

REVIVAL AND RESURGENCE IN
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REVIVING THE MEMORY OF THE APOSTLES: APOCRYPHAL TRADITION AND TRAVEL LITERATURE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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IN this essay I aim to consider the association of place with apostolic personae.¹ The imaginative worlds generated between the time of the apostles in the first century and the rise of the medieval Christian world in the seventh and eighth centuries can be seen as an integral part of what we now label 'late antiquity'.² The period of late antiquity, roughly from 300 to 600 AD (from Constantine to Mohammed), is substantively a period of consolidation and reorientation: knowledge from the ancient Greco-Roman civilizations was queried, repackaged, and disseminated; classical literature was copied, commented upon, and imitated; Roman law was collected, rearranged, and declared authoritative.³ What has been less studied in this period is the reception of the apostolic world as a realm of knowledge in its own right.

The theme of revival offers a valuable framework in which to consider this resurgence of devotion. The awakening of historical interest in the apostles and their geographical associations can be linked to the advent of the Christian pilgrimage movement. This movement, beginning in earnest in the early fourth century, appropriated classical genres of writing, such as the *itinerarium* and the *periplous*, for the purposes of describing the topography of the Holy Land and other

¹ This essay takes inspiration from treatments by Peter Brown in *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), esp. ch. 1, and *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, IL, 1981). This essay also expands arguments made in Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: a Literary Study* (Washington, DC and Cambridge, MA, 2006).

² On the use of apocryphal legends in late antiquity, see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: the Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1991), 89–119. See also Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, 'Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity', in Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny, eds, *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron, Late Antique History and Religion 1* (Leuven, 2007), 47–66.

³ On this picture of the intellectual character of late antiquity, see Hervé Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana: les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire), dans l'Antiquité chrétienne, 30–630 après J.-C.* (Paris, 2001).

sacred locales.⁴ The link between this topographical literature and the revival of writing on the apostles in late antiquity has not yet been explored in detail. I hope to offer in this essay some evidence of this link as well as some attempts at explaining why these two Christian phenomena might find their earliest expression in the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

A vast amount of literature – some of it orthodox, much of it heterodox at best – was produced in the aftermath of the first- and second-century writings that came to be included in the canon of scripture. These non-canonical texts of the second, third, and fourth centuries are almost solely devoted to investigating and expanding the memory of the apostles and they often depend on the canonical writings for their imaginative reconstructions. As much as the history and institutions of the classical past, this apostolic inheritance of imagined worlds became a foundation of late antique Christian culture.

At the beginning of the period under consideration Eusebius of Caesarea wrote his famous *Ecclesiastical History* documenting the rise of the early Church: he is, of course, credited with being the first Church historian, and many followed in his vein.⁵ Eusebius felt keenly the importance of the apostolic inheritance. He tried to link the existing patriarchies directly back to the apostles through a line of unbroken succession, a method of research which was integral to later arguments over patriarchal supremacy.⁶ He also connected the question of which books accurately communicated the gospel of the Church with the question of which ones were authentically apostolic.⁷ This has remained a strategy of Protestant and Catholic apologetics until today. Further, some of the books that Eusebius includes under the category 'spurious' (νόθοις) – that is, non-canonical but not necessarily heretical – are apocryphal Acts of the apostles (e.g. the *Acts of Paul*).⁸

A few generations later, in the year 400, the first set of patristic sermons on the canonical Book of Acts was produced by John

⁴ See Jas Elsner, 'The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine's Empire', *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000), 181–95.

⁵ Though (significantly and explicitly), the later historians never attempted to rewrite the terrain he covered; see Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.1 and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.1.

⁶ For example, on the 'Pentarchy', Henry Chadwick, *East and West: the Making of a Rift in the Church, from Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence* (Oxford, 2003), esp. 115–16, 164–5.

⁷ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.24–5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.25.

Chrysostom.⁹ Chrysostom began this series during Easter week in Constantinople and preached the fifty-five long homilies of the series throughout the rest of the year, making it all the way to the twenty-eighth and final chapter of Acts. At the beginning of the first sermon, he chides his congregation for not knowing Acts well, and even for not knowing that it is in the Bible.¹⁰ Judging from comments such as this and from a second extant series of historical sermons, the *Panegyrics on Paul*,¹¹ Chrysostom seems to have considered apostolic knowledge to be confined primarily to the canonical books: he does not produce similar sermons on apocryphal themes.¹² Yet, clearly demonstrated in his exegetical writing is what we might like to call the cognitive value of the apostolic inheritance: that is, Chrysostom and others were stimulated by a revival of interest in apostolic traditions to produce more writing which commented upon and publicized Christian history.

This awareness of the value of the history of the apostles is an important example of revival writ large. It offers an early example of reaching back into the historical past of the Christian Church for

⁹ In *Acta apostolorum homiliae* (ed. M. Geerard, et al., *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, 7 vols (Turnhout, 1974-) [hereafter: CPG], 4426, PG 60, 13-384). See also the study by Amanda Lee Berry Wylie, 'John Chrysostom and his Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles: Reclaiming Ancestral Models for the Christian People', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992. On the manuscript tradition and printing history of these sermons, see E. R. Smothers, 'Toward a Critical Text of the Homilies on Acts of St. John Chrysostom', *Studia Patristica* 1 = TU 63 (1957), 53-7.

¹⁰ *Homiliae in Acta apostolorum*, 1.1. See also the comment in his fragmentary *Homiliae in principium Actorum* (CPG 4371, PG 51, 65-112), dating from AD 387: 'We are about to set before you a strange and new dish ... strange, I say, and not strange. Not strange, for it belongs to the order of Holy Scripture; and yet strange, because perhaps your ears are not accustomed to such a subject. Certainly, there are many to whom this book is not even known (πολλοῖς γοῦν τὸ βιβλίον τοῦτο οὐδὲ γινώσκοντες ἐστὶν).' Chrysostom goes on to note that the book of Acts is traditionally only read during Holy Week.

¹¹ See the edition and French translation by Auguste Piédagnel, ed., *Jean Chrysostome: panégryriques de S. Paul* (Paris, 1982). See also his sermons on the New Testament books of Titus and Philemon, books which very rarely received dedicated treatment in patristic exegesis: *Homiliae in epistolam ad Titum* (CPG 4438, PG 62, 663-700); *Argumentum et homiliae in epistolam ad Philemonem* (CPG 4439, PG 62, 701-20). See also the study of these sermons by Blake Goodall, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Letters of St. Paul to Titus and Philemon: Prolegomena to an Edition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1979). And see, more generally, Margaret Mary Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen, 2000).

¹² Most of the homilies on apostles besides Paul which are attributed to Chrysostom are generally held to be spurious: e.g. the sermon on Thomas (CPG 4574, PG 59, 497-500; see also J. M. Sauget, 'Deux homéliaires syriaques de la Bibliothèque Vaticane', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961), 387-424, at 408) and the sermon on Thekla (CPG 4515; see M. Aubineau, ed., 'Le Panégyrique de Thècle attribué à Jean Chrysostome (BHG 1720)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 93 [1975], 349-62).

inspiration in the present. It also provides a precedent for future revivals. Thus, the theology of the 'patristic period' – one traditional way of naming late antiquity – is often revered in today's churches as promoting the cause of apostolic Christianity. In terms of religious practice, a historian might prefer to point to the cult of the martyrs and the models that the apostles provided for perennially important late antique saints (e.g. Antony). I would like to add to this discussion the example of travel literature, which had an important role to play in the revival of apostolic history.

