

Water and Proof in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives

Susan Weingarten, in a study of the Bordeaux Pilgrim, noted the significant number of springs and wells that the pilgrim discusses. She counted fifteen mentions of water sources in the brief narrative section (ca. 130 lines)¹. She noted that water sources would have been of importance to any traveler in the region and that the Roman world contained many healing springs and other water sources credited with magical and fertilizing powers, suggesting that the Bordeaux Pilgrim's preoccupation with water should be seen in that context. I'd like to push Weingarten's point a bit further on the function of springs and water sources in the Bordeaux Pilgrim and suggest that water sources in his narrative, and likely in his actual experience of the Holy Land, served to authenticate the sites he visited. Further, the Bordeaux Pilgrim is not the only Christian traveler to appeal to springs and water as empirical demonstrations of the veracity of traditions that situate past epiphanies and sacred stories at specific places. Egeria's guides in the 380s showed her several springs that were intended to validate the siting of biblical stories and saintly legends – and to demonstrate continuing divine presence at those sites, as the title of this paper suggests. The Piacenza Pilgrim's account (ca. 560-570) likewise discusses water sources as signifiers of authenticity, and his descriptions suggest an evolution in the presentation of water features as proofs of epiphany. Specifically, he refers to numerous springs that were understood to demonstrate the accuracy of sixth century placements of miraculous stories from the Bible, but those proofs sometimes function alongside relics in a mutually affirming dialectic of authenticity.

Springs and Alterations of the Natural Landscape in the Bordeaux Pilgrim

Let's begin with our earliest account, that of the pilgrim from Bordeaux, and I should note that my discussion of water in these sources is not exhaustive. Rather, I've tried to choose a few from each source that are particularly illustrative of the

texts' use of water as evidence of authenticity. The narrative sections of the Bordeaux Pilgrim's account of his journey begin and end with water – starting with Cornelius the centurion's bath at Caesarea and concluding with the baptismal spring at Bethsur and the well at Terebinthus². The shift in genre from bare-bones itinerary to more detailed description is signaled a Caesarea with the note, »At Caesarea is the bath [*balneus*] of Cornelius the Centurion«³ and a line later, »At the third milestone [from Caesarea] is Mt. Syna, where there is a spring [*fons*], in which a woman who washes becomes pregnant«⁴. Thus, his description of Palestine begins with the remains of a bath, perhaps understood to be the location of Cornelius' baptism, a potentially still-functional water feature that reportedly dated to a time some three hundred years prior to the pilgrim's visit. The narrative and the pilgrim continue with the miraculous power of a natural spring at Syna, ancient Shuni, a Roman healing sanctuary⁵. The latter appears not to have been a distinctively Christian site, and the pilgrim does not connect it to any biblical story. The miraculous power of the spring is not disputed. It is merely described, perhaps to reveal the miraculously potent nature of the land itself.

The spring at Syna appears to be the sole references to the miraculous power of a spring at a non-Christian site in the Bordeaux Pilgrim, although he does mention locations associated with Greek and Roman myth and history at other points in his narrative⁶. More typical of the Bordeaux Pilgrim are descriptions of springs directly associated with biblical stories and epiphanies that continued to exist in his day. For example, approximately five days journey from Caesarea and Mt. Syna, a mile from Neapolis and Shechem, the Pilgrim comes to »Sychar, the place where the Samaritan woman came down – where Jacob dug the well – in order to draw water, and our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with her. There are plane trees there, planted by Jacob, and a baptistery [*balneus*] which is filled from the well«⁷. Unlike Egeria, the Bordeaux Pilgrim does not quote scripture, discuss Bible readings, or state that he prayed. The important part appears to be that this was the

1 Weingarten, Pilgrim 292.

2 On the form and genre of the Bordeaux Pilgrim's account Elsner, *Itinerarium*.

3 Bordeaux Pilgrim 585,5 [Caesarea] *Ibi est balneus Cornelii centurionis*. – Translations my own unless otherwise stated.

4 Bordeaux Pilgrim 585,6-586,2 *Inde est tertio miliario mons Syna, ubi fons est, in quem mulier est laverit, gravida fit*.

5 Shenav, Shuni.

6 For example, the pilgrim notes Viminatum where Diocletian killed Carinus (564,9), Hannibal's burial place at Libyssa (572,4), and Apollonius' birthplace at Tyana (578,1).

