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'Itinerarium Egeriae' with Introduction and Commentary, by A.
McGowan & P.F. Bradshaw**

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Review of : *The Pilgrimage of Egeria. A New Translation of the 'Itinerarium Egeriae' with Introduction and Commentary*

McGowan, A. & Bradshaw, P.F. (2018, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria. A New Translation of the 'Itinerarium Egeriae' with Introduction and Commentary*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 248 pages. ISBN: 9780814684214, 8421; eISBN: 9780814684450, E8445, \$29.95 (paperback)

Sometime in the late fourth century, a modestly educated pious woman of means named Egeria undertook a journey to see for herself sacred sites identified in Hebrew and Christian scriptures. She is almost the earliest and certainly the most forthcoming Christian pilgrim to leave a narrative of a freshly baptized world of abbots, bishops and liturgies in all their 'sensorial surround.' Here are churches smoky with incense, bejeweled vessels, banks of candles and voices raised in full-throated worship that could be heard beyond the church walls and 'as far away as the city.' So intact were these holy places – nearly untouched as yet by the passage of time and the displacement of peoples – that they count as 'uncurated' shrines. There were no wall labels, specialty merchandising for visitors, corps of eager tour guides, or official versions, oral or written, of what happened there except for what was already recorded in holy writ. Egeria simply got site briefings and guided tours from resident monks or cadged oral lore from the locals as she traveled. Many biblical settings had no sanctuary built over them, others lay in ruins. When there was a church community, she joined in its liturgies. She provides an invaluable first eye witness account of Jerusalem as the *de facto* crucible of large scale Christian rites.

She seems untroubled by the inevitable dangers and challenges of her journey. No setback, inconvenience or even companion of the road is mentioned, just the male leaders – and one deaconess – of the Christian communities who welcome her with deference. The Latin of her travel diary is casual, confident, conversational. Middlebrow Egeria incorporates no echo of classical Latin authors or church fathers. She does have an audience in mind for her chronicle, her 'reverend sisters' back home, perhaps in southern France, perhaps in northwest Spain. The off-stage presence of those women as a circle of confidants and religiously motivated readers has understandably excited the curiosity and solidarity of modern folks.

Jerusalem in the 380s was already very much a crossroads for Semitic tribesmen, mighty eastern suzerains, and presumptuous invaders from Anatolia, Macedonia and Rome. It was not yet the seething locus of jostling interconfessional pilgrimage after the year 1000 which Peter Brown comments on so knowingly. Egeria had been preceded by a few other early pilgrim travelers, even women like Helena, Constantine's mother, the amateur archeologist. Jerome (347-420) was already irked by the arrival of female gadabouts and objected, on theological grounds, to their swanning about backwater villages in his backyard. For her part, Egeria reports no pushback which makes her narrative all the more intriguing. She doesn't even complain about the crush of fellow pilgrims. She apparently doesn't see any.

McGowan and Bradshaw have taken responsibility for both the world of early Christianity and a wealth of scholarship on the infancy of its worship. Relying on now classical studies by George E. Gingras and Maribel Dietz among many others, their 100-page Introduction deftly navigates complex ancient records and their at times biased historiography. They recognize that Egeria's 'pilgrimage' does not map easily onto modern or even medieval notions of sacred journeys. She is more interested in visiting holy communities and holy people than tombs or monuments. It's the experience of praying with living Christians that moves her, and she gladly tells her readers about the night vigils, processions with children riding on their parents' shoulders, and even the new security measures taken after an overly devout Good Friday worshiper took a bite out of the True Cross instead of just kissing it.

The Translation and Commentary on Egeria's text are precise and well documented. In carefully arranged indices the editors register the best modern bibliography, geographical place names, and sources

contemporary to Egeria such as Augustine, Cassian, Cyprian and Eusebius who rest their gaze on a common landscape of faith in a newly absent Jesus.

The editors' Translation is freshly rendered but not scrubbed of Egeria's own stumbling grammar and chatty voice. She clearly had ready access to Latin versions of most of the Hebrew and Christian canon which guided her wanderings. Learned commentators are of no concern to her. She never cites a one. Nor is she especially self-reflective. She reports no flutter of emotion at sites of miracles, no critique of her own faith life or that of others. Her modest aim is to compose something instructive, only mildly edifying, for those 'sisters' who could have been housebound aristocratic ladies in Egeria's circle, only possibly subscribers to some form of vowed or communal life. They may have just been kinswomen from the same pious family. In any case, the closing centuries of Roman imperial control over the Mediterranean allowed women to travel, perhaps even more freely than priests who needed ecclesiastical permission. After the ninth century, cloisters for women multiplied and women who did not reside in them became increasingly suspect. Setting out in the fourth century, Egeria enjoyed a historic interlude of expanded feminine mobility hardly duplicated until the nineteenth century's Grand Tour.

What these editors have accomplished is truly significant. The engaging style of their introduction and commentaries is perceptive, unpretentious despite vast erudition, and fair in their assessment of previous scholarship even when it has to be set aside. Their mastery of early Christian sources is superb, and so is their sympathy for Egeria herself and those who point to her as a courageous pioneer and proto-pilgrim. Sacred journeys like hers will eventually become compulsive, ostentatious, not infrequently combative. The editors present a text from before the time when pilgrimage was always armed, either defensively or offensively. McGowan and Bradshaw make room for an Egeria who apparently saw herself even when escorted by military detachments as an independent traveler, consistently received in remote monasteries with courtesies laid on for a woman who was a social anomaly and yet gratifying guest.

Scholarly references abound which McGowan and Bradshaw incorporate from works in English, Latin, German and French. It's curious that except for a few older entries, scholarship in Spanish is consistently neglected. This is unfortunate because native pride – most scholars now accept that Egeria was from Galicia

– has prompted substantial contributions by Iberian academics. Besides overlooking the *Itinerario de la Virgen Egeria* (1980) and *Egeria. Itinerario* (2007), a major exhibition was assembled in 2003 at the Museo das Peregrinacións y Santiago with a carefully documented and beautifully illustrated catalog: *Egeria. De Finisterre a Jerusalén y los primeros peregrinos cristianos*. Much as for the MET exhibition *Jerusalem, 1000–1400*, the illustrations in those two shows and the riveting artefacts they displayed point to one of the few weaknesses of this otherwise superb edition. There are almost no maps and the four illustrations are borrowed from publications dating to 1956, 1981, 2005 and 2015.

McGowan and Bradshaw offer an account of Egeria's world and text that is judicious, comprehensive and yet enjoyable for its smooth style. This will be the standard reference tool for a generation to come.

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