Travel Narrative and Apostolic Geography

In the year AD 686 (or perhaps 688), Adomnan, abbot of Iona and author of the famous 'Life of St Columba', presented King Aldfrith of Northumbria with a copy of his work *De locis sanctis* ('On the Holy Places').¹³ This work was a long, systematic account in three books of pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land, concentrating in the first book on Jerusalem, but branching out in the second and third books to include places further afield, such as the Galilee, Samaria, Damascus, Tyre, Alexandria, and finally Constantinople. The work was not without some pretensions to style and has been studied in modern times for its Latinity.¹⁴ The Venerable Bede thought so much of the work that he used it as the basis for his own *De locis sanctis* of 702/3.¹⁵ Despite all of these salutary qualities, it is worth noting that Adomnan himself had never travelled to the Holy Land. Rather, as he makes plain in the preface to the work, he was prompted to write his book by the Holy Land pilgrim Arculf, who came to Iona in 683, after having shipwrecked off the coast of Britain.¹⁶ This fortuitous shipwreck provided Adomnan with the raw material he needed to write his work. Less a pilgrimage account than a topography firmly in the vein of Eusebius's

¹³ See the introduction, edition, and translation by Denis Meehan, *Adomnan's De locis sanctis* (Dublin, 1958), at 3–4 for the presentation to Aldfrith. See also the edition by Ludwig Bieler, ed., *Adamnan's de locis sanctis libri tres*, CCSL 175 (Turnholt, 1965), 175–234. For the context of this work in seventh-century Europe, see Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2003), 318–19 and 329.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 and n. 2.

¹⁵ For Adomnan's text, see the critical edition by L. Bieler, CCSL 175 (Turnholt, 1965), 249–80. Peter the Deacon, librarian of Monte Cassino, in 1137 wrote a book on the holy places, based on Bede, Egeria (see below), and a third otherwise unknown text.

¹⁶ Bede tells us Arculf was a bishop from Gaul; but Iona is far out of his way if returning to Gaul from the Mediterranean. On this issue, see Meehan, *Adomnan's De locis sanctis*, 7.

and Jerome's *Onomastica*,¹⁷ Adomnan's *De locis sanctis* evocatively describes how he copied down notes from Arculf onto wax tablets (*tabulae*), which he then set into a succinct narrative (*brevi textu*) written on parchment (*in membranis*).

The value of this literary-historical episode for the present essay is that it exemplifies the vibrant genre of topographical writing in late antiquity and its firm connections to the practice of Christian pilgrimage. Adomnan's *De locis sanctis* comes at the very end of the period under consideration, yet as such it encapsulates a number of principal themes of the topic at hand. First, Arculf is the earliest pilgrim after the Arab conquest of the Holy Land whose account has come down to us. The Arab conquests of the mid-seventh century dramatically affected the social and political landscape of the Mediterranean and are understandably considered by many to mark the beginning of a new age.¹⁸ Arculf notes that the religious topography of urban areas had already changed by the time he made his journey in 679–82: he identifies numerous 'churches' (mosques) of the 'Saracens' (Arabs) in Jerusalem and elsewhere.¹⁹ Second, despite this changed landscape, Arculf's journey illustrates the continued relative ease with which a pilgrim might make his way from West to East via Constantinople in the seventh century. In contrast to so easy a journey – which had been the case since the early fourth century – Willibald of Eichstätt in the eighth century was imprisoned twice by Muslim authorities while attempting to visit holy

¹⁷ There has been considerable interest of late in the work and tradition of Eusebius's *Onomasticon*: see now R. Steven Notley and Ze'ev Safrai, ed. and trans., *Onomasticon: the Place Names of Divine Scripture, including the Latin edition of Jerome* (Leiden, 2005); Susan Weingarten, *The Saint's Saint: Hagiography and Geography in Jerome* (Leiden, 2005); Stefan Timm, *Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen: Edition der syrischen Fassung mit griechischem Text, englischer und deutscher Übersetzung* (Berlin, 2005); and finally, G. S. P. Freeman-Greenville and Joan E. Taylor, *The Onomasticon: Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.* (Jerusalem, 2003).

¹⁸ Though the trend in late antique studies has been to see late antiquity extending much later than previously thought up to and including the Umayyad world, at the least. See the introduction to Glen Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds, *Late Antiquity: a Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), vii–xiii; and more aggressively, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: a Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000), 32–4 (on Henri Pirenne).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28–9, for the Church of John the Baptist at Damascus, partially converted into a mosque. Furthermore, while there is no explicit evidence for this beyond the date of his journey, Meehan (the editor of Adomnan's text) thinks it likely that Arculf was involved in the Third Council of Constantinople in 680–1, which attempted to resolve the question of Monothelism, a question in which the Dyothelite western churches felt they had a high stake. See Chadwick, *East and West*, 59–70.

sites.²⁰ Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, every step of Arculf's journey was imbued with religious significance, principally the significance of places associated with Jesus and the apostles. In Alexandria, for instance, Arculf visited the Church of St Mark, which contained the valuable relics of the saint: these relics were stolen by Venetian traders in 828, just a hundred and fifty years later (forming the spiritual nucleus of today's San Marco).²¹ The tradition that Mark had evangelized and finished his life in Alexandria still held sway in Arculf's time and directed both the journey and the narrative: not insignificantly, Alexandria provides the climax of the second book and marks the end of Arculf's sojourn in the Holy Land.

Writing that was stimulated by the revival of apostolic history came in many forms. Travel narratives are one of the most intriguing because they often attempt to connect that history with places on the ground. The most fundamental aspect of this interaction between narrative and place is that, according to the received apocryphal tradition, the apostolic world was not of a piece: rather, it was segmented into what might be termed an 'apostolic geography'. A particular scene is repeated a number of times in apocryphal literature from the second and third centuries. The apostles receive from Jesus a commission – not simply the general 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28: 18–20 – but specific commissions to specific regions of the Mediterranean and further afield.²² This scene underpins the image of motion out from the centre upon which nearly all the Apocryphal Acts depend: from the earliest *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul* in the mid-second century, to the highly significant *Acts of Thomas* in the third, and to the fourth- and

²⁰ The account of Willibald's travels, called the *Hodeporicon*, was written by his biographer Hugeburc (Hygeburg/Huneberc) of Heidenheim, a nun and member of Willibald's family. See the study by Eva Gottschaller, *Hugeburc von Heidenheim: philologische Untersuchungen zu den Heiligenbiographien einer Nonne des achten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1973). The text of Willibald's *Vita* (Société des Bollandistes, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Manuscripta*, 3 vols [Brussels, 1898–1901 and 1986] [hereafter: BHL] 8931), including the *Hodeporicon*, can be found in Oswald Holder-Egger, ed., *MGH Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887). See also the discussion in Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communication and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), 129–34.

²¹ On the theft of the relics of St Mark, see McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 237–40. On the authenticity of the *Translatio S. Marci* (BHL 5283–4), see *idem*, 238 n. 2.

²² See Jean-Daniel Kaestli, 'Les scènes inventoriées d'attribution des champs de mission et de départ de l'apôtre dans les actes apocryphes', in François Bovon, ed., *Les actes apocryphes de apôtres: christianisme et monde païen* (Geneva, 1981), 249–64. A similar scene appears in Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.1, ostensibly quoting Origen; see Eric Junod, 'Origène, Eusèbe et la tradition sur la répartition des champs de mission des apôtres', *ibid.*, 233–48.

fifth-century Acts which are written afresh, such as the *Acts of Philip*. This is one of many points of contact between these two epochs in Christian literary history – early Christian literature and late antique Christian literature – and is worth exploring in more detail.