7 Bordeaux Pilgrim 588,3-5 *Sechar, unde descendit mulier Samaritana ad eundem locum, ubi iacob puteum fodit, ut de eo aquam impleret, et Dominus noster Iesus Christus cum ea locutus est: ubi sunt et arbores platani, quas plantavit iacob, et balneus, qui de eo puteo lavatur*.

place where Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well. The well is not only there, it still flows and water from it goes to a baptistery. The well of Jacob is not defunct, of course. It lives and now serves the purpose of Christian baptism.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, the first details noted by the Bordeaux Pilgrim are water features. »There are in Jerusalem two large pools [*piscinae magnae duae*] beside the Temple ... which Solomon built; indeed, further inside the city are the twin pools which have five porches, which are called Bethsaida, where those sick for many years used to be healed. Moreover, these pools have water that is turbulent and scarlet in appearance«⁸. Although there appears to be nothing left of Solomon's temple to comment upon, the pools and water storage demonstrate the truth of stories about the builder-king. The pools' continued existence validates stories about the past – specifically Solomon's building of the Temple. The pools at Bethsaida are of course those from John 5,1-8, but the Pilgrim does not mention that story specifically. He mentions that people »were healed there« (*sanabantur*) with the imperfect tense suggesting that they no longer are. Indeed, his description of the red color of the water suggests that the pool may have been put to other uses by the fourth century⁹. Certainly, the Bethesda Pools seem no longer to have been places of healing when the Piacenza Pilgrim visited around 570, noting that »the pool [of Bethesda] itself has become ruined with waste and here there they wash all that is necessary in the city«¹⁰. The pools are there as evidence to past epiphanies, such as Jesus' healing of the lame man, but the time of the miracle working power of the pools, and the angel that later versions of John 5 say stirred the waters, has passed.

The centrality of water sources, wells, and cisterns is also apparent in the Bordeaux Pilgrim's description of Golgotha and the Holy Sepulcher. After briefly mentioning the existence of Golgotha, »where the Lord was crucified« and that the crypt »where his body was laid« is about a stone's throw away from it, he mentions that Constantine has ordered a »basilica« to be built. The Pilgrim assists his reader and defines »basilica« as »the Lord's place«, but the only specific architectural detail that he offers about Constantine's church is that »the basilica (which is the Lord's place) of incredible beauty has cisterns on the side from which water is drawn, and behind them a bath [*balneum*] where children are baptized«¹¹. The discussion of Constantine's apparently

impressive cisterns suggests a parallel to Solomon's cisterns, which the Pilgrim observed at the place where the Temple once stood¹². Constantine thus becomes a new Solomon, endowing his new temple with remarkable cisterns, as did God's original temple builder¹³.

The final passages of the Bordeaux Pilgrim's account reports two more sources of water: the spring where Philip baptized the eunuch at Bethsur and Abraham's well at Terebinthus, i.e. Mamre. Concerning Terebinthus, the Pilgrim reports the tradition from Genesis 18 that Abraham ate with the angels beneath the tree. The well of Abraham referred to in the pilgrim's account does not appear in the Genesis story, but it is reported in other sources from the period, depicted on pilgrimage objects, and appears on depictions of the scene as far away as San Vitale in Ravenna¹⁴. Indeed, according to other sources, Mamre was the site of a significant regional and interreligious festival in the early fourth century, part of which focused on Abraham's well¹⁵. The importance of the well is also suggested by excavations at Mamre which discovered the well in the courtyard of the church along with lamps and coins left there by visitors – dating from the fourth through sixth centuries¹⁶. The Bordeaux Pilgrim does not report any religious rituals at Bethsur or Mamre, although he mentions Constantine's basilica at the latter. For the Bordeaux Pilgrim, the water sources serve to confirm the locations of biblical events. He concludes by describing the tombs of the patriarchs at Hebron, the location of which is »two miles from [Terebinth]« and the authenticity of which is confirmed by the Hebron tombs themselves and the well at Abraham's home at Mamre.

