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Review of: Holy Land Pilgrimage by Stephen J. Minz

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Review of: *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, by Stephen J. Minz

Binz, Stephen J. (2020) *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, Liturgical Press: Minnesota. 320 pgs, ISBN: 9780814665121, 6512; eISBN: 9780814665374, E6537, \$24.70 (paperback)

This review aims to analyse and present the peculiarities of the book: *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, written by Stephen J. Binz in 2020. The author is a biblical scholar; he has published several books on pilgrimage sites and sacred places, receiving different prizes for many of them. Thus, once familiar with his production, we might understand the uniqueness of his proposal, that sums up knowledge and travel curiosity. Indeed, as he also suggests, more than a book, this is a hand-book whose peculiarities can be understood thanks to the accurate structure of the manuscript. The work is structured into 13 chapters, and with the exception of the first and the last one, each of them is devoted to providing the reader with evocative and precise descriptions of the most important regions and places in the Holy Land. Furthermore, this is not just a handbook, but it is also a travel and spiritual guide throughout the sites of the Holy Land with an interdisciplinary approach that combines geography, history, history of art and, of course, theology.

Each chapter consists of a detailed geographic, historic and artistic description of the site or place; this is supported by rich visual materials, which vary from maps to pictures, and are also different in terms of perspectives and subjects. Sometimes the author introduces his own full-colour photos and as a matter of fact, at some points we can detect some sort of autobiographical and self-experienced content. This richness is important to follow the author during his pilgrimage, thus inviting the reader to travel (somehow) with him. The different pictures portraying the groups of pilgrims at holy sites convey a sort of sense of *communitas*, that is the group's pleasure in sharing common experiences, as formulated by V. Turner and E. Turner. This enhances the desire to travel to these fascinating lands.

In my opinion, the most interesting and intriguing aspect of the text is that each chapter ends with questions inviting the author to 'meditation', and immediately after, he suggests some readings and responses. This is one of the very original contributions of the text, as the biblical

references denote the real essence and the main aim of the work: to guide Christians to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. There is no doubt about the author's intention to deliver an educational work to the public that builds on the Christian origins and makes readers and travellers rediscover themselves during their travel experience.

Precisely for its contents and structure, for its aims and target, the book is useful for the whole pilgrimage experience, which, indeed, begins at home, once the plan to travel has started and preparation has begun. Furthermore, I would add that this book will also help pilgrims to reflect on their pilgrimage experience once home, thanks to the questions inviting readers and pilgrims to meditations, and biblical reading. Access to the religious and spiritual understanding of certain events and experiences assumes new meanings once back in ordinary life and the memory of this travel guide might help to keep the light of the Holy pilgrimage alive.

One of the aspects that Binz transmits and defends is that travelling as a tourist is different to travelling as a pilgrim, and this can be easily understood from the first lines of his work:

Pilgrimage is not an experience of pleasing sightseeing. Rather pilgrimage immerses travelers in a formative journey, a multifaceted experience that can be described as universal, communal and liturgical (p. 1).

He clearly defends an understanding of pilgrimage in religious and prayerful terms, contrary to post-modern research that is committed to the characterisation of 'secular pilgrimages'. As opposed to post-contemporary pilgrimages with new values, Binz shows that the ancient act of pilgrimage linked to religion is far from over.

The result of the work is a fascinating geo-biblical description, that by means of a journey of faith, contributes to the rediscovery of a never-ending sense of the sacred places of the Holy Land.

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