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Narratives of Transformation: Pilgrimage Patterns and Authorial Self-Presentation in Three Pilgrimage Texts

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Introduction

This paper explores a theme important in pilgrimage narratives from a variety of cultures: the expression of the author/pilgrim's developing understanding of the meaning and significance of his or her pilgrimage. It does so through three case studies: readings of three first-person narratives from widely differing chronological, cultural and religious milieux. The first narrative is Aelius Aristides' *The Sacred Tales*, an ancient Greek text written AD c. 170, which evokes the culture of Graeco-Roman healing pilgrimage; the second is Friar Felix Fabri's *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae* ('Wanderings in the Holy Land'), a Latin narrative of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land written c.1484–8; and the third is Pierre Loti's *Un pèlerin d'Angkor* ('An Angkor Pilgrim'), a French text relating a personal (and initially nonreligious) pilgrimage to the temples of Angkor in what was then French Indo-China, published in 1912. These three narratives were produced in cultures with profoundly different traditions of pilgrimage, including its practice, its cultural meanings and the modes of its description. These significant differences immediately raise the question of the meaning and usefulness of attaching the label 'pilgrimage narratives' to all three texts, and invite a reasoning for the exercise of comparison across cultures and across time.

On the question of definition two issues need to be considered: whether these texts were written in and received as part of a tradition of

pilgrimage writing in their own cultural contexts (a question of genre), and whether we, as twenty-first century cultural historians, can recognise the type of activity or process they are describing as 'pilgrimage' (a question of content). In this context, I use a broad definition of pilgrimage primarily as a journey undertaken for religious reasons, but also including nonreligious journeys motivated by a strong personal desire.¹ First let us consider Aristides' *The Sacred Tales*. In Graeco-Roman culture there was no distinct literary genre of pilgrimage writing, although we may choose to see periegetic travel writing, such as Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, and texts concerned with centres of pilgrimage, such as Lucian's *Alexander* and the *Syrian Goddess*, as modes of describing ancient pilgrimage. Aristides' text identifies itself by its title as a *hieros logos* ('sacred story') and thereby as part of a genre of narrating the mythological achievements of a god. He adapts this model by focusing exclusively on the god's achievements in relation to himself. In terms of content, Aristides writes about journeys undertaken at the command of the god (sacred journeys), and the goal of these pilgrimages (which are sometimes given the official term for pilgrimage, *theoria*) is bodily healing. The second text under consideration, Fabri's *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae*, is part of a well-established medieval tradition of descriptions of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land which stretched back to Late Antique accounts, such as that of Egeria. At the opening he expressly brings attention to the fact that he does not give the work the title of 'pilgrimage' (*peregrinatio*) but 'wandering' (*evagatorium*) (Fabri (1843–9) 2A) and explains that he includes information on geography and amusing anecdotes not strictly related to the sites in the Holy Land. Throughout the narrative, however, he does refer to his journey as a *peregrinatio*, he discusses at length its religious purpose and he warns against the dangers of *curiositas*.² In this way we can see Fabri positioned at the cusp between medieval pilgrimage culture and a nascent Renaissance humanism expressed in ethnographic travel writing. In the *Evagatorium*, Fabri describes his journeys and the landscape of the Holy Land and often he recalls his own feelings as a pilgrim. The third text, Loti's *Un pèlerin d'Angkor*, seems to push the definition of pilgrimage almost to breaking point: the journey described is not undertaken for religious reasons but for personal ones, and although the goal of the journey is a sacred complex it is not part of the religious

tradition of the author.³ Nevertheless, as we will see, the experience of this journey eventually offers Loti religious enlightenment. Moreover, through the title of the work and several references to contemporary Buddhist pilgrims to Angkor, Loti explicitly places himself within a pilgrimage discourse. The underlying paradigm, though, which developed during the European Enlightenment, is that of secular travel as exploration of unknown landscapes and cultures and eventually of the unknown self. It has been argued that this is a development of a pilgrimage tradition.⁴ The prominence of the subjective self as opposed to an 'objective' discourse of travel is a particularly French (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon) feature and can be seen in the context of the fragmentation of discourses in the twentieth century. All three texts, then, were written within a tradition of pilgrimage writing in their own cultural context. They describe journeys of immense personal significance, driven by the pilgrims' desires (which are explicitly religious in the case of Aristides and Fabri), and these are activities that we can recognise as 'pilgrimages', albeit of very different kinds. Crucially, the journeys are identified by the authors as 'pilgrimages' in ancient Greek, Latin and French (*theoria*, *peregrinatio*, *pèlerinage*) and are presented within these particular cultural traditions of pilgrimage. We can, therefore, talk about these texts as 'pilgrimage narratives'.

Bearing in mind the cultural specificity of these three pilgrimage texts and the delicate nature of cross-cultural comparison, this paper will focus on a particular theme which is prominent in all three texts: the authors' expressions of a changing understanding of the meaning of their pilgrimage. There are two main reasons for undertaking this analysis. Firstly, as I will argue, this theme is fundamental in all three texts and is intimately linked to the authors' self-presentation (despite different models of self and personhood available in each culture). The examination of the similarities as well as the differences in the use of this theme can offer insights into the different kinds of pilgrimage and self-presentation that are being constructed. Secondly, the analysis of the literary renegotiation of the meaning of pilgrimage in three very different pilgrimage narratives opens the possibilities for refining our definitions of pilgrimage: it is suggested at the end that this theme is an important feature of the *practice* of pilgrimage. Although the basis for the

comparison of these texts is purely aesthetic, it would also be possible to locate them in a historical continuum of European pilgrimage writing.