Water in Egeria's Account

Although references to wells and springs are proportionally fewer in Egeria's text as compared to the Bordeaux Pilgrim, they still figure prominently. By my count, there are seven references in the surviving text of Egeria, which describes her travels in Sinai, Transjordan, Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Constantinople. There are another nine references in the summaries supplied by Peter the Deacon – where the twelfth century source draws from Egeria's now-lost accounts of her journeys in Galilee and lower Egypt. There is one reference to a spring in the ninth century Madrid

8 Bordeaux Pilgrim 589,7-11 *Sunt in Hierusalem piscinae magnae duae ad latus templi...quas Salomon fecit, interius vero civitati sunt piscinae gemellares quinque porticus habentes, quae appellantur Bethsaida. Ibi aegri multorum annorum sanabantur. Aquam autem habent hae piscinae in modum coccini turbatum.*

9 The red color is also mentioned by Eusebius, Onomastikon s.v. Bezatha, and Jerome, Epistulae 108,9. On the sanctuary of Asclepius/Serapis at the site Be- layche, Judea-Palestina 160-170. On the possibility that the Bethesda/Probatica Pools were outside the city in the third and fourth centuries, see Eliav, God's Mountain 111-116.

10 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Prior 27,2 *Nam ipsa piscina modo redacta est in stercorem et ibi lavant omnia quae sunt necessaria in civitate.*

11 Bordeaux Pilgrim 594,2-4 *basilica ... mirae pulchritudinis habens ad latus excepturia, unde aqua levatur, et balneum a tergo, ubi infantes lavantur.*

12 Bordeaux Pilgrim 590,6-591,1.

13 On Christian supersessionism in pilgrimage narratives, see in general Jacobs, Remains; on the Bordeaux pilgrim Irshai, Appropriation.

14 The well and ritual at Mamre Sozomenos, Historia Ecclesiastica 2,4; Mader, Mambre 103-106. 306-320; Taylor, Christians 86-95; Kofsky, Mamre 23-26; Cline, Angels 106-118. Representations of the well Frazer, Pilgrim's Mold 137-145; Cline, Souvenir 40-44.

15 Eusebius, Vita Constantini 3,53,1-3; Sokrates, Historia Ecclesiastica 1,18,5-6; Sozomenos, Historia Ecclesiastica 2,4,1-3.

16 Mader, Mambre 147-180; Magen, Elonei Mamre 46-55.

Manuscript that supplies a missing portion of Egeria's text¹⁷. Egeria describes her journey as motivated by *gratia orationis*, for the sake of prayer, and she regularly describes how she, her companions, and their clerical and monastic guides read relevant passages from the Bible and pray at the holy places¹⁸. Still, Egeria also notes her desire to see the places of the Bible and those escorting Egeria seem eager to point out springs and wells associated with biblical stories. Egeria duly reports such phenomena for the benefit of her audience.

Egeria's descriptions of water sources associated with biblical and other Christian holy sites range from the relatively brief mentions of wells, such when the bishop of Carrhae pointed out to her: »Behold, the well where holy Rebecca watered the camels of Eleazar, the boy of Abraham«¹⁹ and the same bishop led Egeria and her party to »that well where holy Jacob gave water to holy Rachel's animals«²⁰ to much longer descriptions, such as that of the spring near Livias and Mt. Nebo. There, she reports that the local presbyter from Livias who had accompanied her party asked, »Do you want to see the water that flows from the rock, which Moses gave to the thirsting children of Israel?«²¹. Egeria says that she and her party were eager to see such a site and followed the presbyter to a small church with many monks below a mountain near Mt. Nebo. As she states, »At that place, therefore, between the church and the monasteries plentiful water flowed from the rock, intensely beautiful and clear, with unrivaled taste«²². Upon asking the local monks about the spring, Egeria is told that »this is the water that Saint Moses gave to the children of Israel in this desert«²³. As is typical, Egeria is not content with sense perceptions of the holy, reporting that »therefore, according to habit, there was a prayer, a reading from the Books of Moses, and also one psalm spoken«²⁴. As Egeria reports, her guide and the local monks were eager to show the spring near Mt. Nebo, the on-going presence of which served as proof of a past miracle, the veracity of biblical accounts about Moses, the correct siting of the location, and a signal of divine presence in Egeria's day. It is worth noting that for Egeria the

clarity of the water and its excellent taste seemed worthy of report. Here, sanctity is sensed not only by sight but by taste.

