau," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* [RAC] (Hiersemann: Stuttgart 1972), 6, 197-267; Klaus Thraede, "Zwischen Eva und Maria: das Bild der Frau bei Ambrosius und Augustin auf dem Hintergrund der Zeit," in: Werner Affeldt (ed.), *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter. Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*. Beiträge zu einer internationalen Tagung am Fachbereich Geisteswissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin 18. bis 21. Februar 1987 (J. Thorbecke: Sigmaringen 1990), 129-139.

³⁰ Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish-Hellenistic exegete, writes that man is *nous*, "mind, rationality", and woman is *aisthesis*, "sensation". See Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Brill: Leiden 1970), 38-41. Clement of Alexandria christianised Musonius's doctrine concerning the equality of sexes, but stressed their different roles in generation. See Giannarelli, *La tipologia*, 13-21.

³¹ For the text see Jean Lebon, "Athanasiana Syriaca II," in: *Le Muséon* 41 (1928), 169-216. The text was analysed by Susanna Elm, "Perceptions of Jerusalem: Pilgrimage as Reflected in Two Early Sources on Female Pilgrimage (3rd and 4th Centuries A.D.)," in: Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica XX* (Peeters: Leuven 1989), 219-223.

one's life, according to Christian doctrine, one carries these places within oneself:

Whilst it is understandable that the virgins should cry bitter tears at parting, their sadness is unnecessary. Physical presence in the Holy Land is neither essential nor crucial. Whoever leads a saintly life, carries the Holy Land permanently within himself. Jerusalem, and that means Christ, is therefore constantly present to the virgins, even in their Egyptian home, as long as the ascetics follow the path of a true virgin both in body and soul.³²

As we read in the text, Jerusalem can also be found in the home of women ascetics in Egypt, providing they maintain the virginity of their body and soul; Jerusalem is present both as an external space and in the interiority of every Christian. In this sense Jerusalem is seen not as a physical or geographical place, but as a spiritual one, so that it is possible to pass from the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly one. There is no need to go to the Holy Places, as long as human life is based on the Gospel's teachings. Athanasius moves the material, physical, concrete pilgrimage which the female ascetics undertook, to another, a spiritual sphere.

Athanasius's text recalls Gregory of Nyssa's thoughts about Christian pilgrimage. In his *Letter 2* he affirms that the only journey a believer must set out on is the one which leads a human being from physical to spiritual reality, from his/her bodily life to life in God, and not the journey from Cappadocia to Palestine. Every Christian must live according to the precepts of the Gospel, and Christ never mentioned a journey to Jerusalem.³³ Furthermore, Gregory writes that the grace of God is the same everywhere: it is not more plentiful in Jerusalem than in other places. The inner person must prevail over the exterior one; if one thinks evil thoughts, even if in the Holy Places, one is as far from having Christ inside oneself as are those who have not yet begun to confess him.³⁴ At paragraph 18 Gregory urges his addressee, Censor, to advise the brethren he leads, that in order to go to the Lord, they have to leave their bodies, their bodily dimension, behind, but not leave Cappadocia for Palestine.

³² I quote Elm's translation of what Athanasius writes to the virgins; see Elm, "Perceptions of Jerusalem", 220.

³³ Cf. Egidio Pietrella, "I pellegrinaggi ai Luoghi Santi e il culto dei martiri in Gregorio di Nissa," in: *Augustinianum* 21 (1981), 135-151.

³⁴ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistula* 2,15-17.

Mulieres viriles: Between Heaven and Earth, Body and Soul

Jerome's thoughts on the role of travelling seem to change,³⁵ when in various letters sent to western Christians from the mid-380s on he tries to persuade correspondents that being in the Holy Land, as either a pilgrim or a permanent resident, provides a unique spatial context within which to authenticate their faith.³⁶ He illustrates the spiritual and intellectual benefits afforded by pilgrimage in a beautiful letter to his Roman patron Marcella (*ep.* 46) in spring 386.³⁷ He promises her that if she comes to Jerusalem, she will find an earthly paradise populated by the best of all the Christian monks in the world (*in toto orbe sunt primi*). He reminds her also of the bishops and martyrs, who came to Jerusalem "because they thought that their devotion and knowledge were deficient and that they had not achieved the pinnacle of virtue unless they had worshipped Christ in the very places where the Gospel first had glimmered from the cross."³⁸ But the main Holy Land attraction, as far as Jerome is concerned, is not Jerusalem, but Bethlehem. For instance, he describes for Marcella what it is like to be in the Nativity Grotto:

With what words, with what expression can I describe to you the cave of the Savior? That manger where he cried as a newborn ought to be honoured with silence rather than with words that fail to do it justice. [...] Behold, in this small crevice of the earth the creator of the heavens was born. Here he was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Here he was seen by shepherds. Here he was pointed out by the star. Here he was adored by the wise men.³⁹

³⁵ For Jerome on pilgrimage, see Pierre Maraval, "Saint Jérôme et le pèlerinage aux lieux saints de Palestine," in: Yves-Marie Duval (ed.), *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient. XVI^e centenaire du départ de saint Jérôme de Rome et de son installation à Bethléem*, Actes du Colloque de Chantilly, septembre 1986 (Études Augustiniennes: Paris 1988), 345-353; Hillel Newman, "Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem: Jerome and the Holy Places of Palestine," in: Alberdina Houtman / Marcel Poorthuis / Joshua Schwartz (eds.), *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity* (Brill: Leiden 1998), 215-227.

³⁶ Cf. Cain, "Jerome's *Epitaphium Paulae*", 113-114.

³⁷ The dating of this letter has been the subject of debate. Georg Grützmacher, *Hieronymus: Eine biographische Studie zur alten Kirchengeschichte*, 3 vols. (Dieterich: Berlin 1901-1908), 1, 51-52, dates it to 389, while Pierre Nautin, "La lettre de Paule et Eustochium à Marcella (Jérôme, *ep.* 46)," in: *Augustinianum* 24 (1984), 441-448, dates it securely to the spring of 386. On Marcella see Silvia Letsch-Brunner, *Marcella, discipula et magistra: Auf den Spuren einer römischen Christin des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin 1998).

³⁸ Jerome, *Epistula* 46,9 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 54, 339).

³⁹ Jerome, *Epistula* 46,11 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 54, 341). See Andrew Cain, "Jerome's *Epitaphium Paulae*: Hagiography, Pilgrimage, and the Cult of Saint Paula," in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18.1 (2010), 105-139, here 114-116.

The kind of wonderful spiritual experience that may be derived from visiting the holy sites and the feelings it evokes in a woman's soul are amply testified in the *Epitaphium Paulae*, composed by Jerome after Paula's death, a work which speaks about the woman's first visit to the sites of Christ's life.⁴⁰ Various scholarly approaches have been taken to this remarkable piece of early Christian literature. It is accessed as the main source of information about the biography of the historical Paula. In a recent book Susan Weingarten interprets it as a metaphorical account of Paula's pilgrimage through life.⁴¹ We learn much about Paula in Jerome's voluminous writings.⁴² He tells of her luxurious Roman life, her wealth and high status. She, who had once always dressed in silks and who had used to be carried about Rome by her eunuchs so that her feet might never touch the ground, who was descended from Agamemnon, and whose husband was descended from Aeneas, had joined Marcella's group of high-born, wealthy Roman ladies, who together attempted to live a life of monastic severity. Jerome became their teacher, expounding the Scriptures for them, until he quarrelled with Church officials in Rome and found it expedient to return to Bethlehem. Paula and her daughter, Eustochium, joined him there, Paula leaving behind the rest of her children weeping on the quay. With this journey, Paula becomes an *exemplum*, from the moment in which she decides to leave Rome, her social position, her son and daughters. Jerome describes Paula's pilgrimages to all the Holy Places in such a way as to have Marcella participate in their sacred travels, mentally, and vicariously, in her imagination. Jerome's account of Paula's pilgrimage is full of descriptions of her great piety and of her deep emotional participation in the past drama that occurred in the places which she visits. He is writing in her praise as did Valerius in that of Egeria. The letter waxes most sentimental about her parting from her family members, describing her as torn between the love of her children and her love for God. But there is also something more. According to Jerome, Paula *nesciebat matrem ut Christi probaret ancilla*: she ignored her maternal dimension in order to stress in herself her being the Lord's servant. This is

⁴⁰ On Paula see François Lagrange, *Histoire de Sainte Paule* (Librairie Poussielgue Frères: Paris 1868); Raymond Génier, *Sainte Paule* (Librairie Victor Lecoffre: Paris 1917); Giuseppe del Ton, *S. Paola Romana* (Vita e Pensiero: Milano 1950), and recently, Christa Krumeich, *Paula von Rom: Christliche Mittlerin zwischen Okzident und Orient* (Habelt: Bonn 2002).

