

## HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE AND WESTERN AUDIENCES: SOME REFLECTIONS ON EGERIA AND HER CIRCLE

In the vast literature centering on the *Itinerarium Egeriae* (*IE*) there is a serious lacuna.<sup>1</sup> No attempt has been made to analyse the circle of readers to whom this remarkable document was addressed and for whose sake Egeria recorded so faithfully every detail of her journey. Yet if a full understanding of the *IE* is to be achieved, some definition of the circle of Egeria and of its relations with the pilgrim is essential. In other words, who in the West at that point in the late fourth century,<sup>2</sup> would have been so interested in Holy Land pilgrimage as to read attentively such a personal account as the *IE*? The following is a tentative essay to gauge the concerns, expectations and cultural background of Egeria's immediate circle of readers through her own emphasis on various aspects of her pilgrimage. In addition, the investigation will try to assess the place of pilgrimage in the life of western communities and the value of communications between the pilgrim on the road and the society back at home.

The *IE* was written as an open letter from a person to an audience never named but invariably addressed in affectionate terms.<sup>3</sup> It falls into two distinct parts, each with its own narrative characteristics and different topics. The first is an account in the first person of the author's journey in the holy places; the second is a report in the third person of the liturgical ceremonies in Jerusalem throughout the year. This combination is unique. In the earlier section Egeria directly addresses her readers, calling their attention to various points. In the second, she only mentions her audience twice, once at the very beginning, and then at the opening of an account of the baptismal process in the Holy City. The work encompasses a wide variety of episodes, from visits to localities to conversations with bishops and descriptions of religious rites. It can hardly have been conceived as a conventional guidebook to potential pilgrims, but it may well have been written with a wider audience than its immediate recipients in mind.<sup>4</sup>

At various stages along her route, Egeria directs the attention of her audience to some points which apparently required special explanations. Thus when tracing the biblical Exodus, she described the localities in the Sinai in such detail that she hastened to add: 'it was not too much to describe all these things one by one since

<sup>1</sup> Up to 1979, the list included about three hundred items, M. Starowieyski, 'Bibliografia Egeriana', *Augustianum* 19 (1979), 297–318. Since then additions have included a revised edition of J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem and Warminster, 1981); and P. Maraval, *Égérie, Journal de voyage* (SCh 296) (Paris, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> The date accepted here for the journey, namely A.D. 381 to 384, was established by P. Devos, 'La date du voyage d'Égérie', *AB* 85 (1967), 165–94.

<sup>3</sup> The affectionate titles include *Dominae venerabiles sorores*, *affectio vestra*, *dominae venerabiles*, *dominae sorores*, *dominae lumen meum*. As late as the 470s the adjective *venerabilis* could have been applied to both clerics and laymen (cf. Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 6.2.1 where a religious laywoman is called *venerabilis matrona* and even *sancta*). In the late fourth century Paulinus of Nola used *sancta parens*, *soror nostra venerabilis* for Bassula, Sulpicius Severus' mother-in-law, who was very religious and even an ascetic but not a nun (*Ep.* 31.1; 5.19).

<sup>4</sup> Note the striking anonymity of the numerous persons met on the way, with the single exception of Marthana (23.3). The *IE* was written and sent from Constantinople (*IE* 23.10).

so much could not be remembered. Rather when your affection reads the sacred books of Moses, you will see more fully all the events there.<sup>5</sup> This is a key sentence both for the understanding of the purpose of the document and for a perception of the interests of its readers. In the first place, it underlines the importance of the *lectio divina* in the life of the Christian communities in the West.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it illustrates an attitude of some believers to the text itself. In order to come to grips with the Scriptures, Egeria's audience used a visual stimulus derived from a description of a pilgrimage to biblical places.

A pilgrimage to the Holy Land was a serious undertaking which entailed economic as well as spiritual preparations. It seems reasonable to assume that in planning her journey, both Egeria and her circle pondered long over the Bible, for she knew exactly what she wanted to see and asked to be shown accordingly.<sup>7</sup> She was also willing, like most other pilgrims, to accept the stories of her local guides without questioning their authenticity or credibility. It is therefore all the more curious to read one of the special remarks addressed directly to the readers which she appended as her own conclusion to the guided tour of the Sinai: 'I want your affection to believe me that, so far as I could perceive, the children of Israel proceeded in such a way that as much as they went to the right, so much they retreated to the left; and as much again as they were marching forward, so much they retreated back, and so they made their very route until they reached the Red Sea.'<sup>8</sup> A rather unusual example of scepticism on the part of a pilgrim.