Before proceeding to examine the narratives individually it is important to clarify that the discussion is concerned with *texts* and authorial personae rather than the real experiences of the authors. Aristides, Fabri and Loti all made the journeys of pilgrimage on which their narratives are based, and it is entirely possible that the authors' experiences of pilgrimage involved a developing sense of the meaning of that experience (though this is, of course, wholly unverifiable). Nevertheless, the texts they produced are finished literary products written many years after the pilgrimages described.⁵ Aristides and Fabri actually draw attention to the process of composition of their narratives. Aristides emphasises that he is unable to write about all the miracles granted to him by Asklepios and that he is selectively drawing together fragments of experience into a coherent narrative pattern (Aristides (1958) XLVII.1, XLVIII.1–4). Both Aristides and Fabri assert that their texts are based on records and diaries kept during the pilgrimage: on one level this bolsters the credibility of the stories and evokes a sense of recorded presence (Aristides (1958) XLVIII.2,3,8, XLIX.26,30, L.25 and Fabri (1843–9) 25A–B); but on another level, it points to the difference between these records of experience as they occurred and the published versions which were written as literary works with the benefit of leisure and hindsight.⁶ Although the diaries referred to in *The Sacred Tales* and the *Evagatorium* may even have been invented for rhetorical effect, Loti is certainly known to have kept a *Journal intime* throughout his life, including the period of his pilgrimage to Angkor, though this diary is not mentioned in the narrative. Parts of the *Journal intime* were published posthumously, but the section covering the pilgrimage to Angkor was first published in 1989 and then only in a limited facsimile edition.⁷ A comparison of the two texts reveals that Loti changed the story of his pilgrimage at various points, for instance adding a third full day of sightseeing at Angkor that never actually happened (Loti (1996): 64–72). All three texts, then, are polished literary creations which retrospectively impose narratives on the pilgrimage experiences of the past. Aristides and Loti could have chosen to expunge their original (mistaken) expectations of their pilgrimages; and Fabri could have chosen to omit his first

pilgrimage to the Holy Land which was so disappointing that he felt the need to make a second, more satisfactory, journey. That they do not suggests that the feature of thwarted or mistaken expectation was one that each author consciously chose to include. How is the consequent theme of the renegotiation of the author's understanding of his pilgrimage used in the three texts?

Aelius Aristides, *The Sacred Tales*⁸

At the opening, Aristides defines his subject as 'the achievements of the Saviour' (XLVII.1). The epithet 'Saviour' was commonly used for Asklepios, the god of healing, and in particular it was used in the context of his cult at Pergamon in Asia Minor. Aristides further specifies the 'foreknowledge' of the god, and mentions several elements associated with the traditional healing cult of this god (XLVII.3): revelatory dreams; the 'storms' of his body; submitting to the god as to a doctor. The first episode, which is narrated in great detail (taking up almost the whole of Book One of the surviving six, numbered orations XLVII to LI), is the story of his stomach, its symptoms and the remedies recommended by Asklepios (XLVII.4–61). This initial focus on the author/pilgrim's body dramatises an initial understanding of the pilgrimage to Asklepios as a traditional search for bodily healing.

Only later, in Book Two, does Aristides recount the original circumstances and motivation for his pilgrimage to Asklepios (XLVIII.5–7, 60–70). As a talented and ambitious young orator from the province of Asia, he journeyed to Rome in order to declaim in the capital and advance his career. His illness, already incipient before he set out, is said to have become worse on the journey to Rome, and worse again on the return. Aristides' career is presented as being curtailed by his illness and his inability to travel. The doctors are unable to help him and in desperation suggest that he visit the warm springs near Smyrna. Here Asklepios made the first of his many revelations to Aristides and summoned him to Pergamon (XLVIII.7). The goal of the pilgrimage is thus presented as the restoration of bodily health in order to resume the practice of oratory, which involved declaiming and travelling.

The typical pattern of pilgrimage to Asklepios involved a journey to his sanctuary and there performing rituals of cleansing and sacrifice in preparation for sleeping in special buildings, in the hope of receiving a revelatory dream from the god. The cure was accomplished either during this dream or afterwards by following the instructions of the god. The pilgrim then made a thank offering and departed from the Asklepieion. Aristides' pilgrimage radically diverged from this pattern: the god kept him at the sanctuary in Pergamon for two years, occasionally sending him out on 'mini-pilgrimages' to a variety of locations. The accounts of these journeys in Books Two and Three emphasise (and self-dramatise) Aristides' extraordinary suffering and the miraculous nature of the god's cures. Through sacred travel, and already through literary composition ordered by the god, Aristides' series of illnesses are cured. The text describes a series of gruelling treatments which literally leave the marks of this divine favour on Aristides' body. For example, Asklepios disfigures Aristides' body with a large tumour in his groin by forbidding him to remove it by surgery or drugs (XLVII.63); he makes Aristides' body extremely thin by prescribing fasting and vomiting (XLVII.59); he makes Aristides' body change colour by ordering him to bathe in the freezing streams in the winter (XLVIII.53); he alters the appearance of his body by ordering him to smear it with mud and display himself in the sanctuary (XLIX.24), by ordering him to wear only a light shirt in winter and walk barefoot in the snow (XLVIII.78–80), and by ordering him not to bathe for five years (XLVII.59); he pierces his body to let the blood flow by ordering phlebotomies (XLVIII.47–48, XLIX.34); and he penetrates it by prescribing enemas (XLIX.34).