⁴¹ *The Saint's Saints: Hagiography and Geography in Jerome* (Brill: Leiden 2005), 219-265.

⁴² For a study on the letters of Jerome, see Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2009).

significant because in general, physical motherhood excludes a woman from the possibility of being *ancilla Domini*.⁴³

In the subsequent chapters, after having shown her humility, because the woman on her arrival in Jerusalem prefers a humble cell,⁴⁴ Jerome writes:

she prowled all the places around with such ardour and passion that, if it were not because she had to hurry to other ones, she would not have been able to move from the first, and, prostrated in front of the Cross, she dwelled in prayers like if she were seeing the Lord hanging from there. Once entered into the tomb of the Resurrection, she kissed the slate that the angel had removed from the entrance. As if, in her belief, she had been thirsty for much desired waters, with her lips she lapped the place where the Lord had lain (*et ipsum corporis locum, in quo Dominus iacuerat, quasi sitiens desideratas aquas fide, ore lambebat*).⁴⁵

Enthusiasm, emotion and empathy are all present in Paula's soul. It is important that in this context Jerome plays with the metaphorical meaning of *lambere*, "to kiss passionately", and the literal meaning of *lambere* "to lap (up)", "to lick". The object of *lambere* is *ipsum corporis locum*, while the meaning of *lambere* evokes the addition *quasi sitiens desideratas aquas* (see Ps 41:2-3). The spiritual thirst of Paola, *quasi sitiens*, is accentuated by the word *fide*, in opposition to *ore*, which underlines the reality of *lambere*. Jerome speaks of her as prostrating herself before the Cross, almost seeing upon it the hanging body of the Lord, as she prays, and as kissing the stones, the one which the angel had rolled away and the one in the Holy Sepulchre on which

⁴³ Cf. Jerome, *Epistula* 108,6,3. See Elena Giannarelli, "Donne e viaggi nella tarda antichità (Juv. VI 85-87 e Hieron. Ep. CVIII,6)," in: Maria Serena Funghi (ed.), *Hodoi Dizesios. Le vie della ricerca. Studi in onore di Francesco Adorno* (Olschki: Firenze 1996), 233-240, esp. 237-238; Patrick Laurence, *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin: la conversion à la 'vie parfaite'* (Institut d'Études Augustiniennes: Paris 1997).

⁴⁴ Paula chose a donkey for her travel. Melania *senior* had chosen the same animal, as a symbol of humility: see Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 29,12 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 29, 259): *vidimus gloriam Domini in illo matris et filiorum itinere quidem in eo, sed longe dispari cultu; macro illam et viliose asellis burico sedentem tota huius saeculi pompa, qua honorati et opulenti poterant circumflui senatores prosequantur, carrucis nutantibus, phaleratis equis, auratis piletis et carpentis pluribus, gemente Appia atque fulgente; sed splendoribus vanitatis prae lucebat Christianae humilitatis gratia. Admirabantur divites pauperem sanctam, at illos nostra pauperies ridebat.*

⁴⁵ Jerome, *Epistula* 108,9,2. For the Latin text of this letter see Christine Mohrmann / Antonius A.R. Bastiaensen / Jan W. Smit, with Italian translations by Luca Canali and Claudio Moreschini, *Vite dei Santi IV* (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla: Milano 1975), 148-237, here 164.

