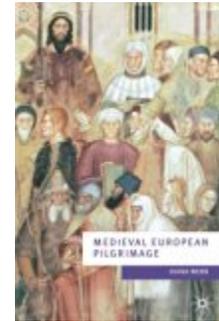


Diana Webb. *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c700-c1500*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. xvii + 201 pp. \$99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-76259-2; \$33.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-333-76260-8.

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Published on H-Catholic (September, 2004)



Medieval European Pilgrimage: A Student's Guide to Who, What, When, Where, and Why

Written by Diana Webb, Senior Lecturer in History at King's College London and author of *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (1999), *Medieval European Pilgrimage* is a basic introduction to the subject for students. Its scope is broad, ranging from the eighth to the early-sixteenth century (though there is treatment of pilgrimage from as early as the fourth century). Given its target audience, there are few footnotes and the bibliography is sparse and includes mainly English-language sources. For a more detailed listing of relevant books and articles Webb directs the reader to her earlier work (p. vi).

The book contains five chapters beyond the brief introduction. The first, "Medieval Pilgrimage: An Outline," takes a chronological approach and addresses the question of "when" by dividing the pilgrimage experience into two major phases divided by the First Crusade. Although its origins are murky, it is clear that pilgrimage flourishes in the fourth century when Christianity was legalized. It should not surprise us that during these early centuries Rome and Jerusalem attracted much attention (the other great pilgrimage site, Santiago de Compostela in Spain, would not begin to attract pilgrims until the tenth century). In addition, Webb points out some of the more local sites that emerged, including those that focused on the Desert Fathers and the early martyrs of the Roman Empire. Later on, during the tenth century, the practice of granting indulgences would promote pilgrimage in both its armed and unarmed forms. The final section of the chapter investigates how the practice of pilgrimage changes indeed, becomes more popular as a result of

the widespread social, economic, political and religious changes of the later Middle Ages. Whether this popularity declines as a result of the objections of Protestant Reformers and the ability to earn indulgences through other means, such as good works, is difficult to determine. If English records from major shrines are representative, it appears that spiritual journeys to the major pilgrimage sites may have become less frequent. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the same phenomenon occurred at the smaller popular shrines whose records did not survive.

The question of "why" is the focus of chapter 2, "Motives for Pilgrimage." As we might expect, the motivations of pilgrims were varied. Clearly one of the attractions of the journey was the chance to travel and experience new places. Idle curiosity, a related incentive, was another. In some cases pilgrimages could be inspired by travelers' tales that moved people to embark on heroes' journeys. For monks, the act of going on pilgrimage was a more emphatic rejection of the comforts of life. The nature of their vocation demanded that they renounce the material world; by embracing a pilgrimage, they were rejecting the final remaining comforts: the familiar people and places that constituted their home. Penance—both for spiritual and civil offenses—was another motivating factor, as were the vows that people made as they negotiated the milestones of their lives. Indulgences were another. Of course, there were the more traditional and less cynical motivations, which included the desire for a miraculous cure from sickness as well as the devotion to

a particular saint. In an attempt to distinguish the practical from the spiritual, Webb suggests that the latter kinds of motives more frequently animated long-distance pilgrims.

“Varieties of Pilgrim” is the title of chapter 3, which explores the “who” of pilgrimage. Although it was easier for the wealthy to embark on a pilgrimage, it was possible to find the poor, vagrants, and even serfs who had obtained permission from their lords on these journeys. Pilgrims could travel in a variety of formations, ranging from going alone to traveling with family members or even strangers. Women, too, were pilgrims, despite the fact that society generally considered them fragile and sensual beings; nuns had it particularly hard because not only were they seen as frail, there was concern about the propriety of having cloistered women on long journeys. Although it is likely that the number of women on long-distance pilgrimages was small, they were probably disproportionately represented in the numbers of peasants who participated in local ones. Due to complications presented by pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing, women more readily participated in short-range pilgrimages—or perhaps none at all. Men from the regular clergy were well-represented, though at times some, like nuns, had to deal with complications arising from their cloistered status. Those who had the greatest opportunity to go on pilgrimages were the secular clergy and laymen; noblemen, in particular, went often not only because they had money to facilitate the journey, but also because the undertaking appealed to their self-image.