Taste and the clarity of the water may also be indicative of authenticity and epiphany when Egeria later visits the palace of King Abgar at Edessa, who was famous in antiquity for his legendary correspondence with Jesus, original copies of which Egeria reports to have been shown by the bishop at the gates of the city²⁵. According to the story reported by Egeria, the Lord sent King Abgar a letter promising that no enemy would enter the gate of the city. When the Persians later besieged Edessa, Abgar took the Lord's letter to the gate of the city and prayed, which caused the Persians to retreat in darkness. The Persians did not give up easily, however, and they cut off the water supply to Edessa. Egeria reports that at the very moment the water was cut off, God caused a spring to flow out of the palace, about which Egeria reports that it is the only water source in the city »which is like an immense silver river«²⁶. Egeria also reports that inside the palace there »there are springs, full of fish -- springs the likes of which I have never seen, they are of such a size, so colorful, and of a good flavor«²⁷. Here, the presence of the spring, its splendid appearance, and its excellent taste demonstrate the authenticity of the site, the letters of King Abgar and his correspondence with the Son of God, and Christ's presence on earth.

A watery proof of a biblical story where discoloration rather than purity proves authenticity occurs during Egeria's visit to Job's dunghill. The description occurs in a portion of the text that is now missing but that is supplied by a ninth century manuscript from Madrid, referred to as the Madrid Manuscript, parts of which were based on Egeria's text²⁸. According to the Madrid Manuscript's summary of Egeria, she saw »the dunghill where Job sat is now a clean place surrounded by an iron railing where a great lantern burns each night. And where he scraped his sores with a potsherd there is a spring which four times a year changes its color, becoming first the color of pus, then of blood, then of gall, then it is clear«²⁹. In this case the power of the spring is not

17 Madrid Manuscript published De Bruyne, Nouveaux 482-483. Reprinted in Egeria p. 57 (Franceschini/Weber).

18 Egeria 13,2; 17,1. She describes her company's usual practice of scripture reading and prayer at 10,7. On Egeria's identity and motivation: Wilkinson, Egeria 35-83; Sivan, Who.

19 Egeria 20,4 *Ecce puteus unde potavit santa Rebecca camelos pueri sancti Abrahae, id est Eleazari.*

20 Egeria 21,1 *duxit nos episcopus ad puteum illum ubi adaquarat sanctus iacob pecora sanctae Rachel.*

21 Egeria 10,8 *si vultis videre aquam, quae fluit de petra, id est quam dedit Moyses filiis Israel sitientibus.*

22 Egeria 11,2 *Ibi ergo inter ecclesiam et monasteria in medio fluit de petra aqua ingens, pulchra valde et limpida, saporis optimi.* On the connection between Egeria's account and the later, six-century churches and monastery, see Piccirillo, Pellegrinaggio 193-214.

23 Egeria 11,2 *Tunc interrogavimus nos etiam et illos sanctos monachos, qui ibi manebant quae esset haec aqua talis et tanti saporis. Tunc illi dixerunt: »Haec est aqua quam dedit sanctus Moyses filiis Israel in haec heremo«.*

24 Egeria 11,3 *Facta est ergo iuxta consuetudinem ibi oratio et lectio ipsa de libris Moysi lecta, dictus etiam psalmus unus.*

25 Egeria 19,16-19.

26 Egeria 19,7 *quae est ac si fluvius ingens argenteus.*

27 Egeria 19,7 *Ibi erant fontes, piscibus pleni, quales ego adhuc nunquam vidi, id est tantae magnitudinis et vel tam perlustres aut tam boni saporis.* Because the

Latin text is rather ambiguous as to whether it is the fish or the springs that Egeria found tasty – both the springs (*fontes*) and fish (*pisces*) are masculine plurals – Wilkinson, Egeria 133 renders the sentence to indicate that Egeria enjoyed tasty fish at Edessa: »the fish...tasted so good!« Similarly Gingras, Egeria 78: »fish of such great size, of such great luster, and of such good taste«; Bernard, Pilgrimage 36 leaves the English as ambiguous as the Latin. However, I think Pierre Maraval is correct when he translates the passage to indicate that it is the water that tastes good: »il y avait là des fontaines pleines de poissons, telles que je n'en avais encore jamais vues tant elles étaient vastes, tant leur eau était limpide et d'un goût excellent«, Maraval, Égerie 207. As Maraval points out, the fish in those pools were considered sacred in pre-Christian times as they were, and are, after the Islamic conquest. On the pools at Edessa (Urfa) under Islamic rule, see Segal, Edessa 2 with 54, where Segal relates a story told by a nineteenth century English missionary that although Muslims did not eat the fish in the pools, Christians sometimes ate the fish after catching them in the streams that flow from the pool, »they cook them in wine sauce and declare them excellent«. The pools and springs appear in Segal, Edessa pls. 8b. 9a. 10a-b. 11. 32.