the Lord had lain. Jerome's letter shows that the holy places provide the opportunity to get in touch with and to live one's faith concretely, along with the spirit and memory of the Lord. Their holiness derives from the historical events that have occurred in them and their function is strictly related to what happened there. Paula's kiss of the Lord's tombstone is equivalent to a kiss of the body of Christ, because this is the place where the body of the Lord was deposited. Through the visible it is possible to enter into contact with the invisible. The same feeling pervades Paula when she enters the Grotto of Nativity in Bethlehem: "[...] once entering into the Saviour's shelter, after having seen the holy lodging of the Virgin Mother and the stable [...] while I was listening, she stated she was perceiving, with the eyes of faith, the child wrapped in arms whining in the crib, the Magi worshipping him as God and the star shining above [...]"⁴⁶

It is important that, according to what follows in Jerome's *Epitaphium*, Paula, in order to express her emotional state, uses reminiscences of scriptural quotations, creating a sort of biblical collage, in which the Bible and the holy places blend.⁴⁷ Paula's choice to remain in Bethlehem was born from her desire to intensify her identification with Christ: she would live there, because the Saviour chose Bethlehem. Paula's *exemplum* proves that pilgrimage acquires a positive value when the physical dimension and the spiritual *iter* overlapped and the one prepares and mirrors the other.⁴⁸

However, Paula had already shown her virtue at the end of her journey to Egypt and her visit to the monks; Jerome's account of this in *Epistula* 108 ends by saying, unconsciously echoing Valerius concerning Egeria: "Her zeal was wonderful – her courage scarcely credible for a woman. Forgetful of her sex and the weakness of her frame, she desired to dwell with her maidens

⁴⁶ Jerome, *Epistula* 108,10.2. For the Latin text see Christine Mohrmann / Antonius A.R. Bastiaensen / Jan W. Smit, with Italian translations by Luca Canali and Claudio Moreschini, *Vite dei Santi IV* (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla: Milano 1975), here 166.

⁴⁷ Paula's pilgrimage, like Egeria's, is a mapping out in time and space, using the Bible to understand the lands of the Bible. But Paula adds to Egeria's knowledge of the Bible in its Old Latin translation and her curiosity about Greek and comparative liturgy, her own knowledge not only of classical Latin but also of Greek and the Hebrew she is avidly studying. See Elena Gianarelli, "Antiche lettrici della Bibbia. Dame, martiri e pellegrine," in: Claudio Leonardi / Francesco Santi / Adriana Valerio (eds.), *La Bibbia nell'interpretazione delle donne*. Atti del convegno di studi del centro Adelaide Pignatelli (Napoli, 27-28 maggio 1999) (Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo: Tavernuzze 2002), 23-48.

⁴⁸ Cf. Cain, "Jerome's *Epitaphium Paulae*", 119-121.

among so many thousands of monks in the Egyptian Thebaid, but returned to Jerusalem.⁴⁹ As we note reading the text, in this situation Jerome does not fail to present the woman as *mulier virilis*, in the act of abandoning the physical and moral weakness of her female dimension, ready to spiritually become a man; in fact, human perfection is considered to be achieved in masculinity, according to both ancient philosophers and Christian doctrine, because in the incarnation the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became a man. Christ is proposed as an object of *imitatio* to every believer.⁵⁰ *Imitatio Christi* leads a woman to overcome her female nature; she becomes as strong as a man, an athlete. When the identification with Christ took place, Paula passed all the constraints of her earthly dimension and physicality in order to live in the spirit. Now she is a spiritual being who possesses a physical body that enables her to live in God's physical creation. Her eyes and heart are opened to a new world and an eternal hope, and like a newborn baby, she begins the process of learning to live this spiritual life that is so foreign compared to the physical one she was accustomed to. Her spirit is drawn to the eternal joys of heaven while her body is shackled to the momentary thrills of this world, as Paul also states in Rom 7:14-8:2.

Christian pilgrimage thus mirrors an interior journey, the imitation of Christ and a commitment to the Christian conviction that an individual is only temporarily on this earth. In a letter to Oceanus from 399, Jerome writes about the travels of the Roman widow Fabiola: "Rome was not large enough for her compassionate kindness. She went from island to island, and travelled round the Etruscan Sea, and through the Volscian province [...] where bands of monks have taken up their home, bestowing her bounty either in person or by the agency of holy men of faith."⁵¹ Eventually Fabiola sailed to Jerusalem. Though Jerome urged her to stay in the East, she wanted to resume her travels, living out of her "travelling baggage [...] a stranger (*peregrina*) in every city".⁵² Fabiola did not take Jerome's advice, but instead followed another path, one that others before her, including many women, had followed; she

⁴⁹ Jerome, *Epistula* 108,14,3: *mirus ardor and vix in femina credibilis fortitudo! Oblita sexus et fragilitatis corporeae inter tot milia monachorum cum puellis suis habitare cupiebat*. Latin quotation from Mohrmann / Bastiaensen / Smit, *Vite dei Santi IV*, 182.