This partitioning of the world generated pilgrimage sites dedicated to those apostles who claimed that particular pilgrimage city or region. In such cases, the apostle's presence at that site, either because it was associated with his biography (or hers, in the case of Thekla), or because his remains were *in situ*, provided the motivation for the journey in the first place. I have already mentioned how Arculf went out of his way to visit Alexandria and St Mark's sepulchre. Another site of apostolic importance (in Jerusalem itself) was Mount Sion where a shrine arose to the (proto)martyr Stephen (Acts 7). The 'discovery' (*inventio*) of this site seems to have occurred in the early fifth century, and the empress Eudocia (wife of emperor Theodosius II) founded a major basilica there in 460.²³ Due to her efforts at monumentalizing the shrine, numerous pilgrimage accounts from the fifth and sixth centuries note the shrine of Stephen: for instance, the fifth-century *Breviarius* of the Holy Land lists a shrine (*sacrarium*) on the site where Stephen was stoned, containing the stone (*ille lapis*) which was used.²⁴ Likewise, the *Holy Land Topography* of a writer named Theodosius in the early sixth century claims that the church was founded on the site of Stephen's martyrdom, 'outside the Galilean gate' (*foras porta Galilaeae*), and he names the empress Eudocia as its founder.²⁵ Later pilgrims, such as the Piacenza pilgrim in the late sixth century and Arculf in the seventh, also mention the shrine and emphasize that the stones (plural) were open to view at the site.²⁶

Also in the seventh century, the bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem

²³ Eudocia made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 438 and eventually made her home there after being exiled from the capital in 443/4 (A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols [Cambridge, 1971, 1980, 1992], 2: 408–9). According to Gerontius's *Life of Melania the Younger* (ed. D. Gorce, SC 90 [Paris, 1962], 57–8), the pilgrim Melania the Younger made so great an impression on Eudocia that she decided to visit the Holy Land in person. Melania seems to have initiated Eudocia into devotion to Stephen: both Melania and the empress were present at the dedication ceremony of the original shrine in 439. On Melania, Eudocia, and the shrine of Stephen, see E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312–460* (Oxford, 1982), 230–44.

²⁴ *Breviarius*, 4.93–5 (ed. R. Weber, CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 111).

²⁵ *Theodosii de situ terrae sanctae*, 8 (ed. P. Geyer, CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 118).

²⁶ Piacenza Pilgrim: *Antonini placentini itinerarium*, 22 (ed. P. Geyer, CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 140–1). Arculf: 1.18 (ed. Meehan, *Adamnan's De locis sanctis*, 62–3).

(himself a former pilgrim and traveller) wrote a poem in anacreontic metre on the Christian city of Jerusalem, which weaves together tradition and imagination in its praise of Mount Sion:

And speeding on,
May I pass to Sion,
where, in the likeness of fiery tongues,
the Grace of God descended;
where, when he had completed
the mystic supper, the King of All
teaching in humility
washed the disciples' feet.

Blessings of salvation, like rivers
pour from that Rock where Mary,
handmaid of God, childbearing for all men,
was laid out in death.

Hail Sion, radiant Sun of the universe!
Night and Day I long and yearn for thee.
There, after shattering hell,
and liberating the dead,
the King of All, the Shatterer
appeared there, the Friend.²⁷

While there is no mention of Stephen in this passage, Sophronius's poem is striking for the way it uses a holy place to associate a wide range of textual allusions. From Pentecost to the last Supper to the Resurrection and even Mary's own death, the site of Sion takes on the role of the Christian Jerusalem as a whole, both in its biblical or literary resonance and as a pilgrim's destination. In fact, we can see in the account of the Piacenza pilgrim that the site was, by the seventh century, overwhelmed with associations, biblical and apocryphal alike: for instance, the house of James, the crown of thorns, and the column upon which Peter's cross (brought from Rome) had stood are only a few of the relics associated with the site.²⁸

Mount Sion and the memory of the martyr Stephen, of course, have biblical warrant, and perhaps owe more to a renewed interest in the

²⁷ Sophronius, *Anacreontica* (ed. M. Gigante [Rome, 1957], 125–6); trans. John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 2002), 158–60.

²⁸ *Antonini placetini itinerarium*, 22 (ed. P. Geyer, CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 140–1).

history of the Gospels and Acts – like Chrysostom's sermons – than they do to apocryphal tradition. Looking elsewhere, however, one of the earliest pilgrim narratives also happens to be one of the richest for tracing the value of specifically apocryphal legends in travel literature. Travelling to the Holy Land in the years 381–4,²⁹ the Spanish matron Egeria made her remarkable journey in the generation between the first flowering of Constantinian pilgrimage and the era of massive building campaigns of Eudocia and the fifth-century emperors.³⁰ Like the anonymous 'Bordeaux Pilgrim' before her (our earliest pilgrimage narrative, from AD 333), Egeria's text is dominated by the resonance of the Old Testament and the Gospels. There are, in fact, so many references to Old Testament sites in these early pilgrimage narratives that they have led scholars to postulate an established system of Jewish pilgrimage prior to Constantine's reign.³¹ Unlike the 'Bordeaux Pilgrim', however, Egeria includes extended descriptions of places visited outside the Holy Land.³² In particular, there are two specific incidents in Egeria's text

²⁹ The dates of her pilgrimage were established by Paul Devos, 'La date du voyage d'Égérie', *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), 165–94. For questions of authorship – the text as it stands is truncated and anonymous – see Pierre Maraval, *Égérie, journal de voyage (Itinéraire): introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et cartes* (2nd rev. edn, Paris, 2002).

³⁰ Constantine's mother, Helena, famously visited the Holy Land in the last years of her life before returning home to Rome and dying there as an octogenarian. Legend has it, of course, that Helena discovered the True Cross in Jerusalem, on the site of today's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. While oft-cited, this particular legend has no strong historical evidence in its favor. What we do know rather well is that Constantine invested heavily in monumentalizing the city of Jerusalem and its environs, just before and coincident with Helena's travels. Moreover, immediately subsequent to Constantine's investment comes our earliest Christian pilgrimage account to have survived, the anonymous 'Bordeaux Pilgrim' from AD 333. The text mentions Constantine by name on three occasions, in relation to the following buildings: a basilica on Golgotha (presumably the Holy Sepulchre church, dedicated in 335), another at Bethlehem (dedicated in 339), and a church at the Oak of Mamre (*quercus Mamris*, dedicated in the late 320s). Golgotha: *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 594.1–4 (ed. P. Geyer and O. Cuntz, CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 17); Bethlehem: *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 598.1–7 (ed. idem, 19–20); Mamre: *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 599.3–6 (ed. idem, 20). All these are mentioned also by Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine* and elsewhere and were well known in the Christian East. See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.25–47 and 51–3 (ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, 1.1 [2nd edn, Berlin, 1975], 94–104 and 105–7). See also the translation and commentary by Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999), 132–43 and 273–301.

³¹ See John Wilkinson, 'Jewish Holy Places and the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage', in Robert Ousterhout, ed., *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (Urbana, IL, 1990), 46–53; and also Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993), esp. 318–32.

³² Whereas the 'Bordeaux Pilgrim' follows rather strictly the ancient genre of the Roman *itinerarium* outside of Palestine – only breaking away from that model while visiting

(outside of the confines of Jerusalem) which testify to the role of apocryphal legends in her journey. Their value for the historian is not limited to the social evidence of cultic activity on the ground; rather, they should have a voice in our evaluation of her narrative and in our understanding of the rise of Christian travel literature in late antiquity.

Egeria and Apostolic Legends

The two incidents I would like to discuss are Egeria's visits to the shrine of St Thekla at Seleukeia in south-eastern Asia Minor (modern Silifke in Turkey) and her visit to St Thomas's shrine at Edessa in the Roman province of Osrhoëne (modern Urfa, also in Turkey, further to the east). Both these visits are described by Egeria as being off the beaten path; she emphasizes the special care she took to visit them in person. Moreover, in both cases there is a textual component to her pilgrimage. Stories she has read about these saints motivate her to seek out the places where they are honored. Furthermore, in both cases she either produces a text that she owns related to the apostle or takes away a text to add to her collection. Her visits to these shrines were brief, only a few days at each, and both of them occurred on the way back home to Spain via Constantinople, but they both engage much larger imaginative worlds than their brevity suggests. Egeria's accounts are prime examples of the revival of interest in late antiquity in the historical apostles. Coincident with the birth of Christian pilgrimage in the fourth century, this historical or antiquarian spirit is at the forefront of Egeria's narrative.