Several more of Egeria's remarks merit attention. On a visit to the Dead Sea Egeria was naturally interested to learn the whereabouts of the famous pillar of salt (Lot's wife). Commenting on the locality, she says: 'Believe me, venerable ladies, that the column itself is not visible now, only the place itself is shown; the column itself is said to have been covered by the Dead Sea. Surely when we saw the place, we did not see any column, and so about this matter I cannot mislead you.'<sup>9</sup> The implication is that Egeria and her circle not only preplanned her itinerary carefully according to the Bible, but also may have read other accounts of pilgrimage. For both Jewish and Christian traditions accepted the existence of the pillar as a fact, and two sixth-century pilgrims testify to the sight of the column.<sup>10</sup> Egeria's concern to assure her readers that no pillar was to be seen, and her repetition of this point, are revealing.

That the trip had been preplanned in conjunction with her circle and their reading of the Bible also emerges from Egeria's explanation of the excursion to Edessa. 'I want your affection to believe me that there is not a Christian who has come to the holy places, namely to Jerusalem, who does not also go there (to Edessa) for the sake of praying.'<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she and her immediate audience considered anything outside

<sup>5</sup> IE 5.8. On the journey in the Sinai, IE 1.1–6.1 with Valerius, *Ep.* 2 (ed. M. C. Diaz y Diaz in *SCh* 296, pp. 323–49).

<sup>6</sup> In general, D. Gorce, *La lectio divina. Des origines du cénobitisme à Saint Benoît et Cassiodore*, Vol. I: *Saint Jérôme et la lecture sacrée dans le milieu ascétique romain* (Paris, 1925).

<sup>7</sup> IE 3.7; 5.12; 7.1 and *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> IE 7.3. Pilgrims were apparently also prepared to be sceptical about the fountain of John on the way to Carneas. The guide there provided 'archaeological' proof, Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> IE 12.7.

<sup>10</sup> Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* 20 (CC 175.122); Antoninus Placenti, *Itinerarium* 15 (CC 175.137); Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, pp. 219–20.

<sup>11</sup> IE 17.2. P. Devos, 'Égérie à Édesse. S. Thomas l'apôtre. Le roi Abgar', *AB* 85 (1967), 381–400. In spite of the lengthy description of her visit, there is no mention of the famed Ephrem who died just a few years before her arrival.

the biblical narrative of secondary importance. Yet, Egeria's readers must have been aware of the importance of Edessa at least in one of the apocryphal stories connected with Christ. For they had a copy of the famous correspondence between Christ and Abgar, and if Egeria ever returned they would have another copy, longer than this, to compare with it.<sup>12</sup> 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.

The most unusual part of the *IE* is the lengthy description of the liturgical year in Jerusalem, which, in the present state of the manuscript, occupies the same length as the narrative of the actual pilgrimage. Though Egeria does not state the purpose of describing the liturgy, she is certain that her readers will find it of the greatest interest. She even feels 'obliged' to include this part, informing her audience of the manner and contents of the religious ceremonies which take place in Jerusalem day by day: 'So that your affection should know what is the daily process in the holy places day by day, it has become my duty to inform you from my knowledge, because you would be glad to know these things.'<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the recital of the liturgical events Egeria never tires of emphasizing the appropriateness of the prayers and readings of the day.<sup>14</sup> This was the singular contribution of Cyril of Jerusalem to the development of liturgy there. So often does she call attention to this feature that the inescapable conclusion is that the opposite existed in the West, and that in Egeria's community of origin the words used on a given occasion did not necessarily match the contents of the feast. Pilgrims like Egeria and, through her report, Christians such as the members of her audience, surely contributed to a diffusion of knowledge about the liturgical processes in Jerusalem, which resulted in the introduction of similar patterns adapted to western needs.<sup>15</sup>

Among the rituals which Egeria witnessed in the Holy Land, the process of baptism was of central interest for her readers. This is evident not only from the length of the description, but also from several remarks which Egeria intersperses in it. In the first place, she feels 'obliged' to inform her readers about the process while stressing its inner logic: 'lest you think, lady-sisters, that this is done without reason, it was my duty to explain.'<sup>16</sup> Then, she draws attention to strangers, like herself, who seek baptism, but for whom the required testimony of good character might not be easily acquired.<sup>17</sup> Then she adds that baptismal learning is called catechesis, a term apparently unknown to her circle.<sup>18</sup>

Above all, there is an underlying emphasis on the learning experience as an essential

<sup>12</sup> *IE* 19.19. J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 172f. D. J. Lane, 'Pervenimus Edessam. The Origins of a Great Christian Center outside the Familiar Mediaeval World', *Florilegium* 3 (1981), 104–12.