⁵⁰ See Kari Elisabeth Børresen, (ed.), *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1995).

⁵¹ Jerome, *Epistula* 77,6 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 55, 44).

⁵² Jerome, *Epistula* 77,8 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 55, 46).

left Jerusalem and resumed her travels, eventually returning to her home in Rome. Once again, Jerome states that she wanted to escape, that she felt confined.⁵³ The living *exempla* of Paula, Marcella, Fabiola and others demonstrates that women, and even women of rank, could abandon the secular life.

In the ascetic and monastic world this Christian dimension of an in-between space reaches its climax. With the Cappadocian Fathers, the term “philosophy” finds a new meaning: Christian faith and asceticism.⁵⁴ In Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*,⁵⁵ the first biographical writing with a female protagonist, Macrina left the *saeculum*, the secular dimension, and decided to turn to monastic life, a life in the philosophical dimension. Her progress towards holiness was marked by the death of several relatives of hers, a sequence of sorrows she faced like an undefeated athlete, according to the Apostle Paul. She was able to let reason prevail over passion, and turning to rationality (ch. 10), she became an *exemplum* of patience and fortitude (the Greek word is *andreia*, of course). She even became the spiritual mother of her own mother, *didaskalos* for her brothers, and was also compared with a male model of patience as great as the biblical Job (ch. 18). She reached the third and final step of the way to perfection, living like angels, completely detached from physical needs and desires (ch. 22).⁵⁶ Macrina is openly compared to an angel in the moment in which she has overcome common human nature to the point of not feeling any extraneousness for her own death. In front of this, she rests impassible, reasoning according to philosophy until the end, since the matter is incapable to alter the serenity of her spirit: the concept of *apatheia* is connected to the coming closer of her future life.

According to Gregory, both men and women must go beyond their physical limits in order to reach this angelic state of living. But his choice of writing about a woman needs to be justified. He writes: “A woman was the object of our speech, if one may refer to her as to a woman: for I do not know if it is

⁵³ Cf. Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, 300-800* (Penn State University Press: University Park PA 2005), 107-154.

⁵⁴ Cf. Anne-Marie Malingrey, ‘*Philosophia*’: *Étude d’un group de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.C.* (Klinkcksieck: Paris 1961), 223-235.

⁵⁵ Cf. Pierre Maraval (ed.), Grégoire de Nysse, *Vie de Sainte Macrine* (Les Éditions du Cerf: Paris 1971, Sources Chrétiennes 178); Elena Giannarelli (ed.), San Gregorio di Nissa, *La Vita di Santa Macrina* (Paoline: Milano 1988).

⁵⁶ On Macrina see Ruth Albrecht, *Das Leben der heiligen Makrina auf dem Hintergrund der Thekla-Traditionen: Studien zu dem Ursprüngen des weiblichen Mönchtums im 4. Jahrhundert in Kleinasien* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1986).

right to use that natural designation for one who went beyond nature” (ch. 1). There is ambiguity in the Greek text: it is not possible to decide whether Macrina went beyond the nature of a woman or of a human being. Maybe she went beyond human limits, sexual distinctions included. This important passage demonstrates Gregory’s bewilderment of writing a biography of a woman, that is to say of presenting her as a model.

Whether Gregory of Nyssa wrote out of a complex and dialectical sensibility about the relationship of spirit to flesh or whether the pattern found here is rather more accidental, it is clear that the *Life of Macrina* muddies the distinctions between body and soul at almost every turn, asserting both the quasi-physicality of the soul as well as the carnality of spiritual struggle. As problematic as the body is for the author, it cannot be simply rejected as the negative pole of a dualistic equation. Rather, the body remains fundamental to ascetic piety, a compelling site for the production of religious meaning, as well as the source of endless images that document the soul’s curative journey. But at the end of her earthly journey, Macrina is identified with an angel, being able to live in her body as if she already had no body: Macrina and her nuns were completely detached from physical and secular needs.