Chronologically, Egeria's visit to Thekla's shrine in Seleukeia occurred after the visit to the city of Edessa, but I shall consider the Thekla visit first since it provides a helpful introduction and since her account of Edessa is more elaborate. Thekla's shrine was located along the coast of south-eastern Asia Minor, just to the south-west of Tarsus, the birthplace of the apostle Paul. Egeria notes that she had visited Tarsus on her way to Jerusalem but had not taken the time to visit the shrine at Seleukeia. The Seleukeia visit probably took place in May 384 on her way back to the West.

the most sacred sites in Jerusalem and nearby – Egeria's text could be read as demonstrating an acquaintance with a broader range of travel literature from the ancient world (e.g. *Onomastica*, the ancient novel, etc.). On the 'Bordeaux Pilgrim' and *itinerarium* genre, see Elsner, 'The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*'.

Some background is necessary on Thekla – a woman not named in the canonical New Testament, yet one who had achieved considerable prominence by Egeria's day. According to the legend, Thekla was a female companion of St Paul. All that we know of her is contained in the mid to late second-century apocryphal text entitled simply the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*.³³ This text is romantic and novelistic in style and can hardly be considered a trustworthy source for the historical Thekla, if there was one at all.³⁴ The *Acts of Paul and Thekla* was a best-seller by early Christian standards and contributed greatly to the social formation of a cult of Thekla, which saw its peak in the fifth century.³⁵ About a hundred years after Egeria, in the 470s, the Roman emperor Zeno monumentalized the cult site with at least one major church, and perhaps as many as three.³⁶ At Egeria's time the site was not so developed, but important early Christian writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus had special attachments to Thekla, and Egeria herself notes a significant amount of activity at the shrine. She describes the monastic communities there, both men's and women's, which seem to have been substantial. The women's ascetic community was headed by a woman named Marthana, whom Egeria claims she had known well when she was in Jerusalem. One could suppose that Marthana planted the idea to visit the site in Egeria's mind when they were both in the Holy Land.

Once Egeria arrived at Seleukeia she went straight to the *martyrium* located near, or under, the main church. Upon entering the shrine she said prayers and, as she says, 'read the entire *Acts* of holy Thekla.' When

³³ There is currently no complete critical text for the *Acts of Paul*, of which the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* comprises the middle third. The best edition is R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, eds, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, 3 vols (Hildesheim, 1891, rpt. 1972), 2: 235–72, though reference must be made to the 'critical translations' of E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. M. Wilson, 2 vols (rev. edn, Louisville, KY, 1992), 2: 213–70, and J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: a Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James*, (rev. edn, Oxford, 1999), 350–89. Lipsius and Bonnet made use of eleven Greek manuscripts for their edition, but over forty are now known to be extant. There are also numerous versions in almost all the ancient Christian languages. Willy Rordorf's new critical edition of the *Acts of Paul* for the Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum is thus eagerly anticipated.

³⁴ Even though some have tried: W. M. Ramsay, *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor*, Royal Geographical Society's Supplementary Papers 4 (London, 1890), 375–428.

³⁵ On the late antique cult of Thekla, see Stephen Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thekla: a Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001); see also the introductions to Gilbert Dagron, *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thécle: texte grec, traduction, et commentaire*, Subsidia Hagiographica 62 (Brussels, 1978) and Johnson, *Life and Miracles*.

³⁶ On the archaeology of the hilltop site, see the references at Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, 5 n. 17.

finished she exclaims, 'I gave heartfelt thanks to God for his mercy in letting me fulfill all my desires so completely, despite all my unworthiness.' She stayed for two more days praying and communing with the male and female ascetics.³⁷

I would like to concentrate on Egeria's reading the 'entire *Acts of holy Thekla*' at the shrine. It is unlikely that the text she read there is anything but the famous *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, given what we know about the popularity of this work in the broader late antique world (and given the lack of any *comparandum*).³⁸ But whose text was it: was it hers from home? Did she purchase it in Jerusalem? Was there a library at Seleukeia? All these things are possible. However, there is evidence that Egeria may not have known much Greek,³⁹ and we know from Tertullian that the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* had been translated into Latin at a very early point, perhaps even within 20 years of its original composition.⁴⁰ So, the most likely explanation is that she had a copy in Latin with her.⁴¹ This text travelled so widely in the period that it is also entirely possible that she acquired it on her journey, perhaps after meeting Marthana in Jerusalem and once she knew she would visit the site on her return to Constantinople.

Another way of interpreting this event in Egeria's narrative is that the text itself prompted her visit to the shrine. Whether or not Egeria personally owned a Latin copy of the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, she was clearly anticipating her visit to the site, and she feels no need to explain to her readers (perhaps fellow nuns or lay women in Spain?)⁴² who Thekla was or what she accomplished alongside her companion Paul. According to the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, Thekla was commissioned by Paul to teach and baptize in her home city of Iconium after having narrowly escaped two attempts on her life and having baptized herself in the process. She spent her final days, however, at Seleukeia. Thekla's legend is apocryphal both in the sense of being non-canonical and also

³⁷ Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 23.1-6 (ed. A. Franceschini and R. Weber CCSL 175 [Turnhout, 1965], 66).

³⁸ On the popularity of this work in late antiquity, see Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, 1-14.

³⁹ Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 47.3-4 (CCSL 175, 89).

⁴⁰ See Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, 3 nn. 5-6. Admittedly, Tertullian read Greek and could be reading the Greek original rather than a Latin translation (*ibid.*).

⁴¹ In the absence of any archaeological evidence of a library: *contra* Dagron, *La Vie et Miracles de Thècle*, 33.

⁴² See Hagith Sivan, 'Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences: Some Reflections on Egeria and her Circle', *Classical Quarterly* ns 38 (1988), 528-35; eadem, 'Who was Egeria? Piety and Pilgrimage in the Age of Gratian', *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988), 59-72.

in the sense of belonging to the imaginary worlds of Christian *Acta* from the second century. This legend was conveyed by the text of the *Acts* and thus had a discernable impact on the decisions Egeria made in determining her course.

The fact that Egeria inserted the act of reading this text into her own book says much about the archival value of the apocryphal legends in late antiquity and how collecting the texts went side by side with the experience of visiting the shrines. Travel literature can thus profitably be read as archival, and these two practices of collecting sites and collecting texts are mutually reinforced in much travel literature from the period: as in the example of Arculf, whose experiences are incorporated into Adomnan's text of the *De locis sanctis*, experiences which Adomnan deftly refines and organizes with the help of other texts open at his desk.⁴³ Similarly, Egeria assumes a knowledge of the Thekla legend, or at least access to it, among her readers, and these readers share her experience of reading the text on site through Egeria's encapsulation of this event.

A similar episode from Egeria's narrative is her visit to the city of Edessa, where there was a shrine to the apostle Thomas that contained his relics.⁴⁴ Unlike Thekla, Thomas *does* appear in the New Testament, in the Gospels and Acts. He is named among the twelve disciples in Matthew 10: 3, Mark 3: 18, and Luke 6: 15. He is called Thomas Didymus ('the twin') at John 11: 16 and 21: 2 and he famously doubts the resurrection at John 20: 24–8.⁴⁵ Thomas is, in fact, very prominent in the Gospel of John (e.g. 14: 5–7) and has even been offered by one scholar as a candidate for the so-called 'beloved disciple' (13: 23, 19: 26, 21: 20–4), in place of that title's traditional attribution to John.⁴⁶ The name Didymus means 'twin' in Greek, as does the name 'Thomas' in Aramaic and Syriac (the Christian Aramaic spoken at Edessa). In addition, at a very early point in the tradition the apostle Thomas was

⁴³ Meehan, *Adomnan's De locis sanctis*, 5, 11–18. See also Brown, *Rise of Western Christianity* (2nd edn), 329.

⁴⁴ See the article by Paul Devos, 'Égérie à Edesse: S. Thomas l'apôtre, le roi Abgar', *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), 381–400. Devos is, however, unwilling to allow Egeria's account of Thomas to stand in contradiction to Eusebius's account (see below), thereby short-circuiting questions regarding the reception and availability of these legends (382).