<sup>13</sup> *IE* 24.1. On the visual reliving of the Bible at the holy places, E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 83ff. F. Parente, 'La conoscenza della terra santa come esperienza religiosa dell'occidente cristiano del IV S. alla crociate', in *Populi e paesi* (Sett. di studi del centri ital... Spoleto, 1981) (Spoleto, 1983), 231–316.

<sup>14</sup> *IE* 29.2; 29.5; 31.1; 32.1; 35.3.4; 36.1.3.6; 39.5; 40.1.2; 43.5.6.9; 47.5.

<sup>15</sup> Eastern influences have been identified in the case of the Gallic or Gallican liturgy, though the date of their introduction is undecided between supporters of an early one (2nd–3rd century) and those who prefer a date in the fifth century. For bibliography and a brief summary, M.–J. Delage in *SCh* 175, pp. 158–9. On the importance of returning pilgrims, Hunt, op. cit. (n. 13), p. 126. For an attempt to assess the influence of Holy Land liturgy on triumphal decoration of western sarcophagi, M. Simon, 'Sur l'origine des sarcophages chrétiens du type Bethesda', *Mélange d'archéologie et d'histoire* 55 (1938), 201–23.

<sup>16</sup> *IE* 46.1.

<sup>17</sup> *IE* 45.1.1; 46.1.

<sup>18</sup> *IE* 46.2. Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus* was only written c. 400.

part of the catechesis and in the life of the Jerusalem community in general, where everyone could follow the Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> Such an observation implies that in Egeria's home community this was not the case. The question regarding both Egeria and her circle is, therefore, where did they gain their familiarity with the Bible, especially if she herself had not been baptized before leaving for the Holy Land.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps we are dealing with a 'reading circle' of devout and pious women who met regularly to study and discuss the Scriptures and who supported a member on a pilgrimage, asking in return for a written report on it. Both the length of the journey and the sending of that account some three years after the departure from home would exclude any possibility of a more formal type of affiliation such as a monastery.

Egeria has often been identified as a nun writing, presumably, to a monastic audience. Yet her frequent visits to monastic cells need not be taken as an indication of monastic affiliation, since from the middle of the fourth century onward, such excursions formed an integral part of a pilgrimage to the East.<sup>21</sup> Egeria also met many monks on the road, some serving as guides, many extending hospitality to pilgrims.<sup>22</sup> Her account of such meetings was of little value for a monastic audience, as a comparison with accounts written by monks for monks demonstrates. For narratives such as that of Postumianus, the Gallic, and Rufinus, the Italian monk, have one striking feature in common; they are full of miraculous incidents and of instructive conversations, two elements of particular interest for monastic listeners.<sup>23</sup> Egeria's only remark to her readers on monastic life in the orient is: 'I do not wish your affection to think that the conversation of the monks at any time was other than about the Holy Scriptures or the deeds of the greater monks.'<sup>24</sup> The *IE* does not contain a single miraculous story or the substance of a single conversation with or among the monks.

<sup>19</sup> *IE* 46.2–3.

<sup>20</sup> She may have been baptized in Jerusalem. Aside from drawing attention to the logic of the whole process and to the registration of strangers, Egeria also notes the participation of women in the catechesis (*IE* 46.1). And though she stops short of disclosing the instruction preparatory to the actual act of baptism, the *disciplina arcani*, her own participation cannot be excluded. After the three necessary years of instruction she may have ended her stay in the Holy City with her personal initiation. At that time the West clearly lacked the elaborate preparations connected with the process of initiation. See 'initiation' in *The Study of Liturgy*, edd. C. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold (London, 1978), pp. 79–146, esp. pp. 95–7.

<sup>21</sup> D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 46–64. The precise way in which the focus of pilgrimage in the fourth century subtly shifted to include not only holy places of the past but also saintly figures of the present awaits further study.