Now we must consider the figure of Melania *junior*. She was a member of the famous family of Valerii. Her parents were Publicola and Albina, her paternal grandmother is known as Melania *senior*. Little is known about the saint’s childhood until after her marriage at 13. Obedient to her parents she married one of her relatives, the patrician Pinianus. During the seven years of her married life, she had two children who died young. After their death Melania’s inclination toward a celibate life reasserted itself, and she secured her husband’s consent to enter upon the path of evangelic perfection, parting little by little with all her wealth. Pinianus, who now assumed a brotherly relationship towards her, was her companion in all her efforts for sanctity.

In the Greek *Life of Melania the Younger*,⁵⁷ written at the beginning of the 5th century, the unknown writer calls the protagonist a *mulier virilis*; he describes her actions with the Greek term *andragathemata*,⁵⁸ and when she goes to the mountains of Nitria “the very blessed Fathers there welcomed the blessed woman as if she were a man. In fact, she went beyond the measure of her sex, and she acquired a male mindedness, or better, a heavenly

⁵⁷ See Denis Gorce (ed.), *Vie de Sainte Mélanie* (Les Éditions du Cerf: Paris 1962), Sources Chrétiennes 90.

⁵⁸ See Gorce, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, prologue, 90.

mindfulness” (ch. 39). The text creates a *climax* through the use of the Greek words *gynakeion metron*, *phronema andreion*, *phronema ouranion*, which has a strictly female perspective; it should be noted that the substantive *metron*, “measure”, is defined by the adjective *gynakeion*, while *phronema* is used to indicate both a male and a heavenly dimension. Here again, the woman must leave her natural, negative condition in order to acquire the positive value of masculinity; then she may reach a dimension beyond human limits. Interestingly, the Christomorphic state means to overcome both, the status of being a woman, but also of being a man, and obviously goes beyond gender boundaries. Furthermore, the texts’ insistence on women’s virility in relation to their successful appropriation of this spiritual status echoes a claim made frequently in the accounts of the lives of holy women in early Christianity. The paradox of this use of gender, of course, is that it at once underwrites and undercuts the broader cultural dualism upon which it draws. That is, women’s ability to embody the virtues of a virile, courageous person suggests that gender is a malleable category, not inscribed in simple ways in male and female bodies. At the same time, the fact that their ability to embody these masculine roles and virtues is perceived positively, is based on the idea that the two genders are conventionally separated from each other, and that masculinity has a more positive value than femininity. In descriptions of the fragility of the body, the soul is elevated to a privileged status which becomes self-evident over time, when the body becomes the worthy vessel of the soul through a constant process of refinement. Some of the fathers of the Early Church were influenced by a current of philosophical thinking known as “ascetic dualism” ultimately traceable to certain works of Plato and continued in later Greek Stoic philosophers that was also prevalent in Imperial Roman society. In this thought, a strict division between body and soul is created, with truth being an objective reality which philosophers were searching for. This “ascetic dualism” was linked to a psychological model in which reason was expected to dominate the mind, and much of what people always valued, such as beauty, pleasure and emotional satisfaction, was regarded as distraction from the path towards truth. Body and emotions were considered inferior to soul and reason, and virtuous people were supposed to have complete mastery over their feelings in all contexts. There is certainly a tension in these texts between a kind of dualism which understands material life in this world to be of no consequence, and a kind of embeddedness or interwovenness of spirituality and embodiedness which undercuts the simple dualism of body/spirit.

