

2014

### Book Review: Paul Davies, Deborah Howard and Wendy Pullan, eds. *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond*

Ashley Elston  
*Berea College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal>



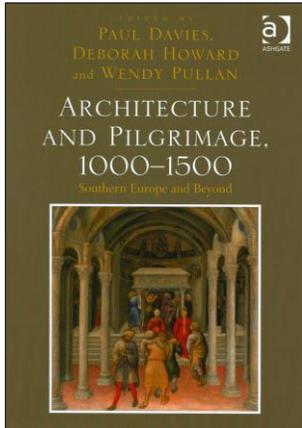
Part of the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Elston, Ashley. "Book Review: Paul Davies, Deborah Howard and Wendy Pullan, eds. *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond*." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 4, 3 (2014): 95-105.  
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol4/iss3/6>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* by an authorized editor of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [noltj@kenyon.edu](mailto:noltj@kenyon.edu).



**Book Review: Paul Davies, Deborah Howard and Wendy Pullan, eds.**  
*Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

**By Ashley Elston, Berea College, Art & Art History Program**

Pilgrimage studies present scholars with ample opportunities for exploration. The complex and interwoven elements of journey and destination, the simultaneous tension and cooperation between the shrine and devotional object/image, and the multivalent modes of the pilgrim's experience all encourage inquiry into the integrative visual, spiritual and physical culture of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Recent collections, such as the significant 2005 volume on art and architecture related to late medieval Northern European pilgrimage edited by Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe, have deepened and expanded our understanding of the myriad (and often mutually reinforcing) types of objects and built environments pilgrims encountered.<sup>1</sup>

The contributions to the 2013 volume edited by Paul Davies, Deborah Howard and Wendy Pullan stem from a 2005 conference, *Architecture and Pilgrimage 600-1600*, held at the University of Cambridge. As the title of the book suggests, the nine essays

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe, eds. *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005).

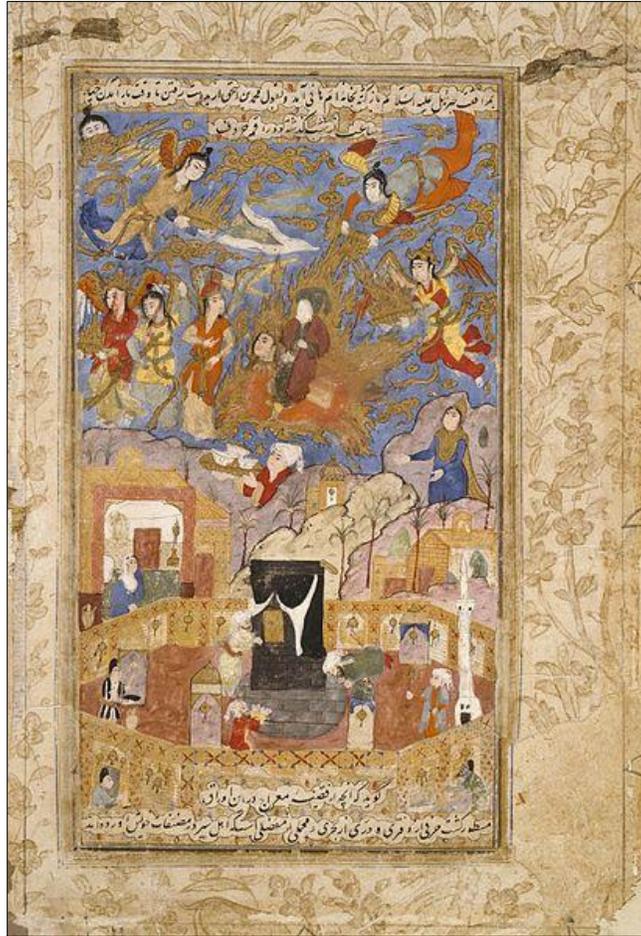
published here present a more focused constellation of study divided into two sections, the first covering the wider Mediterranean basin and the second exploring pilgrimage in Italy. This framework, in combination with Davies and Howard's introduction and the afterword by Herbert Kessler, helpfully situates the phenomenon of later medieval pilgrimage in a wide-ranging cultural context. The broad geographical coverage of the included essays reflects the diverse nature of pilgrimage, a recurring theme in the collection, and the volume's structural separation between Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean is appropriately porous as essays in both parts refer to and draw upon issues raised in the other.