⁴⁵ The motif of 'Doubting Thomas' is a highly successful one in medieval and early modern art and literature. See Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), Pt 2.

⁴⁶ James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA, 1995).

conflated with Judas or Jude, the brother of James and Jesus (Matt. 13: 55, Mark 6: 3) and also the titular author of the small letter of Jude just before Revelation in the New Testament.⁴⁷ This conflation appears to have taken place with only the materials of the canonical New Testament at hand.⁴⁸ Let us now turn briefly to the highly significant extra-canonical expression of Thomas's apostolic persona.

One of the earliest apocryphal gospels (and one which has received a lot of attention recently) is the *Gospel of Thomas*, a text which clearly has a relationship both with the synoptic gospels and with the Gospel of John: its connection to the synoptics concerns the *Gospel of Thomas's* knowledge of 'Q' (the sayings source behind Matthew and Luke). As for its connection with John, that depends on one's definition of the conjunction of religious groups rather inconveniently labelled as 'Gnostic Christianity'.⁴⁹ Conventional wisdom has it that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written in northern Mesopotamia in the second century, after the Gospel of John and in reaction to it.⁵⁰ More recently, some scholars have attempted to argue that the *Gospel of Thomas* is earlier than the Gospel of John, the latter being written in reaction to the former.⁵¹ The scholarly debate is too detailed to go into here, but suffice it to say that, if the conventional model is chosen for the emergence of Thomas literature in second-century Mesopotamia, then the testimony of Egeria in the fourth century that Edessa was a city devoted to Thomas begins to make more sense.

While the earliest traditions about Thomas have nothing explicit to say about Edessa in particular, literature concerning Thomas seems to have been centred on this region from an early point. Edessa is the capital of a large, Syriac-speaking province of Osrhoëne, just to the

⁴⁷ The author of Jude names himself in the first verse and claims he is the brother of James.

⁴⁸ This conflation appears in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, and the Old Syriac version of John 14: 22. See the references in Han J. W. Drijvers, 'The Acts of Thomas', in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson, 2 vols (rev. edn, Louisville, KY, 1992), 2: 324.

⁴⁹ On Gnosticism and labels, see Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": an Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), and Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

⁵⁰ See Han J. W. Drivers, 'East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology', idem, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London, 1984), no. 1: 15-17.

⁵¹ See Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: the Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York, 2003), esp. ch. 2. Compare Most, *Doubting Thomas*, 242-4.

north-east of the province of Roman Syria and across the Euphrates. Thus the *Gospel of Thomas* (surviving complete only in Coptic),⁵² the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (also surviving in Coptic),⁵³ and the *Acts of Thomas* (originally in Syriac and Greek)⁵⁴ have all been read as betraying a specifically Syrian (or more precisely Syriac)⁵⁵ brand of Christianity, one that shares a taste for theological dualisms, ascetic renunciation, and other quasi-Gnostic elements.⁵⁶ This 'Thomas Christianity', as it has been called, remains a debated epithet, and I do not want to minimize the complexity of the problem.⁵⁷ However, the imaginary role of Thomas in Syriac Christianity is strong, and in many ways he becomes the spiritual founder of Christianity both within Syriac speaking regions and far to the East of them.

It will be profitable at this point to give an account of Egeria's experiences in Edessa before exploring the larger significance of the apostle Thomas in apostolic geography. Egeria states that after three years she decided to return home to the West but that, at the same time, God had given her a desire to visit (what she calls) 'Syrian Mesopotamia', that is Osrhoëne.⁵⁸ Her desire to visit the city of Edessa, off the beaten path of most pilgrims, is immediately given *gravitas* through a mention of

⁵² The critical text in Coptic (including an edition of the three surviving Greek fragments) is in Bentley Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 Together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(i) and P. Oxy 1, 645, 655*, Nag Hammadi Studies 20-1, 2 vols (Leiden, 1989), vol. 1. See also the English translation in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 376-99.

⁵³ The critical text is in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex 2*, vol. 1. See also John Douglas Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II.7): the Coptic Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 23 (Missoula, MT, 1975).

⁵⁴ For the Syriac text, see William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols (London, 1871, rept. Hildesheim, 1990), q'b-šlg, with the translation on 146-298. For the Greek text, see Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum*, 2.2: 99-288. For textual issues regarding the original version of the *Acts of Thomas*, see Klijn, *Acts of Thomas* (2nd edn), 1-4 (see also the 1st edn, which has valuable material not included in the 2nd). For an English translation and commentary, see Klijn, *Acts of Thomas* (2nd edn), 17-251.

⁵⁵ The adjective 'Syriac' is preferable to 'Syrian' because what we are referring to is a cultural and linguistic region larger than the political designation of Roman Syria: Syriac was spoken in the fourth to sixth centuries in parts of what is today Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. In ancient terms this large cultural region comprised all or part of the following late Roman provinces: Syria, Euphratensis, Osrhoëne, and Mesopotamia.

⁵⁶ See Bentley Layton, 'The School of St. Thomas', idem, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York, 1988), 357-65. For a contrary interpretation, see Drijvers, 'Acts of Thomas', 334-7, where early Syriac Christianity is not quasi-Gnostic at all, but rather 'sophisticated'.

⁵⁷ See Philip Sellew, 'Thomas Christianity: Scholars in Quest of a Community', in Jan N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas* (Leuven, 2001), 11-35.

⁵⁸ Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 17.1 (CCSL 178, 58).

Thomas. Egeria disingenuously claims that 'everyone' who visits Jerusalem also goes to Edessa and justifies this prominence through the following statement:

[I also wanted to visit Syrian Mesopotamia] for the sake of praying at the *martyrium* of Saint Thomas the Apostle, where his corpse was placed intact. The corpse is at Edessa, [the city] to which our God Jesus, after his ascension into heaven, was sending Thomas. [Jesus] witnessed to this in the letter he sent to King Abgar by the messenger Ananias. This letter is preserved with great reverence at the city of Edessa, where is the aforementioned *martyrium*.⁵⁹

Immediately, the reader of this account is thrown into an entire world of Christian associations: the corpse of Thomas the apostle, a letter Jesus wrote, King Abgar, and a messenger Ananias. The King Abgar legend is familiar from Eusebius, who places this story in a very prominent position at the end of the first book of his *Ecclesiastical History*.⁶⁰ According to legend Abgar was the king of Edessa at the time of Jesus's ministry, but he was ill with a disease, so he sent a letter to Jesus, asking him to come heal him in Edessa. Jesus declined, but promised to send one of his apostles in his stead. In Eusebius's account, Judas Thomas sends the apostle Thaddeus after Jesus's death and resurrection, and Eusebius quotes letters (translated into Greek from Syriac) to prove this story.⁶¹ Thaddeus, one of the twelve disciples/apostles in Matthew 10: 3 and Mark 3: 18,⁶² goes on to heal Abgar and thereby converts the people of Edessa to Christianity.⁶³ According to Eusebius, these letters between Jesus and Abgar were still preserved in his time (c.325 AD) in the 'Archives' or 'Record Offices' (γραμματοφυλακεία) at Edessa, where

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.13.

⁶¹ On the tendentiousness of Eusebius's account, see Sebastian Brock, 'Eusebius and Syriac Christianity', in Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata, eds, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Detroit, MI, 1992), 212-34.

⁶² Also identified with the 'Judas, son/brother of James' in Luke 6: 16 and Acts 1: 13. Could this potentially be a source of the relations (and later competition) between Thaddeus and 'Judas Thomas'? 'Brother' is possible here because in both passages the earliest witnesses do not have a definite article between Judas and James, i.e. 'Ιούδας Ἰακώβου. If accepted, then the apostle to Edessa was essentially understood to be a relation of James, no matter whether that meant Judas Thomas or Judas Thaddeus. For comparison, there is extant a curious inscription from the '40 caverns' at Edessa: Θαδδαῖον τὸν καὶ Θωμᾶν (Devos, 'Égérie à Edesse', 398).