The narrative pattern of illness and miraculous recovery enacts the long-term nature of Aristides' pilgrimage to Asklepios. Although the theme of oratory is present in the first three books, eventually in Books Four and Five it takes centre stage. The god orders Aristides to begin to practise oratory again; although he thinks he is unable to declaim, he makes the attempt and he receives divine strength. Aristides then writes:

But the god also ordered me to compose speeches, not only to contend extemporaneously, and besides sometimes to learn them word for word. And the matter afforded me much difficulty, for neither was I at

all able to conceive of any of the things which were to follow, nor could I trust his purpose – how could I have so much ease? – first I had to be saved. Yet, as it seems these were contrivances of his for the present moment, but at the same time he had better plans than salvation alone. Therefore he saved me by means worth more than the act of being saved. (L.29)

This passage presents the character of Aristides' developing understanding of the meaning of his illness. The illness, which had initially impeded his oratorical career, now appears to be a means of improving that oratorical skill. The narrative includes a statement to this effect made by Pardalas, a character described as 'the greatest expert of the Greeks of our time in the science of oratory', and thus ideally positioned to make such a judgement (L.27): 'He believed that I had become ill through some divine good fortune, so that by my association with the god, I might make this improvement.'

Throughout *The Sacred Tales*, Aristides presents himself as being in intimate and constant contact with Asklepios. But whereas in the first three books the locus for divine contact is Aristides' body, increasingly in Books Four and Five it is Aristides' oratory (his speeches and his writings). The text shifts from presenting Aristides' body and symptoms to presenting him engaged in literary composition. His visions continue to be of the god, but they are also of the greatest literary figures of Classical Antiquity, such as Demosthenes, Sophokles and Plato (L.57, 59–60). The text presents the god moving from Aristides' body to Aristides' words. *The Sacred Tales* itself as a literary composition demonstrated Aristides' talent, which was explicitly linked to the favour of the god.

The presentation of the god of healing as an oratorical mentor was unprecedented. Aristides apologises for this:

But it is necessary to try to make clear all of my oratorical career that pertains to the god and, as far as I can, to omit nothing of it. For it would be strange if both I and others would recount whatever cure he gave to my body even at home, but would pass by in silence those things which at the same time raised up my body, strengthened my soul, and increased the glory of my oratory. (LI.36)

The involvement of the body in the act of declamation and in the ability to travel to different cities did to some extent justify Aristides' linking of the themes of oratory and the body. However, in Book Four the narrative even presents the god of healing intervening to ensure that Aristides evaded civic duty: Asklepios directs Aristides' defence in court (L.63–104). Again, the unusual nature of this 'achievement' of the god is signalled apologetically in the text (L.63).

The author/pilgrim's understanding of his pilgrimage to Asklepios purports to develop and change in *The Sacred Tales* from a simple desire for bodily healing with a view to returning to the practice of oratory to long-term revelatory contact with the god designed to improve his oratorical skill, where the concepts of 'healing', 'sickness' and 'wellness' have been radically redefined. Repeated references to the intervention of Asklepios in directing the writing of *The Sacred Tales* suggests divine involvement in this narrative of revelation (XLVIII.4, L.68–69). The experience of a changing understanding of pilgrimage is evoked in the reader by the text's movement from descriptions of the minutiae of Aristides' stomach symptoms in Book One to accounts of dreams in Books Four and Five in which Plato and Sophokles come to visit and converse with him. The reader's expectations of pilgrimage to Asklepios are in effect challenged by this pattern and a new paradigm of pilgrimage is created for the uniquely favoured orator. Aristides' responsive reading of the landscape of his body leads him through a circuitous route of a series of illnesses and cures to his original goal: the resumption of his oratorical career. As the narrative shifts its focus from the body to oratory Aristides' image of a sick and suffering orator is transformed into that of a divinely favoured pilgrim orator. This transformation of identity is even reflected in a change of name: Asklepios bestows on Aristides the name Theodoros, which affirmed that his very existence was a 'gift of god' (L.53–54, 70).

Friar Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae*⁹

The *Evagatorium* describes Fabri's two pilgrimages to the Holy Land undertaken in 1480 and 1483–4. Although his dissatisfaction with the first pilgrimage was so great that it prompted him to make the second,

on one level this first journey is presented as successful. Amidst great dangers, including illness, storms and lack of provisions during the journey, and the constant threat of capture by Turkish battleships, Fabri manages to get to Jerusalem, see the major sites of pilgrimage and return to Ulm. His fellow pilgrim Georg von Stein, son of the prefect of Upper Bavaria, accomplishes his goal of receiving a knighthood at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The text repeatedly emphasises that Fabri's safety was granted by God and that the accomplishment of the pilgrimage was in part due to divine intervention (e.g. 10A, 20B, 21B, 22A–B). At the end of the episode Fabri writes that this pilgrimage was more dangerous and difficult than the second and that it was a gift of God to return unscathed (22B).

Fabri's presentation of this pilgrimage as a failure involves the issue of his goal in undertaking it, his original model of pilgrimage. At the opening of the *Evagatorium*, Fabri discusses the merits of pilgrimage to the Holy Land and states that the aim of his pilgrimage was better to understand the Bible through viewing the sites of the Holy Land (9B). The failure of the pilgrimage is cast as a failure properly to view the sights and consequently a failure to develop a more profound understanding of the Bible.¹⁰ He writes that the sightseeing was wholly unsatisfactory: he and his fellow pilgrims were not allowed to see certain sights, they saw others only once or in the failing light, and they were rushed from one sight to the other by guides and did not have enough time in Jerusalem (only nine days) (15B). The text dramatises this perfunctory sightseeing by describing not a single monument or aspect of the Holy Land (the description of the first pilgrimage is exclusively of the *journey*). Fabri writes that they ran around the holy places 'without understanding or feeling what they were' (23A). Although Fabri makes it clear that he wished to stay longer and that it was time pressure that prevented him from viewing the sights more carefully, he also portrays this failure in viewing as a failure of his response (both intellectual and emotional) to the landscape. He suggests that he was not able to relate it to the Bible and thus that his understanding of the Bible (the goal of the pilgrimage) failed.