28 De Bruyne, Nouveaux.

29 Egeria p. 57 (Franceschini/Weber) *In loco illo ubi Iob sedebat in stirquillino, modo locus mundus est, per girum cancellis ferreis clusum, et candela vitrea magna ibi lucet de sero ad serum. Fontem vero ubi testa saniam radebat quater in anno colorem mutat, primum ut purulentum habeat colorem, semel sanguineum, semel ut fellitum et semel ut limpida sit.*

demonstrated by its clarity or good taste. Rather, the potency of the story of Job and his trials have caused a sympathetic transformation of the spring. Although geographical details in the book of Job itself are vague, the surviving text of Egeria suggests that she saw the spring near Carneas, where she encountered Job's tomb³⁰. For Egeria and her company, however, the transformation of a spring and its continuing display of the pattern of a cycle of sickness and health reveals to seekers the true location of Job's suffering and the veracity of the story – even as the story explains the unusual behavior of a spring.

Fragments of Egeria in Peter the Deacon indicate that Egeria provided what would be the earliest account of the connection between the site of the Heptapegon (Seven Springs, today's Tabgha) at Galilee and the feeding of the people with the five loaves and two fishes³¹. She reports that at the field where the Lord fed the multitude there are »seven springs, each flowing strongly« and that the »stone on which the Lord placed the bread has now been turned into an altar. People who go there take away small pieces of the stone to bring them prosperity, and they are very effective«³². The gospel accounts of the feeding of the five thousand do not locate it next to a spring, let alone seven. In Egeria's description, however, the springs become the link between an epiphanic miracle, where Jesus revealed a part of his power and identity, and the sanctity of the place in Egeria's day. The flow of the springs and their association with the site of the miracle help to demonstrate that the accuracy of the site, the potency of which is further demonstrated by the altar, parts of which reportedly provide prosperity, as the chipped stones multiply the wealth of their possessors in continuing miracles analogous to the initial multiplication of fish and bread that fed the multitude.

Springs, Wells, and Pools in the Piacenza Pilgrim

Like earlier accounts, the Piacenza Pilgrim's (560-570) presents springs and water features as proofs of the authenticity of holy sites associated with biblical and later Christian stories³³. By my count there are eight total water features in his account, in a document that is about two-thirds the length of Egeria's, including the fragments in Peter the Deacon. In the Piacenza Pilgrim's account, springs and water features exist alongside an increased number of other proofs, such as the vestiges of Jesus' body left in stone and relics associated

with biblical and post-biblical traditions, most of which do not appear in the Bordeaux Pilgrim or Egeria. The springs and relics are presented at holy sites in a way that is mutually authenticating. Such an approach continued to focus on springs as a means to demonstrate the authenticity of holy sites, but the water at those places also served to authenticate the holy relics found there, and water itself came to serve as a means of communicating the sacred, miracle working power of the objects and places to the pilgrims via direct contact and souvenirs, examples of which survive in significant quantities from the time of the Piacenza Pilgrim's travels³⁴.

An example of a mutually authenticating relationship between a relic and biblical water source occurs in the Piacenza Pilgrim's description of his visit to the Well of the Samaritan Woman near Neapolis. As he describes it, »At [Neapolis] there is the well [*puteus*] where the Lord asked the Samaritan woman for water, where there has been made a basilica dedicated to St. John. The well is in front of the chancel of the altar, and there is a bowl [*situlus*] about which it is said [*de quo dicitur*] it is the very one from which the lord drank, and many illnesses are healed there«³⁵.

The Piacenza Pilgrim's account suggests a change in how the site was presented to pilgrims and how pilgrims interacted with the well since the Bordeaux Pilgrim's visit in the fourth century. Where the Bordeaux Pilgrim had emphasized the well's connection to the Samaritan Woman as well as Jacob, the Piacenza Pilgrim does not mention the patriarch. Where in the Bordeaux Pilgrim's day there had been a baptistery, now there was an entire basilica. More than that, pilgrims can now see and drink from the Lord's own bowl. The phrase *de quo dicitur* suggests that the pilgrim may have been suspicious about the story about the Lord's bowl. However, he follows his report of the story with an assertion of the site's healing powers, which leaves little doubt about the veracity of site's claims to be where the Lord appeared to the woman and where his miraculous powers continue to manifest through the well, its waters, and the bowl.

