

## Introduction

In his *Trattato di Terra Santa e dell' Oriente*, published in 1524, the Venetian friar Francesco Suriano wrote the following about the Holy Land. God, he said, “decreed this land to be the habitation of the Holy Spirit, that is of His Son . . . in which He should work the salvation of the world by his birth, life and death.” He had “ennobled, decorated and adorned with every prerogative of sanctity and grace above all other parts of the world as the principle which contains every perfection of the world.” From this land “has diffused all graces in all parts of the world, just as from the heart of the animal the vital spirits are diffused to all the members of the animal, as from the fountain runs down the water in rivulets, and as the lines are drawn from the center of this land . . .”<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Suriano evokes a Holy Land that would have been familiar to his devout early modern Catholic readers. It was a sacred landscape, beloved of God, because it was the divinely appointed home of Christ. It was in consequence a powerful and transformative place of encounter with a living Christ because the region continued to resonate with his divinity. Of special relevance to our investigation here, however, is Suriano’s depiction of the Holy Land as the *source* of Christian perfection. The region described in this passage is a powerful, active force of divinity and a central actor in a global story of redemption – “a beating

<sup>1</sup> The seminal modern edition of Francesco Suriano’s treatise is the *Trattato di Terra Santa e dell’Oriente* (Assisi: Artigianelli, 1900). The translation used here comes from the excellent English edition, *Treatise of the Holy Land*, trans. Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1949): 22–23.

2 *The Holy Land and the Early Modern Reinvention*

heart,” an ever-flowing “fountain of sacrality,” that “diffused all graces in all parts of the world.”

Suriano’s conception of a powerful, unbounded source of sacrality sets the frame for the following exploration of Catholic engagement in the Holy Land between 1517 and 1700. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on a region that remains a focus of intense interest to this today. Bookstore shelves heave with publications penned by modern day travelers, popular historians, and journalists as well as academics. The vigorous production of scholarship on medieval and early modern pilgrimage is especially striking, all the more because it shows little sign of slowing down.<sup>2</sup> That the Holy Land continues to generate such intense interest makes sense for many reasons that also shape the present study, not the least of which is its possession of a shared biblical past. This shared past has imbued the Holy Land with a special authority and mythic character that have made the region not only a revered spiritual home for Muslims, Christians, and Jews and a site of extraordinary religious diversity but also a source of a living sacred history that continues to inform present-day realities and religious identities. As Moshe Sharon argues so eloquently in a recent study of medieval pilgrimage, “the Holy Land is more than a geographical name; it is a concept, it is a focus

<sup>2</sup> A small sampling of the diverse and rich nature of recent scholarship on shrines and pilgrimage in the Holy Land includes Marianne Ritsema van Eck, “Encounters with the Levant: The Late Medieval Illustrated Jerusalem Travelogue by Paul Walter Von Guglingen,” *Mediterranean Review* 32(2018): 153–188; Adam G. Beaver, “From Jerusalem to Toledo: Replica, Landscape and the Nation in Renaissance Iberia,” *Past and Present* 218 (2013): 55–90; James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Katharine Blair Moore, “The Disappearance of an Author, the Appearance of a Genre: Niccolò da Poggibonsi and Pilgrimage Guidebooks between Manuscript and Print,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 357–411; Arad Pnina, “Mapping Divinity: Holy Landscape in Maps of the Holy Land,” in *Jerusalem As Narrative Space*, ed. Annette Hoffmann and Gerhard Wolf (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 263–276; Paris O’Donnell, “Pilgrimage or Anti-Pilgrimage? Uses of Mementoes and Relics in English and Scottish Narratives of Travel to Jerusalem, 1596–1632,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 13 (2009): 125–139; Alexandra Cuffel, “From Practice to Polemic: Shared Saints and Festivals As ‘Women’s Religion’ in the Medieval Mediterranean,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 68 (2005): 401–419; Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of the Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford University Press, 2002; reprint, 2004); Daniel Vitkus, “Trafficking with the Turk: English Travelers in the Ottoman Empire during the Early Seventeenth Century,” in *Travel Knowledge: European “Discoveries” in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ivo Jamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 35–52; Lucia Rostagno, “Pellegrini italiani a Gerusalemme in Età Ottomana: Percorsi, Esperienze, Momenti d’incontro,” *Oriente Moderno* 17 (1998): 63–157; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