The failure in viewing and understanding in Jerusalem is extended beyond the pilgrimage to the period after Fabri's return to Ulm:

So after I had returned to Ulm and began to think about the most holy sepulchre of our Lord and the manger wherein He lay, and the holy city of Jerusalem and the mountains which are round about it, the appearance, shape, and arrangements of these and of other holy places escaped from my mind, and the Holy Land and Jerusalem with its holy places appeared to me shrouded in a dark mist, as though I had beheld them in a dream; and I seemed to myself to know less about all the holy places than I did before I visited them, whence it happened that when I was questioned about the holy places I could give no distinct answers, nor could I write a clear description of my journey. (23A)

Fabri's inability to recall images of the sights, to feel an increased understanding of them, and to express this through the spoken and written word, confirms that he had made great efforts 'without receiving any fruit, consolation, or knowledge' (23B). Unlike Aristides (who, although he did not receive the health that he sought, nonetheless received oratorical instruction from the god), Fabri neither received the sights and knowledge he desired, nor was he given an alternative gift. The experience is presented as being so fruitless and negative that Fabri expresses doubts, both to himself and to others, about whether he had actually been to the Holy Land at all (23B).

Although the literary character of Fabri tries to excise the first pilgrimage from his history, Fabri the author does not excise it from the pilgrimage *narrative*. The description of the first pilgrimage in fact plays an important role in the *Evagatorium* because it is the background against which the second, successful, pilgrimage is set. But the first pilgrimage also provides the framework in which the character Fabri is seen to develop as he actively works through his disappointing experience and gives it new meaning. On his departure from Jerusalem he redefines the (failed) pilgrimage as a (successful) preamble to a second pilgrimage (16B). On his return to Ulm he makes an imaginative 'literary' pilgrimage to the Holy Land by collecting and reading all pilgrimage accounts he has access to.¹¹

So I read everything on this subject which came into my hands; moreover I collected all the stories of the pilgrimages of the crusades,

the tracts written by pilgrims, and the descriptions of the Holy Land, and read them with care; and the more I read the more my trouble increased, because by reading the accounts of others I learned how imperfect, superficial, irregular and confused my own pilgrimage had been. (1B; 23B)

In this process he constructs an ideal pilgrimage to the Holy Land, by means of the accounts of other pilgrims; in the light of this model the failure of his own pilgrimage is confirmed.

This 'literary' pilgrimage, which enables Fabri to construct a more specific sense of what his pilgrimage should be like, is then followed by a real one to the Holy Land in order to see what he had only read about (1B). The success of this pilgrimage is dramatised in the narrative: Fabri's viewing on this occasion is shown to be successful not only by means of detailed descriptions of the monuments and landscape, but also by means of relating those sights to the stories of the Bible. An important aspect of this process is a notional comparison of the appearance of the sight with its appearance in Biblical times (e.g. 124b–129b on the Holy Sepulchre then and at the time of the passion of Christ). Viewing and interpreting thus act as a bridge between the physical landscape and the imaginative landscape, constructed both by the Bible and by the pilgrimage narratives which Fabri had read. The success of this pilgrimage is confirmed by a careful recording of the indulgences received by visiting the sights: although Fabri would also have received indulgences on the first pilgrimage, the text chooses to deploy this symbol of spiritual achievement for the second pilgrimage, not the first.

Fabri's second pilgrimage is characterised by new visions and perspectives. These occur most obviously in relation to the biblical landscape and text but also in relation to the city of Ulm and to the character of Fabri as constructed by his text. On his return, Fabri hardly recognises his home city, the appearance of which has been drastically altered by new buildings. He himself is recognised at his monastery by a dog (a story surely meant to recall the dog Argos' recognition of the returning hero in Homer's *Odyssey* XVII l.290–327) (230B). His appearance, however, is greatly altered both by his beard and his pilgrim's clothes. Although, as a Dominican friar, he is obliged to shave off the

beard, which he feels conveys a sense of his pilgrim's courage and experience, he does manage to retain his pilgrim's clothes under his habit (231A). His transformation into a new person is neatly reflected by his description of his reception at the monastery: to his fellow monks, who had received false reports of his death, he appeared to live again (231A). These hints of a changed Fabri at the end of the narrative should be seen in the context of a statement at the beginning of the narrative that gaining a deeper understanding of the Bible would help Fabri to become a better preacher. In other words, the goal of the pilgrimage is explicitly presented in the context of the person and vocation of Fabri. It should also be seen in the wider context of the prominence of the author/pilgrim throughout the *Evagatorium* and in particular of the self-conscious fashioning of his person as 'Frater Felix Fabri' and 'FFF'.¹² There were alternatives: Fabri also wrote a narrative of the pilgrimage in German, in which he called himself Felix Schmidt.¹³ Fabri's location of identity in his name is specifically related to his interaction with the landscape in a passage from the second pilgrimage. Prompted by the location of St Felix's birthplace in Egyptian Thebes, Fabri writes that he himself is linked to the saint because he was born in Zurich where the saint was martyred and 'reborn' in the baptismal waters over the tomb of the saint, and because he was given the saint's name (140A). There is a similarity in the way that Fabri and Aristides discuss their religious names in these texts and link their pilgrimages to their vocations, in effect fashioning themselves as pilgrim-preacher and pilgrim-orator respectively.