The Piacenza Pilgrim's account of healing at the Well of the Samaritan Woman does not state explicitly that drinking the water was part of the healing ritual, although it is strongly implied by the focus on the well and the Lord's drinking bowl. In other cases, the Piacenza Pilgrim is unmistakably clear that water is consumed after its contact with relics in order to transfer the potency of the relic to the pilgrim. For example, at the Holy Sepulcher he reports that he and his companions drank from the sponge used at the crucifixion [*de qua spongia bibimus*]³⁶. And at Mt. Zion, he describes drinking

30 Egeria 13,1-3; 16,5-7.

31 Described in Mark 6,37-44; Matthew 14,13-21; Luke 9,12-17; John 6,5-14.

32 Egeria, from Peter the Deacon V 3 (99 Weber) *septem fontes, qui singuli infinitam aquam emittunt... Sane lapis, super quem Dominus panem posuit, nunc est factum altarium, de quo lapide frustra tollunt venientes pro salute sibi et prodest omnibus.*

33 For dating and textual tradition see Milani, *Itinerarium* 31-58.

34 Vikan, *Pilgrimage*.

35 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Prior 6, 5 *In qua est puteus, ubi Dominus a Samaritana aquam petiit, ubi facta est basilica sancti Iohannes; et ipse puteus est ante cancellus altaris et situlus ibi est, de quo dicitur quia ipse est, de quo bibit Dominus, et multe egritudines ibi salvantur.*

36 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Prior 20, 8 *Nam et ibi est illa spongia et canna, de quibus legitur in evangelio, de qua spongia acquam bibimus...*

from a skull »of the holy martyr Theodota, from which many were drinking water for a blessing [*pro benedictione*] and I drank too«³⁷.

In the Piacenza Pilgrim's account, miraculous springs authenticate post-biblical legends and their sites as well. For example, a spring on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem near Rachel's tomb came to be associated with Mary's flight to Egypt and a post-biblical tradition that maintained that the spring gushed forth when Mary stopped there to rest. As the pilgrim relates, »On the road which leads to Bethlehem, at the third mile from Jerusalem, Rachel lies in the body, at the edge of the place called Rama. At that place I saw (in the middle of the road) a pool of water which flowed from rocks – perhaps about seven sextarias, from which everyone fills, and it neither diminishes nor grows larger. It is indescribably sweet to drink, it is said [*dicitur*] about it that Saint Mary, when she was fleeing to Egypt, sat in that location and was thirsty and thus this water flowed. There, a church has now been built«³⁸.

Here, the existence of the spring serves as proof of Mary's flight even as the story of Mary's flight explains the origin of the spring. The details here about the steady volume of the water and its sweet taste seem to confirm its miraculous origin and suggest continuing divine presence, which the nearby church helped to emphasize³⁹.

Concerning Jerusalem, water from the Siloam Pool and Spring plays an important role in the Piacenza Pilgrim's descriptions by linking separate holy sites and demonstrating their potency through healings. The pilgrim relates that when he and his companions had descended many steps from an ancient arch near a city gate, they came to the »spring of Siloam, [where] there was a floating basilica, beneath which surged the Siloam, which has two basins of marble made by human hands...«⁴⁰. There, his party encountered a screened enclosure around the two basins, »where men go into one to bathe and women into the other, for a blessing [*pro benedictione*]. In these waters many powers are demonstrated [*virtutes ostenduntur*] – more precisely [*immo*] lepers are healed [*leprosi mundantur*]. And in front of the atrium is a large pool made by human hands, in which the people wash assiduously. For in these basins at certain times the font surges with great force, which descends through the valley

of Jehosaphat, which is called Gethsemane, and it flows up to the River Jordan and into the River Jordan at the location where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea, below Sodom and Gomorrah«⁴¹.