During her earthly journey, Melania left Rome and, passing through Egypt, went to Jerusalem where she consecrated herself to monastic life. Her true journey, however, was a different one and found its conclusion when she arrived in paradise, when she left her physical dimension. After all, we must not forget that previously Melania *iunior*'s grandmother, Melania *senior*,⁵⁹ is described as abandoning the *saeculum* in favour of Jerusalem in a letter of Paulinus of Nola dated 408. This *exitus* is a sort of spiritual gift, where the goal is represented by a *peregrinari a corpore*: it is necessary to leave the body, according to a spatial and spiritual movement on the basis of 2Cor 5:8: "Full of confidence we prefer to be outside the body and live with the Lord." And thus, thanks to her twofold, physical and spiritual journey, Melania becomes an exile among her fellow citizens, and a fellow citizen of the saints.⁶⁰

The sacred has its own space, certainly different from the profane dimension, but still a spatial dimension of this world, reached through an *iter* that ends at the "threshold", an element of distinction but also of conjunction and transit. Pilgrimage then is a kind of dialectic, between the profane space (the long and hard journey) and the sacred space (the church or the *loca sancta*). Being in "between" is like being in a constant state of crossing, restless but also dynamic, in an uncertain dimension, and at the same time in a definitive one. It is linked to questions about the significance of membership and it crosses the space concerning the questions "where you come from" and "in what you recognise yourself". In Christianity women, animated by Christian faith and asceticism, are often suspended between two different dimensions, between heaven and earth, but there is no doubt that at the end they want to reach the angelic dimension, the final step.

El artículo plantea la cuestión del peregrinaje como un estar entre... un viaje entre la tierra y el cielo. Los cristianos son peregrinos por definición y por vocación.

⁵⁹ For the transmission of the Christian faith from mother to son or daughter, see Elena Gianarelli, "Da madre a figlio: Eredità genetica e trasmissione di valori in testi biografici di età imperiale," in: *Filologia antica e moderna* 15 (1998), 27-54, spec. 45-48. On Melania *senior* see Francis X. Murphy, "Melania the Elder: A Biographical Note," in: *Traditio* 5 (1947), 59-76; Antonino Isola, "Melania Seniore nell'*Historia Lausiaca*," in: *Vetera Christianorum* 33.1 (1996), 77-83.

⁶⁰ Cf. Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 29,10 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 29, 257): *navigavit et simul saeculum orbemque commutans urbem Hierusalem spiritali dono, in qua a corpore peregrinaretur, elegit, exul civium et civis effecta sanctorum*. See also Laurence, "Les pèlerinages des Romaines", 228-229.

Si su verdadera patria es el cielo, la vida terrena no es para ellos nada más que una peregrinación o un exilio, su verdadera vida es la vida eterna. La Tierra Santa es vista no como un lugar físico o geográfico, sino como un lugar espiritual, por lo que es posible pasar de la Jerusalén terrenal a la celestial; no hay necesidad de ir a los Santos Lugares, siempre que la vida humana esté basada en las enseñanzas del Evangelio. Sobre todo en el contexto de las peregrinaciones a la Tierra Santa con las mujeres como protagonistas, podemos destacar la importancia de la vida cristiana como estar en un espacio intermedio, cuando estas mujeres se presentan como *Mulier virilis*, en el hecho de abandonar la debilidad moral y física de su condición femenina, y están preparadas para convertirse espiritualmente en hombres. La Imitación de Cristo lleva a la mujer a superar su naturaleza femenina, ella llega a ser tan fuerte como un hombre, un atleta. Cuando la identificación con Cristo se realiza, la mujer cristiana ha pasado todos los límites de la dimensión terrenal y física con el fin de vivir en el espíritu. Ahora ella es un ser espiritual que posee un cuerpo que le permite vivir en la creación física de Dios, sus ojos y su corazón se abren a un mundo nuevo y una esperanza eterna, y al igual que un bebé recién nacido, que comienza el proceso de aprender a vivir esta vida espiritual que es tan extraño en comparación con el físico al que estaba acostumbrada. Su espíritu se ciñe a las alegrías eternas del cielo, mientras que su cuerpo está encadenado a la emoción momentánea de este mundo, como dice Pablo en Romanos 7:14-8:02. La peregrinación de las mujeres cristianas es reflejo de un viaje interior, de la imitación de Cristo y de un compromiso con la convicción cristiana de que un individuo está sólo temporalmente en esta tierra. Para estas mujeres, la peregrinación se convierte en una especie de don espiritual, donde el objetivo está representado por un *peregrinari a corpore*: es necesario dejar el cuerpo, suspendido entre el cielo y la tierra, y para llegar a la dimensión angélica, el escalón final.