The prologue of the *Evagatorium* discusses the nature of the virtuous pilgrim and justifies the practice of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, largely drawing on scriptural sources (3B–9A). Fabri writes that the pilgrim who follows in the footsteps of Jesus and of the original pilgrims (the Apostles) will not be able to accomplish all that he wishes (5A–B). In other words, a degree of failure is anticipated. The process of responding to this experience and reinterpreting it is encapsulated in the narrative of Fabri's first pilgrimage. The truly 'virtuous pilgrim', whose definition is fleshed out in the course of the narrative, is revealed to be the one who manages not only to see the sights (itself an achievement) but also to respond to them – to understand them and to remember them. The landscape (of the Holy Land and of Ulm), the sacred text and the person of Fabri are all transformed in

this process. The presentation of pilgrimage as a process of response in the *Evagatorium* is reflected in the life of Fabri who, before he died, had managed to get permission for a third pilgrimage to the Holy Land.¹⁴

Pierre Loti, *Un pèlerin d'Angkor*¹⁵

While his ship was docked in Saigon in late November 1901, the French naval officer/writer Pierre Loti made a journey up the Mekong river to visit the ancient temples of Angkor. Although his journey only lasted a few days, the narrative *Un pèlerin d'Angkor* spans Loti's whole life, beginning with a chapter relating events of his childhood, then a series of chapters on the journey, situated in a relative chronology 'approximately thirty-five years later', and finally a chapter dated October 1910, in which Loti explicitly looks back and contemplates his life, which is said to be ending (though in fact he died thirteen years later). In addition to this feature of retrospective autobiographical interpretation, the first chapter opens with a statement of Loti's foreknowledge of his life, including his pilgrimage to Angkor (1991: 1181), and the narrative frequently looks forward and back in time. Despite these programmatic features, the narrative depicts an unfolding experience of pilgrimage, and only in the last chapter does Loti express his final verdict on the value and meaning of the pilgrimage, and indeed of his other travels.

The narrative opens and closes at Loti's family home in Rochefort. Loti describes himself as a child and then finally as an old man in the same room, his 'museum', 'where I had gathered a collection of shells, rare-plumaged birds, Oceanic arms and ornaments, everything that conjured up distant countries for me' (Loti (1991): 1181–82). This physical attempt to construct a picture of the world is the backdrop for Loti's 'real' experience of it. The close connection of the landscape of this exotic world and Loti's autobiographical sense is reflected in the description of this museum in another narrative: in *Prime Jeunesse*, an autobiographical narrative first published in 1919, the objects are distinguished by their connection to Loti's relatives, for example, 'little antiquated Chinese ornaments from great uncles who were navigators' (Loti (1999): 353–54). The life of adventures and travels which the museum foretells the child

Loti is again envisaged in explicitly personal terms: it is not the exotic world that he imagines, but his transformation into a hero or pirate (1991: 1182). Although Loti predicts change to his person, in the imaginary scene of his return his family home remains basically unchanged, with the exception of the loot he will have brought back with him (imagined as 'precious stones from Golconda' and 'fantastic loot', 1991: 1182). The description of Loti's real return in the final chapter picks up the theme of change (or the lack of it) to his person and to his home, and describes the very different 'loot' that he comes back with.

In contrast to Aristides' and Fabri's religious pilgrimages, Loti's pilgrimage to Angkor is initially envisaged as part of an open-ended series of 'secular' travels of discovery of the world and the self. The first chapter also connects the inception of the journey to another personal and nonreligious feature, the death of Loti's older brother in Indo-China: while leafing through the latter's papers, the young Loti is said to have seen the engraving of Angkor in a copy of the *Revue Coloniale*, which inspired his desire to see the temples. Loti's orientalisng discourse constructs a journey of cultural exploration to 'the ruins of Angkor' and insists on the extinction of the Khmer culture which created Angkor (1991: 1218).¹⁶ In contemporary Indo-China he sees only traces of the culture which 'really' interests him:

The little Cambodia of today, the repository and preserver of complicated rites the significance of which is no longer known is a last remnant of that vast empire of the Khmers, which for more than five hundred years now has been extinguished under the silence of trees and mosses. (1991: 1198)

All this is asserted in the face of numerous references to contemporary Buddhist religious activity, including pilgrimage to Angkor (1991: 1205, 1209, 1211, 1213). Although Loti implicitly contrasts this to his own kind of journey, he nevertheless styles himself a 'pilgrim' in the title and makes several references to the fact that he stayed in pilgrims' huts both on his journey and at Angkor (1991: 1195, 1203, 1220). The distinction between secular journey and religious pilgrimage is challenged in the last chapter, where Loti writes that what he has gained from his personal pilgrimage to

Angkor and from his travels to other places in his capacity as naval officer is a deeper religious understanding of God (1991: 1233–4).¹⁷ The emerging secular/religious tension is one aspect of Loti's presentation of a developing understanding of the nature of his pilgrimage.