*Introduction*

3

of identity, it is a source of inspiration, it is legend and reality intermingled and interchanged.”<sup>3</sup>

The present monograph explores one particularly important dimension of the Holy Land for early modern Catholics, namely, its function as a powerful source of spiritual and political legitimacy. By 1517, the forces of religious reform were shaking the foundations of the Catholic tradition, threatening many of its traditional structures of authority including the papacy. The westward expansion of the powerful Muslim Ottoman Empire, the emergence of new Catholic empires and encounters with cultures previously unknown to Europeans were other forces that tested the fabric of the Church, reshaping it as it ventured into the modern era. A central argument of this book is that the Holy Land became a critical *place* in which many early modern Catholics sought legitimacy for their changing tradition. They did so through an imaginative engagement with its storied Christian past, an engagement that was no less material and political as it was ideological in nature because, for Catholics, the material was another critical conduit of its authority. Being *there*, performing the liturgical rites, possessing convents, churches, and shrines as well as practicing central Christian tenets demarcated a place for the Catholic tradition *in* the sanctifying power of the region, and in doing so facilitated its reinvention.

This inventive function of the Holy Land is well on display in the passage penned by Francesco Suriano, one of the reasons why his treatise serves as our starting point for our analysis of Catholic engagement in the early modern Holy Land. Another reason is that Suriano was a known expert on the sacred landscape because of his many years of service to the Custodia Terrae Sanctae (the Custody of the Holy Land), the venerable pilgrimage institution that is the focus of our investigation here. The Custody was first established in 1342 to oversee Western pilgrimage to the Holy Places, the sacred sites associated with the life and death of Christ. Political boundaries have shifted since the sixteenth century, leaving modern-day Christian pilgrims to wander through the modern states of Egypt, Syria, Israel, and Lebanon in pursuit of this Christian past. As in earlier centuries, however, the Custody continues to fulfill its central pilgrimage mandate from the convent of the Holy Saviour in Jerusalem, its administrative base since 1558. It also remains in the hands of the

<sup>3</sup> Moshe Sharon, ed., “Introduction,” in *The Holy Land in History and Thought*. Papers Submitted to the International Conference on the Relations between the Holy Land and the World Outside it (Johannesburg 1986) (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

4 *The Holy Land and the Early Modern Reinvention*

Franciscan order, marking a continuous history of Franciscan governance of almost seven hundred years. Dressed in their distinctive brown robes, the brothers are a familiar site in the streets of the Old City, as they lead groups of Catholic pilgrims in well-choreographed visitations of the sacred Christian sites.

Suriano would have been well familiar with these sacred itineraries because he spent years in the ministry of the Custody involved in a wide array of tasks – tending to the material and spiritual needs of pilgrims, maintaining Latin altars in the Holy Places, and providing pastoral care to local Catholic merchants. Typical of the mobile nature of the Franciscan ministry, the Venetian friar moved around while in the Custody, assigned to communities in Beirut and Jerusalem. Suriano thus gleaned a great deal of experience while there, but his official status as *custos* also invested his *Trattato* with added authority. Suriano held the post twice, between 1481 and 1484, and 1512 and 1514. As *custos*, Suriano served simultaneously as the head (guardian) of the Franciscan community and as the most powerful representative of the Western Church within the boundaries of the Custody. Thus, from the main convent in Jerusalem, Suriano oversaw the operations of an institution that was an important local political as well as spiritual manifestation of the Catholic tradition in a region of immense significance to Christians, a region that at the time lay under the authority of a great Muslim power, the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt.

Whether Suriano was aware of the changes to come is unclear from his treatise. Most of it was written during the 1480s, following his first tenure as *custos* with some revisions made later during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. By the time he was living in Jerusalem during his second term, however, the Venetian friar must have noticed the steady westward expansion of Ottoman influence along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. In 1516/1517, only two years after Suriano left Jerusalem for good, the forces of Selim I (d. 1520) swept the regions of the Holy Land into the embrace of the Ottoman Empire. As a prominent Catholic official, the Venetian friar may also have heard the rumblings of reform that were growing increasingly louder in the Catholic Church by this time and which would soon rupture the once united Catholic body, creating a much more diverse Christian landscape in Europe after 1517. Certainly, as a Franciscan, Suriano would have been aware as well of the deep ideological divisions then besetting his own Order by this time, divisions that – in a curious case of historical synchronicity – took formal form in 1517 when the Order recognized the creation of two separate branches: Conventual, and Observant.