<sup>22</sup> Hunt, op. cit. (n. 13), 60f. on the role of Christian hospitality in general. The existence of *xenodochia* in virtually all the monasteries excavated in Egypt and Israel testifies to the influence of pilgrimage on the development of monastic architecture. See H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of Wadi 'N Natrun*, Vol. II (New York, 1932), pp. 168–88 (Cellia and Nitria); C. C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt* (Warminster, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> On Postumianus' pilgrimage, Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* I; Rufinus' Latin version of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*PL* 21, 387–462) is clearly based on his own experience. On the value of miracles, L. Cracco Ruggini, 'Il miracolo nella cultura del tardo impero: concetto e funzione', in *Hagiographie, Cultures et Sociétés IV–XII siècles*, Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et Paris (mai 1979 [Paris, 1981]), pp. 161–204. One can hardly imagine ascetic/monastic literature without the crucial role of miracles in establishing the reputation, sanctity and authority of the holy man.

<sup>24</sup> *IE* 20.13 confirmed by the *Apophthegmata patrum* (*PG* 65, 72–440); Eng., transl. by B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection* (London, 1975), where stories by disciples about their spiritual masters form a major part of the narrative (Poemen 187). On the importance of biblical exegesis, see Copres 3 (discussing Melchizedek) and Athanasius, *V. Anthonii* 72–3.

In comparison with her detailed biblical knowledge, she seems singularly uninformed on the subject of eastern monasticism, and her usually acute observations fail to contribute any significant information to her audience. Moreover, if she was aware of monastic literature such as any Latin version of Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, or Jerome's 'Life of Paul', her diary does not provide evidence of this.<sup>25</sup> She did seem, however, to realize in the course of her travels that Palestinian monasticism, for example, was closely connected with the development of sacred geography.<sup>26</sup> And though the part detailing Egeria's visit to Egypt is missing from the present manuscript, it is reasonable to assume that it did not differ greatly from the pattern established throughout her visits to monks in Palestine and Syria, and as a result would hardly have been more illuminating to the readers.

A few other considerations further remove Egeria from the world of early Christian monasticism in the West. Her singular freedom of movement, best expressed in her last words to her circle,<sup>27</sup> coupled with a lengthy absence from home, seem to exclude any affiliation with an institution which would have required her presence. And while our knowledge of mobility within western monastic circles in the fourth century is limited,<sup>28</sup> it does not appear likely that the freedom of movement displayed by Egeria would have been condoned by, or formed a regular feature of life in, monastic communities.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, we may ask who would have paid for a journey which was obviously conducted in complete disregard for expenses on the road. A monastery was not likely to pay the expenses of a member on a very long and rather costly trip which had not been undertaken for official purposes.<sup>30</sup>

Egeria's style, in spite of attempts to justify its flaws and to grant it the dignity of an 'epic style', puts her and her readers outside the bounds of classical education and the circles of women like Paula, Melania the Elder, and Marcella.<sup>31</sup> One could hardly

<sup>25</sup> Note however that Augustine did not know about Athanasius' *Vita Anthonii* until after Egeria's pilgrimage (*Conf.* 8.8).

<sup>26</sup> Ch. Saulnier, 'La vie monastique en Terre Sainte après les lieux de pèlerinage (IV S.)', *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae* (Congrès de Varsovie 1978 [Bruxelles, 1983]), i.223–50.

<sup>27</sup> *IE* 23.10: 'From this place (Constantinople), ladies, my light, when I was writing these words to your affection, a plan was formed in the name of Christ to go to Asia ... If, after all this I should be in the body ... then either in person, if God should deign me worthy to survive, I shall return to your affection or for sure, if another idea occurs to me, I shall inform you in writing. You only, ladies, my light, deign me worthy of remembrance, whether I should be in the body or outside it.' These last words echo Paul, *II Cor.* 12.3.

<sup>28</sup> On early western, esp. Gallic, monasticism, R. Lorenz, 'Die Anfänge des abendlandischen Mönchtums im IV J.', *ZKG* 77 (1966), 1–61. E. Griffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine* (Paris, 1964), i.271–98 (Martin), 366–80 (general). F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum in Frankreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, dem Rheinland und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung* (München/Wien, 1965), pp. 19–46 (Martin), 47–87 (Lerins). O. Chadwick, John Cassian. *A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge, 1968).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the scope of Augustine's travels after his ordination as the bishop of Hippo, which were entirely confined to Africa. His only two sea voyages were undertaken before ordination. O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1969), pp. 57–81, 205–405. Note also Egeria's own remark on the small number of bishops in Jerusalem, *IE* 49.2. On the Gallic contemptuous attitude to the 'wandering monks' of the East, J. J. O'Donnell, 'Liberius the Patrician', *Traditio* 37 (1981), 55.