The pilgrim does not associate the Siloam Pool with a specific biblical story, although the Gospel of John relates that Jesus' told the blind man to wash the mud from his eyes there to receive his sight⁴². Rather, the healing of lepers demonstrates the miraculous nature of Jerusalem's waters, which ultimately flow into the Jordan, which the Piacenza Pilgrim earlier describes as performing their own miracle during the feast of epiphany.

The pilgrim also links the waters of the Siloam Pool with Golgotha. When describing the Holy Sepulcher, he says that beside Golgotha is the altar of Abraham and Melchizedek and that beside that altar is a crevice and that if you put your ear to the crevice »you can hear rivers of water, and if you throw an apple, or anything else into it, and you go the fountain of Siloam you can pick it up. [He adds] I think that between Siloam and Golgotha is a mile. For Jerusalem does not have a water source besides the Siloam fountain«⁴³.

In this powerfully evocative scene, with its sounds of waters flowing beneath Jerusalem, the Piacenza Pilgrim relates the belief that Siloam's waters flow beneath Golgotha, connecting holy sites and pools in Jerusalem, before flowing out to Gethsemane and the Jordan⁴⁴. Its waters echo below Jerusalem, carrying the blessings of its holy sites to the pool, where the powers of Jerusalem's holy sites and the proof of their epiphanies are manifest in its healing powers.

Conclusion

The surviving pilgrimage narratives from the early centuries of Christian pilgrimage are too few for us to know if those we have present normative models of pilgrimage – a point well-made by Scott Johnson in a recent study⁴⁵. Still, the presentation of springs as proof of a sacred sites in all three of the longer, first-person narratives that survive from the period suggests that water featured prominently in late antique demonstrations of the authenticity of sacred sites. Although limited, our sources also allow us to distinguish some of the

37 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Prior 22, 12 *Vidi testam de homine inclausum in lucello aureo ex gemmis, quem dicunt quia de sancta martyre Theodote esset, in qua multi pro benedictione bibebant aquam et ego bibi.*

38 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Prior 28,1-4 *Via, quae ducit Betleem, ad tertium miliarium de Hierosolima iacet Rachel in corpore, in finis loci, qui vocatur Rama. In ipso loco vidi in media via de petra extra aquam in mobili ad arbitratum usque sextarios septem, unde conplent omnes; et neque minuitur neque ampliatur. Suavitudo ad bibendum innarrabilis dicitur eo quod sancta Maria fugiens in Aegiptum in ipso loco sedit et sitivit et sic egressam ipsam aquam. Ibi et ecclesia modo facta est.* Wilkinson, Jerusalem 142 notes that Qur'an s. 19 seems to describe a similar tradition about a spring flowing forth for Mary.

39 On the site, identified as the Kathisma Church, see Magen, Christians 87-89, with bibliography.

40 Piacenza Pilgrim Rec. Alt. 24,3 *Ab arcu illo descentibus nobis ad fontem Siloam per gradus multos, est ibi basilica volubilis, desub qua surgit Siloam, quae habet solia duo ex marmore manu hominis facta...*

41 Piacenza Pilgrim, Rec. Prior 24,4-6 *In uno lavant viri et in alio mulieres pro benedictione; in quibus aquis multae ostenduntur virtutes, immo et leprosi mundantur. Inante atrio est piscina grandis manu hominis munita, in qua assidue populus lavant. Nam in illis solis certis hortis fons ipse inrigat aquas multas, quae descendunt in vallem Gessemani, quam et losafa vocant, usque ad Iordanem fluvium et ingreditur in Iordanum in loco, ubi Iordanis deficit in mare Salinarum subtus Sodomam et Gomurram.*

42 John 9,7.

43 Piacenza Pilgrim, Rec. Prior 19,5-7 *Ad ipsum altarium est creptura, ubi ponis aurem et audis flumina aquarum et iactas melum aut quod potest natare, et vadis in Siloam fontem et ibi eum suscipis. Inter Sinam et Golgotham credo esse miliarum. Nam Hierusalima aquam vivam non habet preter in Siloam fonte.*

