Despite the doubts of some medieval authors about the sincerity and probity of female pilgrims, a woman’s actions and devotion might be celebrated if her daily role as a caregiver led her to undertake a pilgrimage to a saint’s shrine. However, other kinds of pilgrimage did not dovetail so neatly with feminine responsibilities. In particular, pilgrimages to places such as Jerusalem and Rome were not intended to confer miraculous healing or other tangible benefits either upon pilgrims or upon those for whom pilgrims acted as intercessors. Instead, these strictly devotional pilgrimages offered Christians the opportunity to win indulgences that would shorten their time in purgatory, and to visit both the places and the people described in the New Testament. Pilgrims spent significant time and money and took considerable personal risks in pursuit of these intangible goals. Women encountered less tolerant responses to their presence on such pilgrimages, where they could not easily claim that their travels were an outgrowth of their household duties, and where they might be away for months and even years—if they returned at all.

Both qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that women were enthusiastic pilgrims in the later Middle Ages, and I have argued that women comprised a significant proportion of pilgrims whose claims to have experienced a miracle were recorded. But at least one scholar

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1 An earlier version of this chapter was published under the title “‘Stronger than men and braver than knights’: women and the pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome in the later middle ages,” *Journal of Medieval History* 29 (2003): 153–175. Reprinted by permission from Elsevier.


3 Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowan and Littlefield, 1975), p. 262, suggests that it “is possible that at the close of the Middle Ages women formed the majority of visitors at many shrines;” Josephie Brefeld, *A Guidebook for the Jerusalem Pilgrimage in the Late Middle Ages: A Case for Computer-aided Textual Criticism* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), 15, notes that a figure of one-quarter to one-third female pilgrims has been suggested.
has claimed that the Jerusalem pilgrimage was “virtually reserved for the male sex.” The writings of later medieval pilgrims show that this judgment is not entirely accurate; women did engage in devotional pilgrimage, traveling to far-off places for the good of their souls rather than the welfare of their families. Women had been traveling to Jerusalem for religious reasons since the late Antique, and negative commentary about them, a sure sign of their presence, was standard by the eighth century. By the later Middle Ages, the Venetian senate repeatedly granted the right to ship captains to carry large numbers of pilgrims of both genders to Jerusalem. While specific counts of men and women on the Venetian pilgrim-galleys to Jerusalem are impossible because of the destruction by fire of the pertinent records, we do know something of the numbers by looking at the infrastructure of Jerusalem itself. There were enough female pilgrims in Jerusalem that they required a separate dormitory near the main pilgrims’ hospitals in Jerusalem, “another great hall, wherein women were wont to sojourn since they were on no account permitted to live with men in the great hospital.” Meanwhile, women were enough of a presence at pilgrimage shrines in Rome to have been specifically barred from some of the shrines there and lampooned in sermons and pilgrimage guides.

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7 See a number of examples in M. Margaret Newett, introduction to Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1907), 36–39.


9 On the banning of women from shrines, see John Capgrave, Ye Solace of Pilgrimes. A Description of Rome, circa A.D. 1450, by John Capgrave, an Austin Friar of King’s Lynn, ed. C. A. Mills (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 77. For examples of satire, see Giordano da Rivalto, Prediche del Beato Fra Giordano da Rivalto dell’Ordine di Predicatori