The disjunction between the pilgrimage Loti had imagined and the one that he actually experienced is repeatedly expressed in the narrative. This disjunction is expressed in relation to the image of the temple of Angkor Wat that inspired the pilgrimage and to his general expectations of what he would see and feel as a pilgrim (1991: 1208, 1213). These are the descriptions of Loti's first and last views of Angkor:

Yes! I recognise them at once. They are indeed the towers in the old picture which had so troubled me once upon a time, on an April evening, in my childhood museum. I am in the presence of mysterious Angkor! Yet somehow I do not feel the emotion that I should have expected. It is probably too late in life, and I have seen too many of these remains of the great past, too many temples, too many palaces, too many ruins. Besides it is all so blurred, as it were, under the glare of the daylight; it is difficult to see it because it is too bright. And, above all, midday is drawing near with its lassitude, its invincible somnolence ... (1991: 1194)

I turn therefore to take a last look at Angkor. This pilgrimage, which since my childhood I had hoped to make, is now a thing accomplished, and has fallen into the past, as one day will fall my own brief human existence, and I shall never see again, rising into the sky, those great strange towers. I cannot even, this last time, follow them for long with my eyes, for immediately the forest closed round us, suddenly ushering in the twilight. (1991: 1220)

The failure of the real pilgrimage to Angkor to match the imaginary one is expressed, as it is in Fabri's *Evagatorium*, as a literal failure of viewing related to the light. The first passage also identifies Loti's failure to respond to the sight of the temple, which does fit the image of the engraving seen in childhood. The disjunction between the imaginary and the real pilgrimage is also expressed by constant evocations of what Angkor would have looked like during the height of the Khmer

civilisation and the reality of the 'ruins' (1991: 1197, 1205, 1212–14). Whereas in the *Evagatorium* the evocation of the appearance of sights in biblical times confirms their authenticity and their relationship to the biblical text, in Loti's text the evocation of the appearance of 'Khmer Angkor' seems to highlight the distance between the pilgrim's experience and 'the real thing'. Loti even makes an imaginary 'archaeological' reconstruction of the temple of the Bayon (1991: 1217). The narrative of these disappointed expectations in effect constructs images of Loti's imaginary Angkor and at the same time describes the pilgrim's process of responding to the reality of the landscape.

Following the arrival at Angkor, the narrative describes Loti's 'mini-pilgrimages' to the temples of Angkor Wat and the Bayon. During the course of four viewings under different weather and light conditions, Loti's impression of Angkor develops. For example, on his first visit to the Bayon at dusk the smiling faces of the *bodhisattva* of compassion on the towers (mistakenly identified by Loti as 'Brahma') are described as threatening, whereas on his second morning visit they appear heavily ironic (1991: 1200, 1216). And in the course of one visit to Angkor Wat, Loti's understanding of the layout and meaning of the temple is shown to develop: as he climbs up to the top of the temple his initial impression of architectural disorder is replaced by an appreciation of architectural regularity and proportion, seen as symbolic of a religious harmony (1991: 1206, 1212). Two features are constantly reiterated: the strangeness of this culture and its extinction (1991: 1202–3, 1218–9, 1198). Only on Loti's fourth and final viewing of Angkor Wat does he express a sense of increasing familiarity and intimacy with the sculptural figures (1991: 1219). These episodes construct a pattern of development of the author/pilgrim's relationship to the landscape through a process of engagement and response.

But Loti's desire to find Khmer culture is fundamentally frustrated at the ruins of Angkor: he sees only stone Apsaras, and wonders about the real models who died many hundred years ago (1991: 1201). The tantalising image of the beautiful stone breasts of the Apsaras recurs in descriptions of the temples. On his departure from Angkor, Loti predicts that at the royal palace at Phnom Penh he would see Apsaras 'no longer dead, with these fixed smiles of stone, but in the fullness of life and youth, no longer with these breasts of rigid sandstone, but with palpitating breasts

of flesh, and wearing veritable tiaras of gold, and sparkling with veritable jewels' (1991: 1220). At the unexpected 'apotheosis' of his pilgrimage (1991: 1232) the stone breasts which are caressed by pilgrims at Angkor (1991: 1211) are transformed into the dancers' real breasts which are lingered over by the eyes of another 'Angkor pilgrim' (1991: 1227–8, 1229). The frieze from Angkor Wat depicting scenes of Buddhist mythology comes alive in Phnom Penh at the real culmination of pilgrimage in search of a colonial vision of ancient Khmer culture:

We are in the midst of the Ramayana, and the same performances were once enacted, no doubt, at Angkor Thom, the same costumes worn there. This evening we are able to imagine, better than ever before, what were the splendours of the legendary town. Epochs we thought were gone forever come to life again before our eyes. ... In spite of its diminished outward appearances, this fallen Cambodian race has remained the Khmer people, the people which astonished Asia of olden times by its pomp and mysticism. (1991: 1229)

The accomplishment of the ostensible goal of Loti's pilgrimage to see 'the evening star rise over the great ruins of Angkor' (1991: 1200) has now, at the end of the journey narrative, been superseded by a new realisation of the goal of pilgrimage – the evocation of genuine living Khmer culture. The pilgrimage narrative constructs this story of Loti's developing understanding of his pilgrimage through his response to the landscape and sculpture of Angkor and to the female body.