Introduction

5

As the following investigation will show, these profound changes, along with the increasing integration of the Mediterranean into global trading networks and the emergence of new imperial rivalries, would have important consequences for the operations of the Custody after 1517 because of its intimate association with the Holy Land. One of the most important consequences, and the focus of the present investigation, was the transformation of the Custody into a site of intense intra-Christian conflict. This monograph asserts that these conflicts, when studied in the context of the profound changes shaping the early modern Church, illuminate the Holy Land's valued function as a powerful source of spiritual and political legitimacy for members of an embattled Catholic tradition and, in consequence, an influential role for the Custody as its gatekeeper.

To make this case, the following study probes five of the more persistent challenges to the jurisdiction of the Franciscan brothers from other Christians between 1517 and 1700. These conflicts assumed different forms and involved a diverse array of Christian institutions and communities including not only other Christians (Greek Orthodox, Protestant reformers) but also fellow Catholics. Close investigation of these conflicts thrusts into relief a decidedly traditional conception of the Holy Land as a powerful material vessel of Christ's authority, one that many Catholics found as useful for legitimizing claims to spiritual leadership *within* the Catholic Church as it was for affirming the authenticity of the Catholic faith vis-à-vis other Christian traditions. Indeed, the authority vested in the Holy Land helps to explain not only the intensity and nature of Catholic engagement in the region after 1517 but also why it was meaningful for European powers such as those of France, Spain, and the papacy, to exercise jurisdiction over the administration of the Custody.

With this argument in mind, this monograph makes three assertions that will be developed over the course of six chapters. Firstly, that the early modern Catholics studied here privileged the authority of the Holy Land because they considered it the *place* of Christ. To be there, in contact with the region, was to lay claim to its transformative power and thus to spiritual expertise and authority. Buoyed by this belief, the Catholics of this study emphasized their first-hand experience of the region in their writings, marked its landscape with material evidence of their presence in the form of buildings, art, and Catholic bodies, and, in some cases, exercised jurisdiction *there*. Secondly, along with manifesting a presence *there*, Catholics turned to sacred pasts in the Holy Land to articulate their claims to spiritual authority and leadership. Thirdly,

6 *The Holy Land and the Early Modern Reinvention*

accessing the sacralizing power of the Holy Land required working both through, and with, Islamic structures of authority since the sacred landscape resided within the boundaries of a powerful Muslim regime. The Holy Land had spent most of its history under the rule of a succession of Muslim rulers, the most recent at this point being the Ottoman rulers based in Constantinople (modern day Istanbul). Indeed, the Custody was a construct of both Islamic and canon law, and its operations were also significantly informed by the broader Ottoman context in which it operated.<sup>4</sup> This Ottoman context we should note included a rich diversity of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, a reality that recognized the Holy Land's traditional importance for all three Religions of the Book inasmuch as it does the historically diverse religious and ethnic character of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, a particular concern of this study is to assert the influence of local relations (political, religious, legal) in shaping not only the nature of Catholic engagement in the Holy Land but also the meaning of this sacred landscape for early modern Catholics.

The organization of chapters requires some explanation, especially since it ends with the Franciscan brothers of the Holy land who serve as our central lens into the conflicts involving the Custody. It is precisely because they operate at the center of this investigation, however, that this monograph gives the friars the last word on the Holy Land. Indeed, in Chapter 6 they provide us with not only the last but also the most poignant of the sacred histories considered here. We begin instead from the outside, with conflicts that take us to the frontiers of Catholic engagement with other Christians, in this case the Greek Orthodox and Protestant reformers. From there we move steadily inwards to examine relations between the friars and other Catholics including Catholic institutions (the French state, the papacy, other Franciscans). These final three chapters probe particular cases of jurisdictional conflict to shine a light on a Catholic body riven by reforming currents and the forces of political change – a body that was also slowly transforming in response to these changes.