**Figure 1** Gentile da Fabriano, *Pilgrims at the Tomb of St. Nicholas*, predella of the Quaratesi Polyptych, collection of National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1425. Photo: Wiki Commons

Davies and Howard assert in their introduction that, despite the vast body of literature on pilgrimage, the fixed architectural structures involved have been neglected in favor of the dynamic and mutable aspects of the phenomenon and its attendant acts. They employ an expansive approach to architecture in which the location of the destination is but one of many meaningful places pilgrims encounter on their journeys. Indeed, the editors see pilgrimage as a series of movements through architectural settings and a running theme throughout the collection is the ability of architecture to unify various aspects of pilgrimage experience. The nine essays thus present variations on the numerous ways in which architecture informs and augments visual and devotional constructs associated with pilgrimage across time, space and faith.

The four essays in the “Mediterranean Perspectives” section explore pilgrimage and architecture in locales outside Italy and ways in which pilgrimage connected the Mediterranean world. Henry Maguire’s essay, “Pilgrimage through Pictures in Medieval Byzantine Churches,” examines images of the Holy Land in Greek and Cypriot churches to interrogate how they impacted local saints’ cults. Drawing upon hagiographic texts that parallel the visual typology produced by images of the Holy Land in churches with ties to local Byzantine saints, Maguire sees this as a case of *synkrisis*, in which the lesser site gained authority from the greater *loca sancta*. Representations of the Holy Land also proved a powerful influence on Byzantine pilgrims in Jerusalem, such that Maguire asserts that viewing such images was equal to witnessing the actual sites.



**Figure 2** *The Night Journey of the Prophet with the Ka'ba in Mecca, Iran, c. 1600*, collection of LACMA. Photo: Wiki Commons

Avinoam Shalem's contribution on rituals performed by pilgrims at the Ka'ba in Mecca helpfully explicates the accumulative sensory process of movement, sight and touch that the destination building facilitated. Demonstrating that pilgrimage rituals at the Ka'ba presented the faithful a series of sensual encounters with the building and its covering, Shalem relates this site to mosque architecture with which pilgrims would already have been familiar. In addition, discussion of the practice of veiling the Ka'ba, which enhanced its sanctity and heightened the experience of entering the building, opens

a path for future fruitful comparison with rituals of concealment and revelation that were often part of the Christian pilgrimage tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Wendy Pullan explores the ubiquitous motif of the shell as a habitual part of pilgrimage, seeking to explain its development as a symbol specifically tied to Compostela and as representative of pilgrimage's broader ability to bring prominence to the mundane. In recognizing the shell's simultaneous roles as an individual bearer of meaning and repetitive, decorative emblem, Pullan's essay encourages us, like pilgrims, to critically examine aspects of the visual environment that we often take for granted.



**Figure 3** *St. James the Greater, Puerta del Perdon, Santiago de Compostela. Photo: Wiki Commons*

<sup>2</sup> See *inter alia*, Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ashley Elston, "Storing Sanctity: Sacristy Reliquary Cupboards in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2011), 17-21.

The final essay in the first section continues Deborah Howard's significant work connecting Venice to the Eastern Mediterranean. Here, Howard shows how Venice's diplomatic and commercial relationships with the Holy Land complemented concurrent ties of pilgrimage by, for example, allowing Venetian pilgrims special access and freedom of movement within holy sites and encouraging the fascinating development of "package tours" departing from Venice. In concert with pilgrims' physical movement between West and East and the transmission of regional architectural elements in both directions, Howard also suggests the occurrence of what she calls "imaginative geography," in which Christian pilgrims assimilated the foreign architecture and landscape they saw with their own prior expectations.

The second section of the book is devoted to Italian pilgrimage and architecture, focusing entirely on Tuscan and Umbrian sites and practices. The one exception to this geographic concentration is Claudia Bolgia's essay examining icon shrines in medieval Rome. Bolgia calls attention to a particular type of canopied tabernacle (similar to well-known thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Roman ciboria and relic shrines) that held a miraculous Marian image, arguing that likeness in shrine structure indicates that icons and relics were accorded similar status in Roman patterns of pilgrimage. In addition to contributing to the growing body of scholarship surrounding the complex relationship between relic and image, the essay also helpfully promotes consideration of such shrines within the larger architectural settings where the pilgrim would encounter them.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> On this issue see also Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf, eds. *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Rome: Bibliotheca Hertziana, 2004) and Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery, eds. *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005).