The pilgrimage to see the ruins of Angkor and Khmer civilisation is thus successfully accomplished. The final chapter, however, depicts a dejected Loti back in Rochefort in his unchanged childhood 'museum'. The narrative constructs a homecoming and final assessment of the pilgrimage ten years after the journey to Angkor. The narrative asserts the importance of working out the final outcome of the pilgrimage, of identifying 'the fantastic loot'. The retrospective meditation on the pilgrimage is used autobiographically to explore the course of Loti's life, which is said to be coming to an end. It is precisely the lack of change in Loti as a person – his failure to become a 'hero' or a 'pirate' – that are presented as infinitely disappointing in this final autobiographical

assessment. The first chapter presented the child Loti's desire to transform himself into a hero through exploration of the world and in particular of the exotic 'colonies'. In the final chapter his travels are said to have failed to transform Loti, who is different to the child only in his limited life expectancy (1991: 1233). Whereas in the fifteenth-century *Evagatorium* the failed pilgrimage has to be superseded by a second successful one, the modern narrative of personal pilgrimage can accommodate failure at the end.¹⁸ It is only in the very last section of the narrative that Loti is presented working out what he has extracted from his travels over the world: he tentatively identifies 'a kind of education which does not yet suffice, but has brought already an outline of serenity' (1991: 1233). The text dramatises the process of gaining a deeper religious understanding, of recognising a compassionate God in the many guises in which He is worshipped around the world. Although this passage refers to all Loti's travels, the smiles of pardon of the Buddhist statues at Angkor are specifically mentioned (1991: 1233). The exploration of another belief system and the achievement of some kind of affinity with it is a distinctively modern feature, which contrasts with the pilgrimages of Aristides and Fabri to the 'centres' of their religions.

Although on one level Loti fails to transform himself into the hero/pirate through world travel, on another level his identity as traveller and pilgrim is affirmed in the course of the pilgrimage narrative. The exploration of the self and the landscape are intimately connected in Loti's writings. This feature is also reflected in Loti's self-fashioning in his life: his *nom de plume* is derived from the landscape of his homeland (his family came from the island of Saint Pierre d'Oleron) and was ceremoniously adopted in Tahiti. His identity was collapsed into the identity of foreign countries in the photographs of him dressed up in exotic costumes (Figure 1). Another aspect of Loti's use of his journeys into foreign lands for self-fashioning and self-definition was his use of an increased sexual freedom, in particular for homosexual affairs. Some of these journeys of sexual exploration are described in Loti's writings, such as 'Aziyadé', a thinly disguised autobiographical novel (published in 1879) relating a young Frenchman's love affairs in Constantinople. A portrait of Loti by Félix Vallotton succinctly combines these twin ideas of sexual exploration and the exploration of the landscape of the world (Figure 2):



Figure 1



Figure 2

the toy boat, military sword and miniature colonial subjects he clutches point to Loti's naval career and travels, while the dress he wears hints at his sexual explorations in the direction of bisexuality and transvestism.

Conclusion

The narrative pattern of a developing understanding of pilgrimage suggests that retrospectively the authors/pilgrims understood the active process of response to be an important feature of their different pilgrimages.¹⁹ In the texts I have explored, this involves a renegotiation of what the pilgrims/authors originally desired to attain on their pilgrimage and what they actually felt that they did attain in the event. Aristides desired his illness to be cured in order that he could resume his oratorical career; in the event his series of illnesses continued to bring him into contact with the healing deity who gave him only temporary cures, but through this ongoing contact fashioned him as a divinely favoured pilgrim orator. Loti desired to fulfil his childhood wish to see the ruins of the temples of Angkor, which he had seen depicted in an engraving in a copy of the *Revue Coloniale*; in the event he is disappointed when he sees them because they do not bring to life a sense of the ancient Khmer civilisation, but instead the culmination of the pilgrimage turns out to be the spectacle of live dancers at the royal palace at Phnom Penh performing traditional ancient Khmer dances. In both these cases the deep desire of the author/pilgrim which prompted the pilgrimage is fulfilled in very different ways to what was expected, and the texts describe the process of bridging the gap between expectation and actual experience. In the case of Fabri's first pilgrimage to the Holy Land, his desire to see the sights, to gain a deepened knowledge of the Bible and become a better preacher is disappointed, and the narrative presents no alternative achievement. The narrative depicts Fabri redefining this pilgrimage as a preamble to a second pilgrimage in which the desire to view the biblical sights, to enrich his understanding of the Bible and then to communicate this understanding as a pilgrim writer and a preacher, is eventually fulfilled.

The theme that I have traced in the three texts is, of course, operating in very different cultural contexts and traditions of pilgrimage. It also taps

into very different notions of self and personhood. Whereas the prominence of the authorial persona and his or her emotions was not an unusual feature in early twentieth-century literature, such as Loti's *Un pèlerin d'Angkor*, it was unusual in literature of the second century AD. It is perhaps not a coincidence that many Classical scholars intensely dislike Aristides and judge him to be self-obsessed. Certainly his character in *The Sacred Tales* is far more prominent than that of the periegete/pilgrim Pausanias in the *Description of Greece*. Perhaps *The Sacred Tales* can be located not only at the end of a Classical tradition of religious and travel literature, but also at the beginning of a tradition which would eventually be identified as Christian, and which increasingly focused on the interiority of the person. One way in which this operated in the context of pilgrimage writing was the intimate linking – even subordination – of the exterior landscape to the interior self. The description of the person's journey through the real landscape provided the means to effect this transition. In *The Sacred Tales*, the journey and its effect on the body and spirit of Aristides is an innovative and remarkable feature; in the *Evagatorium* it is an accepted topos of the genre. Although during the course of his travels around Greece Pausanias also famously arrives at a new understanding of the significance of the traditional religious myths which he once treated with scepticism (8.8.3), this process is not presented in the light of Pausanias' personal development. With *The Sacred Tales*, however, we can perhaps identify hints of a travel discourse which eventually came to be closely associated with a Protestant Christian tradition of pilgrimage writing that entirely collapsed the outer landscape into the internal landscape of the soul (for example, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*).