<sup>30</sup> The little we do know about monastic profession of women in Gaul, for example, involves two types of affiliation. One type was 'virgines devotae' who were devoted to perpetual chastity and exercised asceticism at home. The others were members of a 'monasterium puellarum' first attested by Sulpicius Severus towards the end of the fourth century. See R. Metz, 'Les vierges chrétiennes en Gaule au IV siècle', in *Saint Martin et son temps* (*Studia Anselmiana* 46, Tours, 1961), 109–32.

<sup>31</sup> L. Spitzer, 'The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheria', *Comparative Literature* 3 (1949),

imagine any of these women using Egeria's language or style even in their private communications.<sup>32</sup> Though Egeria has been credited with some knowledge of Greek, it was hardly likely to match that of Melania the Elder, for example, who could read and argue about theological compositions of the Greek fathers.<sup>33</sup> Egeria's audience probably had little or no Greek, since she usually took the trouble to translate Greek names included in her narrative.<sup>34</sup> Even the Christian learning of Egeria, and by implication that of her circle, fall short of Jerome's prescriptions for a young aristocratic woman. For while this circle was familiar with the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, as well as with some apocryphal writings and acts of martyrs, Jerome expected his women to be conversant not only with the Bible (with an emphasis on the Psalter), but also with the writings of Cyprian, Athanasius and Hilary.<sup>35</sup> He was opposed to introducing a young female of aristocratic upbringing to Apocryphal books.<sup>36</sup>

It seems, then that we are dealing with a circle of women whose devotion was expressed not so much in Christian erudition as in such pious acts as pilgrimage and in the attentive reading of their pilgrim's account. Their education and literacy are inferior to that of any known circle of women at that time, a fact which adds something to our knowledge of the reception and spread of Christianity in the West among non-aristocratic circles. The readers and the author of the *IE* represent a segment of society which followed spiritual trends set by the nobility, while creating their own means of communicating the experience of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Is it possible to assign Egeria and her audience to a more precise milieu within contemporary society, for instance, to an urban or rural background? This problem is connected with the spread of Christianity in the city and in the countryside, as well as with the openness of each society to the idea of pilgrimage and that of the physical mobility involved in such a venture. It seems clear that by the 380s, when Egeria embarked on her pilgrimage, Christianity had made significant gains in urban centres, while by comparison the countryside remained little affected by the advance of the new religion, as the vigorous campaigns of Martin of Tours to convert the rural dwellers of the Touraine demonstrate.<sup>37</sup> The idea of a pilgrimage, which implies a

225–58. On education in general, H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1948), pp. 451ff. Marcella contributed to the Origenist controversy by forging copies of Rufinus' translations (Jerome, *Ep.* 127.9); for Melania, Palladius, *HL* 46; 54; 55. Paula even knew Greek and Hebrew, though admittedly this was the exception rather than the rule (Jerome, *Ep.* 108.28).

<sup>32</sup> Proba is the best example of the aristocratic woman's familiarity with the classics and their literacy, E. A. Clark, D. E. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross: The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Scholars Press, Calif., 1981). On Melania's literacy, N. Moine, 'Melaniana', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980), 64 n. 327.

<sup>33</sup> The case of Egeria's Greek is unclear and opinions range from 'the fragmentary Greek of a tourist' (Hunt, p. 153) to an 'abundant Greek vocabulary' (Maraval in *SCh* 296, p. 53). She herself refers to the presence of interpreters in Jerusalem (*IE* 47.3–4), but not to her use of them.

<sup>34</sup> *IE* 13.4; 15.3; 15.5 and *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> J. Ziegler, 'Die Peregrinatio Aetheriae und die Hl. Schrift', *Biblica* 12 (1931), 162–98 (mostly on the use of the *Vetus Latina* version). On apocryphal readings, L. M. Starowreyski, 'Les apocryphes chez les écrivains du IV S.', *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae* IV (above n. 26), i.140. Egeria was familiar with the acts of Thecla whose shrine she visited, *IE* 22.2. For Jerome's recommendations, *Ep.* 107.12.

<sup>36</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 107.12.

<sup>37</sup> The countryside, both Spanish and Gallic, accepted belated conversion, as the literary and archaeological evidence demonstrates: P. de Pallol, 'La conversion de l'aristocratie de la péninsule ibérique au IVe siècle', *Miscell. Hist. Ecc.* (above, n. 26), 47–69; C. E. Stancliffe,

certain degree of religiousness as well as a deep-seated-devotion, could hardly have originated in a rural milieu. It is, perhaps, not just a coincidence that the first known western pilgrim was a man from Bordeaux, one of the more important urban centres in fourth-century Gaul and the seat of a bishop since at least the beginning of the century.<sup>38</sup> An audience with an interest in pilgrimage such as is clearly displayed by Egeria's readers is, therefore, best perceived against the background of a city where Christianity had been established for some time.