⁶³ Interestingly, in some traditions Thaddeus is not the named disciple but 'one of the seventy (or seventy-two)' from Luke 10: 1 and 10: 17.

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Eusebius says he extracted (ἀναλαμβάνω) and translated (μεταβάλλω) them from the original documents, which were in Syriac (ἐκ τῆς Σύρων φωνῆς).⁶⁴ There is no mention in Eusebius, however, of Judas Thomas himself going to Edessa, nor of a messenger Ananias, as in Egeria's account.⁶⁵

Leaving from Antioch and crossing the Euphrates into Mesopotamia, Egeria arrived at Edessa in April of 384, one month prior to her visit to the shrine of Thekla. Once in the city, Egeria says that she went straight to the *martyrium* of Thomas. There she prayed and read from what she calls 'certain things of holy Thomas himself' (*aliquanta ipsius sancti Thomae*). She describes a large church on the site, built 'in the new fashion', as she says, and she claims to have seen a number of other *martyria* there, among which lived some of the monks present in Edessa.⁶⁶

What is immediately striking about this account is how similar it is to her visit to Thekla's shrine, especially her reading of Thomasine texts immediately upon arrival.⁶⁷ What were these writings? It is possible that they were the famous apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, which had been composed early in the third century AD, probably concurrently in Greek and Syriac versions on our best evidence.⁶⁸ But there are other candidates for Egeria's writings about Thomas as well: I have already mentioned the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, both of which would have been available in Egeria's time.⁶⁹ One important consideration is whether the genitive in her description – *aliquanta ipsius sancti Thomae* – signifies authorship or not. If it does, then the *Acts of Thomas* (as it stands today) can be excluded immediately, since it is written in the third person. For the moment I will assume that the genitive does not signify authorship but should be translated 'concerning holy Thomas himself'.

⁶⁴ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.13.5.

⁶⁵ Elsewhere (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.1.1), Eusebius claims that Thomas is the apostle to Parthia (i.e. Persia). See Eric Junod, 'Origène, Eusèbe et la tradition', 239–40 and 247–8.

⁶⁶ Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.2–4 (CCSL 175, 59–60).

⁶⁷ The similarity extends even to the syntax of the two passages, especially the use of the phrase *nec non etiam et* connecting the notices about praying first, then reading the text on site. Compare Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.2 with 23. 5 (CCSL 175, 59 and 66).

⁶⁸ Drijvers, 'East of Antioch'. On authorship, date, and setting, see Jan N. Bremmer, 'The *Acts of Thomas*: Place, Date, and Women', *idem*, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas* (Leuven, 2001), 74–90.

⁶⁹ The *Book of Thomas the Contender* is available today only in Coptic translation but in all likelihood came from a Greek or Syriac original (or originals in both languages: see previous note).

Let us consider the *Acts of Thomas* first. The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* is a fascinating text: it describes Thomas's success at evangelism, his miracles, and his eventual martyrdom.⁷⁰ However, the *Acts of Thomas* makes no explicit reference to Edessa. Rather, the story takes place almost completely in India or on the way to India. Thomas is the apostle to India, not Edessa.⁷¹ If this is the text that Egeria read at the *martyrium* of Thomas in Edessa in April of 384, then it is strange indeed that she does not mention Thomas's legendary commission to India.⁷² The only two references to Mesopotamia in the *Acts of Thomas* come, first, in the 'Hymn of the Pearl', an elegant, Gnosticizing poem ostensibly sung by Thomas while in prison in India: in the poem the protagonist seems to come from somewhere in Mesopotamia, though Edessa (Urhai in Syriac) is never mentioned; second, at the very end of some Greek manuscripts, the *Acts of Thomas* says that his body was transported to Mesopotamia by some of his followers: the Syriac text and other Greek manuscripts merely say that he was transported 'to the West' (εἰς τὰ τῆς δόσεως μέσην).⁷³

On this basis, it may be the case that Egeria was reading from the 'Hymn of the Pearl', which is known to have been composed separately from the rest of the *Acts*.⁷⁴ The 'Hymn of the Pearl' is written in the first person, which means that the phrase that was noted above (*aliquanta ipsius sancti Thomae*) could be describing this text as a work of Thomas's own. Or, she could have been reading the *Gospel of Thomas*, which claims to be a writing of 'Didymus Judas Thomas', though this work had already come under severe criticism by Egeria's day.⁷⁵ Like the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas the Contender* claims to be secret knowledge imparted to 'Jude Thomas', though written down by the

⁷⁰ On the text, see n. 52 above.

⁷¹ A contemporary reference to 'Judas Thomas' in India is the *Doctrina Apostolorum* of c.250 in Syriac: see Alphonse Mingana, 'The Early Spread of Christianity in India', *BJRULM* 10 (1926), 435-510, at 448.

⁷² Roughly contemporary with Egeria, however, is Ephrem the Syrian, who makes reference to Thomas in India (*Carmina Nisibena*, 42). Ephrem is not necessarily an independent witness since he clearly knows the *Acts of Thomas* well: see Mingana, 'Christianity in India', 450.

⁷³ See Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, 250-1. Egeria is the next writer to mention Thomas at Edessa, and from that point on the association appears very widely recognized (e.g. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.18; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 6.18).

⁷⁴ See Paul-Hubert Poirier, *L'Hyme de la Perle des Actes de Thomas: introduction, texte-traduction, commentaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve, 1981), esp. Pt 2.

⁷⁵ For example, Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.25.6.

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disciple Matthias.⁷⁶ Neither the *Gospel of Thomas* nor the *Book of Thomas the Contender* seems to be the type of text one would read at a *martyrium*: they are mainly comprised of secret sayings of Jesus and do not have much to do with Thomas himself. And of all of these options, only the 'Hymn of the Pearl' and the *Gospel of Thomas* are written in the first person, making Egeria's claim of reading 'certain things of holy Thomas himself' very difficult to interpret.

After praying and reading this text (whatever it may be) at his shrine, Egeria is given a tour of the city by the bishop. He asks her if he could show her 'all the places Christians should visit here': one gets the sense he has done this before. Their first stop is the palace of King Abgar. Inside are, among other things, marble portraits (*archiotipae marmarae*) of Abgar and his son Magnus (Ma'nou),⁷⁷ portraits which Egeria admires for their wise and noble aspect. Next the bishop shows her the river that emerges from a spring under the palace. He tells her the story of a siege by the Persians during which that source sprang up magically when the Persians had cut off their only water supply. The Persians were defeated through the intervention of the letter that Jesus had sent to Abgar. Abgar took the letter to the gate and prayed: 'Lord Jesus, you promised us that no enemy would enter this city.'⁷⁸ Immediately a darkness fell on the Persians and they were confounded. Every time afterwards when an enemy threatened, the letter was produced and read at the gate and the city was saved.

Finally, the bishop takes Egeria to this very gate of the city where the letter was first received and repeatedly read out thereafter. When they arrive there the bishop prays and he himself reads out the letter. Egeria notes that the gate is considered holy: from the day that the letter was brought by the messenger Ananias, no one has been allowed to pass through it who is unclean or in mourning, nor has any dead body been taken out through it.⁷⁹ The bishop also shows Egeria the tomb of Abgar and his family – 'beautiful,' she says, 'but old-fashioned' (*pulchra, sed facta more antiquo*).⁸⁰ At the end of her account Egeria relates one last salient detail, which connects this story with the rest of her narrative

⁷⁶ On the text, see n. 53 above.

⁷⁷ On the question of which Abgar Egeria was viewing, see Devos, 'Égérie à Édesse', 392–400. On the Edessene dynastic name Ma'nou, see the references at Bremmer, 'The Acts of Thomas', 75, nn. 5–6.