44 On Second Temple and Islamic legends of the waters of Jerusalem, see Koltun-Fromm, Jerusalem 410-411. 417-418.

45 Johnson, Stone 45-46.

different ways that pilgrims interacted with sacred springs, pools, and wells and how pilgrims' interactions with water at sacred sites evolved. In the Bordeaux Pilgrim's narrative from 333, water features prominently as a link between the biblical past the pilgrim's own day, demonstrating the authenticity of sacred sites and the stories told about them. Egeria's guides in the early 380s are eager to show her how the waters associated with biblical stories still flow, and how they authenticate the location at which she and her companions offer prayers and read from scripture. The latest narrative examined here,

the Piacenza Pilgrim's from the late six century, reveals the role of water and water features alongside the increased popularity of relics and *vestigia*. While healing springs and sacred fountains in these narratives might seem at first to be only vestiges of earlier traditions of sacred waters, they serve an important function in the narratives. By creating a living link between past epiphanies and the miraculous landscapes through which pilgrims travelled, springs verified biblical stories and their sites. Their continuous flow signaled the uninterrupted presence of the divine at holy sites in a holy land.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

Wasser und Beweis in frühchristlichen Pilgerberichten

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Beschreibungen von Wasserquellen in den Pilgerberichten des Pilgers von Bordeaux (333), der Egeria (381-384) und des Pilgers von Piacenza (ca. 570) und stellt die These auf, dass die Texte Wasserquellen nutzten, um die Authentizität von Heiligen Orten zu beweisen und vergangene und fortdauernde Epiphanien zu beschreiben. Die Analyse zeigt feine Veränderungen in der Repräsentation von Wasserquellen in den drei Texten auf, vom Gebrauch der Quellen zum Beweis der Authentizität beim Pilger von Bordeaux über die Rolle der Fremdenführer bei Egeria, die ihr verschiedene Quellen zeigten, die auf die Anwesenheit Gottes und fortdauernde Epiphanie hinwiesen, bis hin zur Beschreibung des Pilgers von Piacenza, die Wasserquellen neben andere authentifizierende Reliquien und Vestigia setzt. Der Autor schließt mit der These, dass die Berichte der Egeria und des Piacenza-Pilgers eine Entwicklung in der Komplexität der Begegnung des Pilgers mit dem Wasser aufzeigen. Diese wurde Teil einer immersiven sinnlichen Erfahrung, die es dem Pilger erlaubte, Segnungen zu sammeln und die wundertätige Kraft des Heiligen Landes nach Hause mitzunehmen.

Water and Proof in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives

This paper argues that descriptions of springs and water sources composed by the Bordeaux Pilgrim (333), Egeria (381-384), and the Piacenza Pilgrim (ca. 570) use water sources to authenticate holy sites and demonstrate past and continuing epiphanies. The paper traces subtle shifts in the presentation of water sources in these texts, from the Bordeaux Pilgrim's use of springs to demonstrate authenticity, the role of Egeria's guides in showing her multiple springs that signaled divine

presence and on-going epiphany, and the Piacenza Pilgrim's description of springs alongside other authenticating relics and *vestigia*. The paper concludes by suggesting that Egeria's and the Piacenza Pilgrim's narratives reveal the evolving complexity of pilgrims' encounters with water and its material presentation, as part of an immersive sensory experience that allowed the pilgrim to gain blessings and transport the miraculous power of the Holy Land homeward.

L'eau et la preuve dans les premiers récits de pèlerinages chrétiens

Cet article examine les descriptions de sources d'eau dans les récits du pèlerin de Bordeaux (333), d'Égérie (381-384) et du pèlerin de Piacenza (env. 570), et avance la thèse selon laquelle les textes utilisaient les sources d'eau pour prouver l'authenticité des Lieux saints et décrire des épiphanies passées et qui continuent. L'analyse révèle de légers changements dans la représentation des sources d'eau à travers les trois textes: de l'utilisation des sources pour prouver l'authenticité chez le pèlerin de Bordeaux, en passant par le rôle des guides chez Égérie qui lui ont montré différentes sources et l'ont rendue attentive à la présence divine et aux épiphanies qui continuent, jusqu'à la description du pèlerin de Piacenza qui juxtapose les sources d'eau à d'autres reliques et vestiges comme éléments de preuve. L'auteur achève son argumentation en affirmant que les récits d'Égérie et du pèlerin de Piacenza représentent une évolution de la complexité qui se manifeste dans la rencontre du pèlerin avec l'eau. Celle-ci fit peu à peu partie d'une expérience sensorielle permettant au pèlerin d'accumuler des bénédictions et de ramener chez lui la force miraculeuse de la Terre sainte.

Traduction: Y. Gautier