Christians are pilgrims by definition and by vocation. If their real homeland is heaven, earthly life is for them nothing else but a pilgrimage or an exile, their true life being eternal life. The Holy Land is seen not as a physical or geographical place, but as a spiritual one, so that it is possible to pass from the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly one; there is no need to go to the Holy Places, as long as human life is based on the Gospel's teachings. Especially in the context of the pilgrimages to the Holy Land with women as protagonists, we can note the importance for Christian life as being in an in-between space, when these women are presented as *mulier virilis*, in the act of abandoning the physical and moral weakness of their female condition, and are ready to become spiritually men. *Imitatio Christi* leads a woman to overcome her female nature; she becomes as strong as a man, an athlete. When the identification with Christ took place, the Christian woman has passed all the constraints of her earthly dimension and physicality in order to live in the spirit. Now she is a spiritual being who possesses a physical body that enables her to live in God's physical creation; her eyes and heart are opened to a new world and an

eternal hope, and like a newborn baby, she begins the process of learning to live this spiritual life that is so foreign compared to the physical one she was accustomed to. Her spirit is drawn to the eternal joys of heaven while her body is shackled to the momentary thrills of this world, as Paul also states in Rom 7:14-8:2. Christian women's pilgrimage thus mirrors an interior journey, the imitation of Christ and a commitment to the Christian conviction that an individual is only temporarily on this earth. For these women, pilgrimage becomes a sort of spiritual gift, where the goal is represented by a *peregrinari a corpore*: it is necessary to leave the body, suspended between heaven and earth, and to reach the angelic dimension, the final step.

Christinnen und Christen sind *per definitionem* und aus Berufung Pilger/innen. Wenn ihre wirkliche Heimat der Himmel ist, ist das irdische Leben für sie nichts anderes als eine Pilgerschaft oder ein Exil, da das wahre Leben das ewige Leben ist. Das Heilige Land wird dabei nicht als physikalischer oder geographischer Ort gesehen, sondern als ein spiritueller, so dass man vom irdischen zum himmlischen Jerusalem hinüber gehen kann. Man muss die heiligen Stätten gar nicht besuchen, solange das menschliche Leben auf den Lehren des Evangeliums beruht. Vor allem im Kontext von Pilgerreisen ins Heilige Land, bei denen Frauen die Hauptrolle spielen, können wir die Bedeutung des Dazwischen-Seins für das christliche Leben erkennen, wenn diese Frauen als *mulier virilis* dargestellt werden, wenn sie die physischen und moralischen Schwächen ihrer weiblichen Situation hinter sich lassen und bereit sind, spirituell zu Männern zu werden. Die *imitatio Christi* führt eine Frau dazu, ihre weibliche Natur zu überwinden und so stark wie ein Mann, ein Athlet zu werden. In der Identifikation mit Christus überwindet die Christin alle Einschränkungen ihrer irdischen Dimension und Körperlichkeit, um im Geist zu leben. Jetzt ist sie ein geistiges Wesen, das einen physischen Körper besitzt, der es ihr ermöglicht, in Gottes irdischer Schöpfung zu leben; ihre Augen und ihr Herz sind einer neuen Welt und ewigen Hoffnung geöffnet und wie ein neugeborenes Baby beginnt sie den Prozess, dieses geistige Leben, das im Vergleich mit dem physischen, an das sie gewöhnt ist, so fremd ist, leben zu lernen. Ihr Geist ist zu den ewigen Freuden des Himmels hingezogen, wie Paulus im Röm 7,14-8,2 feststellt. Die Pilgerreisen christlicher Frauen spiegeln also eine innere Reise, die *imitatio Christi* und die Verpflichtung auf die christliche Überzeugung, dass ein Individuum nur zeitweilig auf dieser Erde lebt. Für diese Frauen werden ihre Pilgerreisen zu einer Art spiritueller Gabe, bei der das Ziel eine *peregrinari a corpore* ist: Es ist notwendig, den Körper zu verlassen, zwischen Himmel und Erde ausgestreckt zu leben und die irdische Dimension, die letzte Stufe, zu erreichen.

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