In the three texts I have examined, the meaning of the pilgrimage is explored by means of putting the character of the author/pilgrim within the framework of the pilgrimage narrative. We can see an aesthetic parallel in the 'real' pilgrimage process as the pilgrim places himself or herself in the physical framework of the pilgrimage shrine. Although there is no absolute line of demarcation, one feature which distinguishes pilgrimage cross-culturally from more open-ended travel is the operation of (different) *specific* models of the practice and meaning of pilgrimage. These models operate on a conceptual level and set out what a pilgrimage should achieve

and what it should feel like. They are often mediated through texts and images generated by past pilgrims or, in the case of Christianity, by its canonical text, the Bible. The discrepancy between the pilgrimage ideal and the reality gives rise to the process of renegotiating the meaning and value of the pilgrimage for each pilgrim personally, within the pilgrimage tradition in which he or she is operating. It is an active process, which constantly challenges and recasts the pilgrimage tradition itself. It is an aspect of this process that we can identify in the act of writing about pilgrimage in general, and in particular in the elaboration of the theme of the pilgrim/author's changing understanding of pilgrimage. So in the *Evagatorium* and *Un pèlerin d'Angkor*, both Fabri and Loti try to relate what they see to the descriptions which had inspired their pilgrimages in the first place: in the case of Fabri the description was textual (the Bible and past pilgrimage narratives) and in the case of Loti it was visual (the engraving of the temple of Angkor Wat in the *Revue Coloniale*). The pilgrimage narratives describe a process of reading the physical landscape in the light of these 'texts' and in turn of rereading these 'texts' in the light of the landscape. At the end of the second, successful, pilgrimage Fabri returns to the Bible and is able to correlate the sights of the Holy Land to the stories of the Bible (1B); and at the end of his pilgrimage Loti returns to his family home and looks at and reinterprets the engraving of Angkor (1991: 1231–33). These descriptions of mutual transformation of landscape and 'text' are in turn connected to the personal transformation of the author/pilgrim: Fabri's enriched knowledge of the Bible makes him a better preacher and Loti's new understanding of the universal nature of God and the human predicament enhances his image as an intellectual twentieth-century traveller. Ultimately, through the medium of the pilgrimage narrative, all three pilgrims renegotiate the question of what it means to be a pilgrim in the light of the initial disappointment of their pilgrimage ideal. Within these narratives the authorial self emerges as the locus for this process.

Notes

- 1 Morinis (1992: 1–28).
- 2 On *curiositas* and pilgrimage see Zacher (1976).
- 3 On pilgrimage and tourism see Cohen (1992).

- 4 See Elsner and Rubiés (1999: 1–56).
- 5 *The Sacred Tales* contain a number of references to events which occurred many years after the pilgrimage to Asklepios (AD 145–47); on the basis of these it is thought that Aelius Aristides wrote *The Sacred Tales* AD c.170. In the *Evagatorium*, Fabri writes that he was unable to write about his pilgrimage after the first journey to the Holy Land, which took place from 14 April to 16 November 1480. After his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land and to St. Catherine's monastery at Sinai (13 April 1483 to 30 January 1484) he wrote the narrative of both journeys. Masson has argued that, on the basis of certain references to political events in the text, it is possible to give a *terminus post quem* of 1494 for the composition of the *Evagatorium* (Fabri 1975: vii–viii); more recently Meyers and Chareyron have suggested on the basis of the same references a date between 1484 and 1488 (Fabri 2000: xvii–xviii). Loti's voyage to Angkor occurred in 1901 and *Un pèlerin d'Angkor* was written in 1911 and published in 1912 (Loti 1991: 1179).
- 6 Pearcy (1988).
- 7 Loti (1989).
- 8 For interpretation of *The Sacred Tales* as autobiographical narrative see Bompaire (1993) and Quet (1993); on the sick and suffering body King (1999) and Perkins (1995: 173–90); on dreaming see Cox Miller (1994: 184–204); on pilgrimage see Rutherford (1999) and Petsalis-Diomidis (2001: 70–163); on the theme of documentation see Pearcy (1988); on literary style see Weiss (1998: 47–73); on the Roman/Greek cultural interface see Swain (1998: 260–74). See also Festugière (1954: 85–104), Dodds (1965: 41–45), Brown (1978: 27–53), Behr (1968), Cortés-Copete (1995: 55–86), Jones (1998). Translations of *The Sacred Tales* are from Aristides (1981); all references are to the original text, Aristides (1958).
- 9 On the *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae* see Prescott (1954), Tinguely (1997) and Williams (1998: 37–42). Translations of the *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae* are from Fabri (1896–7); all references are to the original text, Fabri (1843–9).
- 10 On the importance of visibility, interactive viewing and the 'eye of faith' in Late Antique narratives of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, see Frank (2000: 102–33).
- 11 Coleman and Elsner (1995: 92, 210).
- 12 Fabri (2000: xix, xxix–xxx).
- 13 Fabri (1999: 59–61); Fabri (1975: v–x); Fabri (2000: xviii–xix).
- 14 Fabri (2000: xviii).
- 15 All translations of *Un pèlerin d'Angkor* are from Loti (1996); references are to the original text, Loti (1991).
- 16 Said (1978); Hargreaves (1981: 21–85).
- 17 Cohen (1992); Coleman and Elsner (1995: 213).
- 18 On the failure of the pilgrimage ideal after the Renaissance see Elsner and Rubiés (1999: 29–56).
- 19 Coleman and Elsner (1995: 206).

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