⁷⁸ Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.9 (CCSL 175, 60).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.16–17 (CCSL 175, 61).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.18 (CCSL 175, 61).

about Thomas and also with the one about Thekla. She says that she was especially pleased by the fact that she was able to obtain, in her short time there, copies of the letters between Abgar and Jesus. She parenthetically remarks that she already had copies of them at home but that it is much better to acquire them at Edessa. She suspects that the ones she has back home are incomplete because the new ones are longer. She promises her readers – ‘dearest ladies’ she calls them – that they will be able to read them when she returns home.⁸¹

Modern scholars have done extensive work on Egeria’s travelogue as a whole, a text which was only discovered in the late nineteenth century.⁸² However, this aspect of Egeria’s account, the reading and collecting of apocryphal narratives about the apostles, has only rarely been noticed, and no one has taken the time to unpack it at length.⁸³ Egeria’s journey touched upon, at various points, an imaginative world far larger than the pilgrimage journey itself would suggest. Most of the sites she visited, as I noted above, concerned the Old Testament or the Gospels, but the prominent examples of Thomas and Thekla on her return journey should give us pause.⁸⁴ Most important between these two scenes is the act of reading at the shrines. In both cases she produces texts, either locally acquired or part of her personal library. Moreover, in Edessa we see what must have been a natural habit for her (and others), that of procuring copies of the apocryphal narratives which she then took home. If scholars ever felt the absence of a model for the dissemination of apocryphal narratives, Egeria’s account of her own experiences admirably fills that void: we see a devout, no doubt wealthy Christian woman studiously educating herself on apostolic geography, incorporating that geography into her journey, and preserving the knowledge of apostolic wanderings for others. This is the palpable archival quality of Egeria’s narrative, and perhaps we could consider her *modus operandi* here indicative of the mental habits of Christian travellers and travel-writers more generally in the period.

⁸¹ Ibid., 19.19 (CCSL 175, 62).

⁸² On the discovery of the text and subsequent editions, see Maraval, *Égérie*, ch. 2.

⁸³ An exception is Paul Devos’s article ‘Égérie à Édesse’, on which see n. 44 above.

⁸⁴ Sivan only gives passing attention to the sites outside of Jerusalem: ‘It would appear, then, that the prime aim of pilgrimage from the circle’s point of view was to relive established biblical episodes rather than those narrated in apocryphal writings’ (‘Egeria and her Circle’, 530). The two categories should not be so readily separated, either as destinations for pilgrimage or as literary devices.

Thomasine Christianity and the Geographical Consequences of Revival

I noted above two by-ways among the legends of the apostle Thomas to which Egeria does not refer in her narrative. The first is the story of the apostle Thaddeus (or Addai in Syriac) coming to Edessa and converting its people, having been sent by Thomas in Jerusalem. Egeria, by way of contrast, talks about an Ananias bringing the letter and she claims that Thomas himself came to Edessa, having been sent by Jesus, and is responsible for the conversion of the city. The second by-way which Egeria does not seem to know is the story that Thomas was the apostle to India, which is contained in the third-century *Acts of Thomas*. The *Acts of Thomas* were very popular in late antiquity and have consequently survived in almost every ancient Christian language (Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic, and Georgian) in addition to its original Greek and Syriac.⁸⁵ I shall consider the afterlife of these two stories in order.

Thaddeus takes on an important apostolic role of his own within Syriac Christianity. Interestingly, this career is kept entirely separate from Thomas traditions, such as the one Egeria knew at Edessa in 384.⁸⁶ Shortly after Egeria's visit, around AD 400, a text was written, probably at Edessa itself, called the *Teaching of Addai* (usually called by its Latin title, the *Doctrina Addai*). The *Doctrina Addai* mainly comprises a long sermon by Addai to the people of Edessa, performed at the request of King Abgar following his conversion. In the course of the sermon, Addai references a number of important apocryphal legends. For instance, he relates a version of the famous Mandyllion story that a likeness of Jesus was supernaturally imprinted on a cloth. In later tradition copies of the Mandyllion (literally, 'handkerchief') were venerated and used as prophylactic devices for cities (not unlike Abgar's letter in Egeria's narrative).⁸⁷ Addai also makes mention of the tradition that it was not Helena, the mother of Constantine, who discovered the True Cross on Golgotha, but it was Protonike, a fictitious wife of Claudius

⁸⁵ The most recent critical editions of these versions are collected in Klijn, *Acts of Thomas* (2nd ed.), 4 nn. 6–11.

⁸⁶ See n. 62 above.

⁸⁷ See Averil Cameron, 'The History of the Image of Edessa: the Telling of a Story', in Cyril Mango and Omeljan Pritsak, eds, *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševcenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 80–94 [reprinted in Averil Cameron, *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1996), no. XI].

Caesar, emperor from 41–54 AD.⁸⁸ In addition to these stories, the *Doctrina Addai* established a legend about Thaddeus – very influential in its own right – which was further elaborated in later saints' 'Lives': thus, the sixth-century Greek 'Acts of Thaddeus' and the Syriac 'Acts of Mari' build their narratives onto the core of the *Doctrina Addai* story.⁸⁹

One way of interpreting these apocryphal traditions about Thaddeus is that they represent a deliberate, creative attempt to provide a legitimate history for ecclesiastical institutions already in existence on the ground. Egeria's travel narrative sufficiently proves this interpretation in her description of the remarkable amount of building and monastic activity at Edessa. Of course, Egeria is aware only of the Thomas tradition and not that of Thaddeus. But even in Thomas's case we see legitimating histories being fabricated (or perhaps, embellished or elaborated) based on some lost kernel of truth. As noted above, in the *Acts of Thomas* the apostle finds his way to India. At first, when a post-resurrection Jesus tells him to go there, he refuses, like Jonah and other Old Testament prophets. So Jesus sells him into slavery and Thomas gets taken by a merchant down the Red Sea and over to India. Along the way he persuades elite couples not to consummate their marriages.⁹⁰ Once in India Thomas performs many miraculous acts and converts many to the Christian faith. In some scenes Jesus poses as Thomas and works miracles himself; Thomas too is mistaken for Jesus. These scenes are drawing on the 'Twin' motif of Thomasine literature: not only was Judas Thomas supposed to be the brother of Jesus, he was also (according to apocryphal tradition) supposed to be his identical twin (*alter Christus*). Such recognition scenes introduce elements of

⁸⁸ See George Howard, *The Teaching of Addai* (Chico, CA, 1981), 21–35 (with facing Syriac text). On the Protonike legend, see Han J. W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross: the Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac* (Leuven, 1997), esp. 14–16. The legend exists only in extant Syriac and Armenian texts (appearing first in the *Doctrina Addai*) and is thus thought not to have travelled outside these traditions.

⁸⁹ Greek *Acts of Thaddeus*: Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum*, 1: 273–8. Syriac *Acts of Mari*: see Amir Harrak, *The Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle* (Atlanta, GA, 2005). For a separate tradition about Thaddeus, see the Armenian *Acts and Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Thaddeus* in S. C. Malan, *The Life and Times of S. Gregory the Illuminator* (London, 1868), 66–98.

⁹⁰ On 'encratism' and the *Acts of Thomas*, see Han J. W. Drijvers, 'Facts and Problems: Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity', idem, *East of Antioch*, no. VI: 170–1. The *Acts of Thomas* was adopted by the Manichaeans as a foundational text, along with other apocryphal Acts: see P.-H. Poirier, 'Les Acts de Thomas et le manichéisme', *Apocrypha* 9 (1998), 263–87.

mystery and comedy to the narrative, in addition to providing a visual reference to distinctively Syriac theological underpinnings.⁹¹

It is important to note that both the third-century *Acts of Thomas* and the fifth-century *Doctrina Addai* are travel narratives in their own right. They thus amount to important instances in late antiquity of the blending of genres.⁹² Just as Egeria travels to Edessa to see the shrine of Thomas and to obtain the Abgar letters, Thomas before her travelled to Edessa on a mission from Jesus himself. I would like to suggest that Egeria's familiarity with the apocryphal Acts affected the way she travelled and the way she wrote about her travels. She was following in the footsteps of the apostles, legendary or not, and she sought out documents of legitimization both for their travels in history and her contemporary travels. The same effect can be seen in her account of Thekla, where she recognizes the significance of Seleukeia for Thekla and the significance of Thekla for the region: as at Edessa, she makes a special trip out of her way to visit the shrine, and her primary act of worship on site is to read the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*. This apocryphal document substantiates her worship. And her own literary product perpetuates the cycle of travel, writing, and archives.