Following the evidence of Valerius, a seventh-century Galician monk, it has been customary to regard Egeria as herself Spanish. Yet, upon re-examination, Valerius' testimony can hardly be taken as decisive on the question of her origins, and Gaul has an equal if not a superior claim to this distinction.<sup>39</sup> The sole allusion in the *IE* to a place in the West locates Egeria and possibly also her circle in Gaul and the vicinity of the Rhone.<sup>40</sup> In this connection, although the education and literacy of Egeria and her audience cannot be compared with the Christian and pagan learning of well known Christian women at the time, a comparison with the type of life led by Jerome's Gallic circle of women correspondents could be particularly instructive.<sup>41</sup>

To turn to Jerome's female correspondents, *Ep.* 117 was written in confidence to a mother and a daughter living in Gaul, each with her own separate establishment and her own clerics. It reveals a way of life in which a woman pursued her religious vocation, not in the company of other virgins in a monastery, but in her own household under the guidance of a priest. Jerome is highly concerned about the reputation which such an arrangement may breed, and calls on that woman to break the partnership and to avoid men's company altogether. Though the sincerity of Jerome's words has been doubted, there is no reason to doubt the fact that a woman with sufficient means at her disposal could pursue a vocational life if she so wished.<sup>42</sup>

Other solutions to the question of the meaning of Christian life are revealed through Jerome's letters to Gallic women. Hedibia's daughter, Artemia, made with her husband a pact similar to that agreed upon by Paulinus of Nola and Therasia.<sup>43</sup> Though living together they kept vows of chastity and gave themselves to prayer. Artemia later made her way to Palestine but her husband remained behind. In a letter to another Gallic woman, Ageruchia, Jerome (with the help of scriptural quotations and Virgilian verses) attempted to persuade this wealthy and noble woman to remain a widow.<sup>44</sup> What is interesting is the fact that her family appears to be composed entirely of widows or unmarried women living together in the company of virgins. This could well parallel the situation of Egeria and her circle, for Egeria's unusual freedom of movement and obvious affluence point away from a strictly organized monastic circle, that would have curtailed mobility and expenses, in the direction of

'From Town to Country: The Christianization of the Touraine 370-600', *Studies in Church History* 16 (1979), 43-59.

<sup>38</sup> R. Étienne, *Bordeaux antique* (Bordeaux, 1962), pp. 265ff.; Marquise de Maille, *Recherches sur les origines chrétiennes de Bordeaux* (Paris, 1959).

<sup>39</sup> H. Sivan, 'Who was Egeria? Pilgrimage and Piety in the Age of Gratian', *HThR* 81 (1988), 59-72.

<sup>40</sup> *IE* 18.2 referring to the Rhone.

<sup>41</sup> In general, J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (New York, 1975), pp. 91-103; 273-89; and *passim*. In greater detail, E. A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York, 1979), pp. 63ff. Some useful comments on the place of women in provincial communities, E. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 69-76.

<sup>42</sup> P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>43</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 122.

<sup>44</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 123.

a bourgeois milieu. By focusing on a circle like Egeria's audience we can better appreciate the varieties of religious experience existing in the west in the fourth century, and the scope for such experience which the church afforded its female believers.

While a great deal is known of pious individuals and the extent of Christianity in the time of Theodosius at the courts of Milan and Constantinople,<sup>45</sup> the picture of the provincial response to the new religion is obscure. This obscurity is only occasionally dispelled by the emergence of notable individuals to the forefront. The foregoing analysis of the *IE* and its readers enables us to perceive a form of western provincial piety hitherto unexplored. Side by side with movements such as Priscillianism and the evangelism of the countryside undertaken in Gaul by Martin of Tours, pious members of the western Christian society expressed their allegiance to their religion through a deliberate act of removal from home in order to embark on a holy journey. The recording of their reactions to their new surroundings in the East formed an important link connecting the two parts of the Empire in a common enterprise of Christian piety, and enabled an audience to participate vicariously in the experience of pilgrimage.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 101–45 (Constantinople); pp. 183–222 (Milan).

<sup>46</sup> I am deeply grateful for the kind help of Professors E. A. Clark and J. Wilkinson. My thanks to the useful comments of Caroline White and Debra Nails and, above all, of Michael Grounds.