The next two essays investigate the placement of pilgrimage sites in central Italian mendicant churches of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Joanna Cannon brings pilgrimage into the context of the urban laity by exploring the possibility that late medieval Dominican churches were designed to facilitate convenient local pilgrimage, noting that after St. Dominic's remains were moved into the lay nave of the church in 1233, other saints' shrines in Dominican churches were situated to the west of the *tramezzo*. Cannon sees this as part and parcel of a trend in the later Middle Ages towards more convenient pilgrimage and hopefully this will be further explored in her forthcoming monograph on art in Dominican churches of central Italy.

**Figure 4 Giotto and workshop, *St. Francis and Death*, north transept, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi, c. 1308-11. Photo: Wiki Commons**



Donal Cooper and Janet Robson's "Imagery and the Economy of Penance at the Tomb of St. Francis" takes a fresh look at the Lower Church of San Francesco at Assisi,

arguing that pilgrims came here more for the expiation of sins than for the healing we often associate with major pilgrimage destinations. Calling attention to the ritual ties between the main church of St. Francis and the nearby Porziuncula created by increased indulgences granted to the latter site, the authors show that the architectural and decorative programs of the Lower Church were designed to facilitate the movement of pilgrims through the north chapels while surrounding them with images of penitential models. In addition to their collective focus on pilgrimage in Italian mendicant houses, both the Cannon and Cooper/Robson essays are effective examples of scholarly consideration of audience in multifaceted sacred environments.

The volume's final essays probe the often-vexing concepts of "copy" and "influence" in Italian pilgrimage architecture. As Richard Krautheimer demonstrated in his classic "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture,'" architectural similarity carries meaning, although determining the precise intention of the likeness has, in many cases, proved to be less than clear.<sup>4</sup> In his essay Paul Davies complicates the notion that locally famous shrines (as opposed to larger, more heavily trafficked locations) provided only formal models for other pilgrimage sites by illuminating the way in which architectural similarity linked the quattrocento tabernacle at Impruneta ritually and devotionally both to the shrine at SS. Annunziata in Florence and the church of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome. He argues that architectural allusion magnified the prayers of the faithful through the establishment of a spiritual network of far-flung, visually linked sites that housed both miraculous Marian images and Christological relics within similar tabernacles.

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1-33.



**Figure 5 Giuliano da Sangallo, S. Maria delle Carceri, Prato, 1485-91. Photo: Wiki Commons**

Robert Maniura also sees central Italian pilgrimage as a web of sacred sites rather than an exclusive system based on competition. He connects the fifteenth-century church of S. Maria delle Carceri in Prato, a central-plan structure built around a miraculous Marian image, to the lesser-known S. Maria della Pietà at Bibbona via architectural design and complementary (not conflicting) function. Asserting that churches housing miraculous images of the Virgin in Italy were part of a widespread and inclusive pilgrimage structure, Maniura traces this architectural chain back to the Pantheon in Rome, which he suggests was a source of the tradition of placing a miraculous Marian image under a dome.

As a whole, this collection successfully considers many complex ways in which architecture affected Mediterranean pilgrimage and vice versa. Perhaps one of the most

striking threads running throughout the essays is the recurrent notion of pilgrimage architecture as accumulative, as structures with the ability to aggregate pilgrimage sites and practices rather than set them up to compete with one another. The inclusive nature of architecture also applies to the pilgrimage described in several of the essays in which pilgrims' prior knowledge or expectations of pilgrimage locations informed their experiences, both real and imaginary.

In concert with that theme, the collection opens up avenues of further exploration surrounding pilgrimage and architecture. The presence of a single essay on pilgrimage outside the Christian tradition makes one wish for additional consideration of the links pilgrimage forged between different religions during the Middle Ages. The focus on central Italy here also provides a jumping off point for studies of pilgrimage architecture in the north and south of the peninsula and for continued inquiry into sites associated with local pilgrimage rather than more universal destinations.

*Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1550: Southern Europe and Beyond* offers a valuable addition to pilgrimage studies both as standalone essays and as a related collection. The images included are not in color, but are helpful and generally large in scale. Although intended for a scholarly audience, several of the essays could be successfully assigned to graduate and upper-level undergraduate students. As a whole, this volume contributes beneficially to the ongoing exploration of medieval and early modern pilgrimage and is notable in particular for its attempt (however limited) to incorporate multiple faith and cultural perspectives into the dialogue. Revisiting perennial issues of architectural and pilgrimage studies, such as the meaning of visual likeness, the

collection successfully demonstrates the multivalent impact of architecture on pilgrimage and points to further investigation going forward.