By way of conclusion, I would like to point briefly to the real history of Syriac Christianity in India. In the mid-sixth century an Alexandrian trader called Cosmas Indicopleustes (not his real name) wrote a lengthy account, called the *Christian Topography*, of journeys from Egypt down the Red Sea, around the Persian Gulf, and even to Taprobane (Sri Lanka, Ceylon).⁹³ His primary motive was to confute the Greek tradition on the point that the earth was spherical: he preferred the idea that

⁹¹ On the theological resonance of this theme, see Drijvers, 'East of Antioch', esp. 15–16: 'I believe that Judas the twin brother of the Lord is the most perfect representative of the state of salvation, which implies an identification with the Savior, God's Word and Spirit dwelling in a human being. Who is more like the Lord than His own twin brother?'

⁹² The blending of genres and experimentation with form can be read as definitive of late antique literature, see Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, ed., *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism* (Aldershot, 2006), esp. introduction.

⁹³ Critical edition is Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie Chrétienne*, 3 vols (Paris, 1968–73). See also eadem, *La Topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes: théologie et science au VI^e siècle* (Paris, 1962). The name 'Cosmas Indicopleustes' (i.e., 'Cosmas the India-sailor') was not attached to this work until the eleventh century. The author was intentionally anonymous, calling himself only 'a Christian'. On questions of authorship and date, see the introduction to Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustes*. As Cosmas notes in the prologue (1–2) to the *Topography*, he wrote two other geographical works, both of which are now lost: these are the *Geography* dedicated to a Constantine, and an *Astronomy* dedicated to a deacon Homologos.

the earth was flat and that the universe was shaped like the Mosaic Tabernacle.⁹⁴ Beyond his polemical eccentricities, Cosmas was an accurate observer of flora, fauna, and urban life along his route. He purports to describe Christian churches on the island of Taprobane, off the coast of India.⁹⁵ Cosmas himself had become a Christian, a 'Nestorian' Christian, under the tutelage of the *katholikos* of the Persian Church, Mar Aba (540–552), when Aba visited Alexandria.⁹⁶ The churches Cosmas describes in Taprobane are 'Persian' (i.e. 'Nestorian') and 'under a Persian bishop', and he claims there are also Persian churches on the west coast of India, in cities named *Male* (Malabar) and *Kalliana*.⁹⁷ There is no embellishment of Cosmas's narrative with apocryphal stories and it even seems that he does not know the tradition that Thomas proselytized in India, which is most surprising considering his own conversion to the 'Nestorian' Church, what we today call the Church of the East (or the Assyrian Church of the East).⁹⁸

What is striking about Cosmas's claims in Sri Lanka and India is that there truly seem to have been Church of the East churches there from at least the sixth century. In fact, we have archaeological evidence from the period which confirms Cosmas's account: 'Nestorian' tomb inscrip-

⁹⁴ See, e.g., *Christian Topography*, 2.35 (ed. Wolska-Conus, 1: 340–1). Cosmas's principal interlocutor was John Philoponus, a Miaphysite theologian, philosopher, and cosmologist in the sixth century. See Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès*, 40–1. Philoponus's *De opificio mundi* was a direct retaliation to the *Topography*. See Carl William Pearson, 'Scripture as Cosmology: Natural Philosophical Debate in John Philoponus' Alexandria', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1999.

⁹⁵ Cosmas's discussions of Persian churches in Taprobane are at 3.65 (ed. Wolska-Conus, 1: 502–5) and 11.14 (342–5). It is not absolutely certain from the *Christian Topography* whether Cosmas travelled himself to India and Taprobane or whether he was relying on others' accounts: see Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès*, 17. On Taprobane, including Cosmas's description, see D. P. M. Weerakkody, *Taprobane: Ancient Sri Lanka as Known to Greeks and Romans* (Turnhout, 1997).

⁹⁶ On Cosmas and Mar Aba, whom Cosmas calls 'Patrikios', see the *Christian Topography* 2.2 (ed. Wolska-Conus, 1: 306). On the Antiochene tradition of theology to which Cosmas assented, see Wolska, *La Topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustès* (Paris, 1962), 63–85 and Adam H. Becker, 'The Dynamic Reception of Theodore of Mopsuestia in the Sixth Century: Greek, Syriac, and Latin', in Johnson, ed., *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity*, 29–47.

⁹⁷ *Christian Topography*, 3.65 (ed. Wolska-Conus, 1: 502–3). He also describes such Persian churches on Dioskorides (Socotra, in the Gulf of Aden): *ibid*.

⁹⁸ The label 'Nestorian' is today understood to be pejorative and historically misleading: see Sebastian P. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: a Lamentable Misnomer', in J. F. Coakley and K. Parry, eds, *The Church of the East: Life and Thought*, *BJRULM* 78 (1996), 23–35. For the history of the Church of the East, see Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: a Concise History*, trans. Miranda G. Henry (London, 2003), and Christophe Baumer, *The Church of the East: an Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London, 2006).

tions from India have been dated as early as AD 547, contemporary with Cosmas's narrative.⁹⁹ A ancient tradition competing with the Thomasine one is that the apostle Bartholomew was the first one to reach India. Eusebius relates this and tells us that a teacher of Clement of Alexandria, Pantaenus, went to India at the end of the second century and found Christians there with copies of Matthew's gospel written in Hebrew, which Bartholomew had given them.¹⁰⁰ Several scholars have suggested, however, that Pantaenus's 'India' was actually Roman Arabia Felix, or the Yemen, rather than today's India.¹⁰¹ No matter the precise location of these apostles' supposed wanderings, it is impressive that Christian churches were flourishing so far outside of the Roman empire in the sixth century. And, of course, Syriac Christianity flourishes in India today, especially in the south-west, along the Malabar coast, in the northern portion of the state of Kerala.¹⁰²

I would suggest that the revival of interest in apostolic history and the movements of Christian peoples should be read in tandem as part of a larger movement in late antique history. The link between such a revival and the travels of real Christians – whether Egeria's pilgrimage or Christians settling in India – are the apocryphal narratives from the apostolic past. Egeria and the Thomasine Christians of India are linked through a shared reliance on what I have called 'apostolic geography'. Though separated by a couple of centuries, Egeria and the late antique Christians of southern India both rely on the wanderings of the apostle Thomas for a sense of identity and connection to the apostolic commission. Furthermore, their commitment to the human figures of apostolic history can be linked to other texts from the period, including the sermons of Chrysostom, multiple pilgrimage narratives and breviaries,

⁹⁹ Weerakkody, *Taprobane*, 134–5.

¹⁰⁰ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.10–11. For a separate tradition about Bartholomew (though one which mentions Thomas, India, and Thaddeus), see the Armenian *Acts and Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew* in Malan, *S. Gregory the Illuminator*, 99–103.

¹⁰¹ See Mingana, 'Christianity in India', 449. See also Albrecht Dihle, 'The Conception of India in Hellenistic and Roman Literature', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 190 (1964), 15–23, for a different view, i.e. that Christian writers had a rather precise knowledge of (real) Indian geography. For example, 22–3: 'In early Christian literature the conception of India definitely changed and was adapted to really existing conditions. We are able to prove this change not only by comparing the different size and shape given to India in pagan and Christian literature but also by noting the differences in the ethnographical details attached to the general idea of India.'

¹⁰² On the later history of the Syriac churches in India, see Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas: an Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (rev. edn, Cambridge, 1982).

and of course the apocryphal legends themselves, which continued to be copied, translated, and written afresh in late antiquity. This layering of texts and legends is highly characteristic of late antiquity and provides a new context for the movement of travellers around the Mediterranean and further east, through Persia, India, and beyond.

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