

## Journals Beget Journals

Review of

*Patmos Journal: In Search of Thomas Merton with Robert Lax*

By Patrick Hart, OCSO

Westerly, RI: Ring Tarigh for the Literary Renaissance, 1996

16 pages / \$10 limited edition – paperback

and

*Israel Journal: A Trappist Pilgrim in the Holy Land*

By Patrick Hart, OCSO

Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 2000

25 pages / \$18 limited handpress edition – paperback

Reviewed by **Jeanne Doriot, SP**

As general editor of the Thomas Merton Journals, Brother Patrick Hart traveled in 1992 to Athens and Patmos. The purpose of his journey was to consult Merton's friend Robert Lax about the chronology of Merton's Cuban entries in pre-monastic journals discovered after Merton's death. Brother Patrick's own chronicle of his trip to Greece and stay with Lax was published in 1996 as *Patmos Journal*.

The research trip to Greece gave Brother Patrick the opportunity to visit Israel, where he spent most of his time at the Trappist Monastery of Latroun. However, he was able to tour the Holy Land as well. And so, this welcome publication of the *Israel Journal* now offers us the joyous sound of two hands clapping in celebration.

Hallmarks of both journals are Brother Patrick's attention to detail and his ability to communicate his enjoyment of people and places. For instance, the author observed in *Patmos Journal*, after his flight from Louisville to Athens, with a plane change in Boston and refueling stop in Paris: "First glimpse of the Acropolis coming in from the airport is impressive. Majestic standing there on a hill in the heart of the old city, and I think of Saint Paul who preached to the Athenians nearly two thousand years ago."

The ferry crossing of the Aegean to Patmos involved sharing a cabin with a Greek who spoke good English because his wife was from Texas, Brother learned. Enroute, he enjoyed his first taste of Greek beer for lunch with his roommate. After a brief nap, he arrived at the "enchanted island of the Apocalypse" where Lax, "bearded and smiling," welcomed him and settled him in a hotel. The hotel, the monk wrote, was "very modest indeed but entirely adequate for my needs," and his host "had fruit and candy along with a bottle of Greek wine in my room, as well as bottled water. What a thoughtful and gracious host." (And that is what Brother Patrick himself is to his visitors at the

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**Jeanne Doriot, SP**, works in Los Angeles as administrative assistant for the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters. Her poetry and book reviews have previously appeared in *The Merton Seasonal* and *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*. She is a Sister of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Abbey of Gethsemani.)

Walking with Lax to his home near the harbor, Brother commented that everyone on Patmos knew Lax, who was known as “Petros” by the natives. In Lax’s home on the top floor of a small house with a balcony overlooking the shore and the Aegean in the distance, the monk and the poet categorized the Merton journals. Lax, Brother Patrick wrote, was “probably the only person alive who can really help in deciphering these early journals and their chronology.” He did not disappoint.

*Patmos Journal* closes with the pilgrim monk boarding a plane for Israel after a short delay by officials questioning his reason for having visited Patmos. Only when the traveler produced Merton’s journals did his two interrogators hurry him on to the plane. “I’m convinced that Merton arranged it all,” concluded Brother Patrick, thus providing a natural link to *Israel Journal*, for a sense of playful irony provided a Trappist host in Israel named Father Louis, with whom Brother Patrick had studied in Rome 25 years earlier. Like a gracious Lax on Patmos, Father Louis made his guest comfortable at the abbey, drove him to Emmaus and eventually found him quarters at a hospice on the edge of Jerusalem. From there the visitor could more easily access such sites as Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Declining a camel ride up the Mount of Olives, Brother Patrick “succumbed to buying more postcards and a belt with a bronze buckle of Jerusalem.” This word picture, concise as a William Carlos Williams poem, stayed with me for a long time. Whatever became of the ornate belt? Of course, he explained when I asked, he gave it to a friend.

The writer’s simple, direct description of the Via Dolorosa Way of the Cross offers a classic example of sensory appeal: “Jostling crowds, pushing together through stinking, narrow, and winding streets with fish markets, icon shops, leather bags and leather sandals hanging on the shops open to the streets. I was tempted to stop and buy a pair of sandals, but resisted the temptation as it seemed so incongruous while making the Way of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa in the old city of Jerusalem.”

Fittingly, as *Patmos Journal* begins with Brother Patrick departing for Greece, *Israel Journal* ends with Brother Patrick safely ensconced on a plane homeward-bound for Gethsemani. Both journals exquisitely display Brother Patrick’s keen eye and ear and his gift for articulating a sense of place, much as did Merton himself. Moreover, both publications are eye-appealing. While *Patmos Journal* offers photographs by Brother Patrick (including one of Lax) plus one by Lax of Brother, *Israel Journal* employs only title page and cover illustrations by Jim Cantrell and a map by Celia Gluck. Handset in Joseph Blumenthal’s Emerson and Victor Hammer’s American Uncial and Ratdolt types, *Israel Journal* is the more handsome of the chapbooks, at least to this reader’s eye.

Whereas each of these journals describes important journeys, at first glance they might appear relevant only in relationship to the works of Merton recounting his memorable life’s journey. However, *Patmos Journal* and *Israel Journal* each stands on its own merit, but the reader can hope Brother Patrick himself might have further journals to share.

[Note: Both books are available from Bardstown Art Gallery, P O Box 417, Bardstown, KY 40004.]