

Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book: Breydenbach's Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem

By Elizabeth Ross

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Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam* (Journey to the Holy Land), first published in 1486, is one of the seminal books of early printing and is especially renowned for the originality of its woodcuts. In *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book*, Elizabeth Ross considers the *Peregrinatio* from a variety of perspectives to explain its value for the cultural history of the period. Breydenbach, a high-ranking cleric in Mainz, recruited the painter Erhard Reuwich of Utrecht for a religious and artistic adventure in a political hot spot—a pilgrimage to research the peoples, places, plants, and animals of the Levant. The book they published after their return ambitiously engaged with the potential of the new print medium to give an account of their experience.

The *Peregrinatio* also aspired to rouse readers to a new crusade against Islam by depicting a contest in the Mediterranean between the Christian bastion of the city of Venice and the region's Muslim empires. This crusading rhetoric fit neatly with the state of the printing industry in Mainz, which largely subsisted as a tool for bishops' consolidation of authority, including selling the pope's plans to combat the Ottoman Empire.

Taking an artist on such an enterprise was unprecedented. Reuwich set a new benchmark for technical achievement with his woodcuts, notably a panorama of Venice that folds out to 1.62 meters in length and a foldout map that stretches from Damascus to Sudan around the first topographically accurate view of Jerusalem. The conception and execution of the *Peregrinatio* show how and why early printed books constructed new means of visual representation from existing ones—and how the form of a printed book emerged out of the interaction of eyewitness experience and medieval scholarship, real travel and spiritual pilgrimage, curiosity and fixed belief, texts and images.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Bernhard von Breydenbach's account of his pilgrimage from Venice to the Holy Land and Egypt revolutionized book publishing when it appeared in 1486. Erhard Reuwich's accompanying woodcuts include highly detailed, multiblock foldout plates. Thanks to Elizabeth Ross's beautifully written text, I feel like an armchair traveler peering over the artist's shoulder as he documents the exotic people, cities, and creatures his party encountered. Part detective, part ethnographer, and always a sensitive art historian, Ross deftly explores the book's creation, reception, and claims of authority and truthfulness. This is the best study in any language of the *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*."

—Jeffrey Chipps Smith, University of Texas at Austin

"One of the most popular books of the early printing industry, Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam* (*Journey to the Holy Land*) was published in Mainz in 1486 and had many later editions. Breydenbach and his painter/publisher companion, Erhard Reuwich, set themselves ambitious goals. The book was intended, in the first instance, as a practical guide for pilgrims to Jerusalem. Equally important, as Ross discusses at length, was the embedded argument for the return of the sacred lands of the East to Christian control. The first in-depth analysis in English, this study explores both the artistic and intellectual achievements of the *Peregrinatio*. Beautifully produced, it includes large color plates of the seven famous woodcut views of cities along the route from Venice to the East that set a model for later chronicle books. Especially rich is the chapter on Reuwich's extraordinary foldout combination map and topographical view of Jerusalem, presented here as a synthesis of multiple sources, from portolan charts to 15th-century Netherlandish 'world landscapes'—all of it distilled via firsthand viewing. A valuable contribution to the *Peregrinatio* literature."

—D. Pincus, *Choice*

"This study is a monograph in the proper sense, a broadly cast and well integrated interpretation of a major marking point in the history of travel, geography, religious politics, and book printing. Regarding the many unresolved problems—for example Reuwich's pictorial sources, the precise circumstances of the book's production, the texture of the narrative and its basis in actual experience—Ross is fully informed and ventures no unsupported conclusions. . . . The design [of Ross's book] is notably generous and the production exceptional, appropriate to the study of an important monument in the history of the book. . . . Above all there is the elegance and clarity of the writing: measured, jargonfree, and often commanding as well. Not only is this book a pleasure to read, but also the care taken in the research and the soundness of the author's judgment are manifest throughout."

—Peter Parshall, *The Medieval Review*

“The persistence of scholarship on aspects of cross-cultural encounters between Christian Europe and the Muslim East in the medieval and early modern period is testament to an ongoing interest in the multifarious ways in which Europeans engaged with, represented, and perceived their eastern counterparts. Ross makes a valuable contribution to scholarship in the field and concurrently to our understanding of authority and representation in early printed works.”

—Amanda van der Drift, *Parergon*

“Elizabeth Ross writes convincing arguments in elegant prose. Moreover, her book is a refreshing, jargon-free study, dripping with ideas and analysis.”

—Kathryn M. Rudy, *The Historians of Netherlandish Art*

About the Author

Elizabeth Ross is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Florida.

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Santos Ball:

Precisely why? Because this Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book: Breydenbach’s Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap the item but latter it will zap you with the secret the idea inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who else write the book in such incredible way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of benefits than the other book get such as help improving your skill and your critical thinking means. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I were being you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

Lee Witherspoon:

The book untitled Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book: Breydenbach’s Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains her idea with easy approach. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read this. The book was written by famous author. The author will bring you in the new period of time of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can continue reading your smart phone, or device, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can open up their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice learn.

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