Chapter 4, “The Geography of Pilgrimage,” explores the way pilgrims traveled within Europe and to the Holy Land. For example, in some cases, pilgrims availed themselves of roads already in use; in others, roads were built anew. In either case, as Webb nicely puts it, “shrines and roads existed in a complex symbiosis” (p. 114). Beyond the three great pilgrimage sites of the Middle Ages, others existed in capital cities, political and commercial centers that nourished cults mainly for people who had other business in the locality. Still others coalesced around subsidiary shrines founded in honor of a secondary relic or on a small portion of the bones of a saint whose principal burial site was elsewhere. Domestic pilgrimage networks also developed in areas that were on the periphery of the Latin West. These minor centers were often dependent on their proximity to major routes as they provided supplies to pilgrims whose ultimate destination was one of the larger shrines. It is not surprising that, in spite of their interdependent nature, pilgrimage shrines were, as a rule, very competitive with one another; the rival-

ries are at times vividly reflected in their associated miracle stories. Unbelievable as it may seem, it appears that the bulk of the information that a pilgrim needed to embark on his/her journey was received by word of mouth; she/he had an “unwritten Michelin” and very little in the way of printed material to guide her/him. If someone in the group had gone on the same pilgrimage earlier, she/he often took the lead, using past experience for the benefit of the newcomers.

The impact of pilgrimage on medieval culture is the focus of chapter 5 (“Pilgrimage in Medieval Culture”). Webb notes that pilgrimage left a strong impression on the musical, visual and literary arts of the period. For example, song and dance were certainly influenced by these journeys as pilgrims celebrated en route and upon arrival. Iconography of key saints transforms as holy people who went on pilgrimage during their earthly lives were memorialized in media such as stone, wood, glass, and parchment after their deaths. In addition, the emblems of pilgrimage become emphasized in the visual arts and the pilgrim badge is born. Material culture is also influenced by the production of pilgrimage “souvenirs” (which should not to be confused with modern tourist souvenirs that do not evoke a spiritual memory). Relics, the remains of the holy dead, gave birth to elaborate tombs and elegant reliquaries. On a more monumental note, the income generated by pilgrimages helped build (and in some cases restore) ambitious churches in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Satirical possibilities also abounded as ill-suited pilgrims took up these arduous journeys, sometimes failing miserably to meet the ideal of transforming mind and body to become a foreigner to the world. The accounts of the pilgrims themselves constitute a distinct literary genre that itself makes up a good portion of the travel literature of the Middle Ages. It goes without saying that not only did these cultural artifacts capture aspects of medieval pilgrimage, some actually inspired them and even focused the devotion of the participants.

Webb does a sound job, I think, of providing an introduction to medieval European pilgrimage. My one reservation about the book, however, is its suitability for the average student. For example, the language can be complicated at times: “It was hardly likely that the generality of pregnant women would betake themselves from western Europe to the Jordan in quest of a safe delivery” (p. 55). Also, although slim and to the point, the book fails to employ strategies that can help draw students in. With the exception of the fresco that graces the book’s cover, there are no images. The map oddly contains place names

in the original language, so that “Milan,” “Venice,” “Florence,” and “Rome” read “Milano,” “Venezia,” “Firenze” and “Roma,” respectively (p. vii). I am surprised that the names had not been changed (or another map had not been selected) since a good number of students will have a hard time translating them into their English-language equivalents. Snippets of translated primary sources of various genres scattered throughout (stemming from the

discussions of chapter 5) would have provided students with engaging first-hand accounts and associated materials. A glossary of unfamiliar terms would have been a welcome addition as well. I realize that these changes would increase the cost of the book; but they also would help transform this very sound introduction to medieval European pilgrimage into an engaging secondary source for the undergraduate students it targets.

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Citation: Dawn M. Hayes. Review of Webb, Diana, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c700-c1500*. H-Catholic, H-Net Reviews. September, 2004.

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