Chapter 1 introduces the Custody by situating the venerable institution in three contexts critical for understanding its historic role as a gateway to

<sup>4</sup> On Ottoman governance vis-à-vis non-Muslim subjects (*dhimmi*), see among others, Oded Peri, *Christianity under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); and Ronald C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571–1640* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

*Introduction*

7

the Holy Land for early modern Catholics: Western pilgrimage, a shared sacred landscape, and Ottoman governance. By the sixteenth century, the Custody had operated within a multi-faith site of pilgrimage for several centuries, an experience that informed its character and influence as much as its roots in Catholic spirituality. The Ottoman conquest severed the Holy Land from its former Mamluk rulers in 1517, bringing the region into a new political and religious context that had formative consequences for the Franciscan brothers of the Holy Land and their management of Western pilgrimage. This discussion, along with an exploration of the Holy Land as a shared sacred landscape and the Holy Places as shared shrines provides an important context for interpreting the disputes between the friars and other Christians, beginning with the conflicts with the Greek Orthodox in Chapter 2.

The remaining chapters each explore a specific jurisdictional challenge faced by the Franciscan brothers of the early modern Custody, to highlight the Custody's role as a valued gatekeeper to the legitimizing authority of the Holy Land during an era of profound religious and political change. Central to the discussion in each one is recognition of the Custody's role in manifesting a material, spiritual, and legal place for the Catholic tradition *in* the Holy Land and most importantly *in* the Holy Places. Chapter 2 examines the rekindling of a rivalry between the Latin (Catholic) and the Greek Orthodox communities in Jerusalem over the possession of altars in the Holy Places. These disputes, which were legal, political, and liturgical in form, also engaged a broad international Catholic community in defense of Latin altars. It is the argument of this chapter that these disputes functioned as rites of Christian legitimacy involving two ancient Christian traditions with universalist ambitions, both of which could trace a long material and spiritual presence in the Holy Land. In addition to highlighting the influence of these sacred histories in shaping relations between the two Christian communities during the Early Modern Period, a central objective of this chapter is to feature the hybrid character of the Custody. As both an Islamic and Catholic institution, one that straddled Ottoman and Western structures of authority, the Custody played a critical role in mediating Western access to the Holy Places through its legal possession of altars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Some scholars prefer the term “Islamicate” to explain evidence of cultural mixing, syncretism, in shaping the character of institutions such as the Custody. It does apply to the Custody, but for the purposes of this monograph, I find it especially helpful to think of this institution as a product of, and imbedded in, multiple structures of authority both

8      *The Holy Land and the Early Modern Reinvention*

Chapter 3 shifts our attention to the European Reformation as another Christian context shaping the meaning of the Holy Land for early modern Catholics, in this case focusing upon the religious engagement of a brotherhood of devout Catholics known as the Order of the Holy Sepulcher. The Reformation sparked intense discussion over the efficacy of the rite of pilgrimage by 1520, a debate that made the Holy Land pilgrimage a particular locus of confessional debate almost immediately. Several members of the Order used their pilgrimage treatises to engage in this debate, revealing in the process a distinctive and devout Catholic brotherhood that privileged a role for members as spiritual leaders through their personal experience of the Holy Land. In particular, these men celebrated their participation in the pilgrimage, the crusading past of the Order, and a spiritual partnership with the Franciscan brothers of the Holy Land as critical foundations of their claims to spiritual expertise on the contested rite. Their writings, moreover, which played upon the visceral experience of the Holy Land pilgrimage, suggest that one important legacy of the Reformation controversies was the intensification of the material cast of the Catholic tradition and the reification of the Holy Land as a material manifestation of the Word.

Chapter 4 uses an intriguing dispute that erupted in 1661 during the Easter pilgrimage to explore growing conflict between the French state and the brothers of the Holy Land over jurisdiction in the Custody. Beginning in the 1620s, we find the Bourbon regime using its Ottoman status as Protector of the Holy Places to transform the Custody into a visibly French Catholic institution. The French state was granted this status in the Capitulations of 1604, and it used it to press for the assignment of French religious (French missionaries as well as French Franciscans) to work in the Custody. The legal cases that followed reveal a Bourbon regime turning to its mythic past as defender of the Holy Land to strengthen a French state badly weakened by decades of religious and political civil conflict in France and which was also facing a powerful imperial rival in the form of the Spanish Habsburg rulers. In this context, an alliance with the Ottoman regime and France's storied crusading past invested the status of Protector of the Holy Places with significance both as a marker of Catholic orthodoxy and Christian leadership.

within the Ottoman Empire and in Europe. On the usage of the term, see, for example, the discussion in Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of the Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



Introduction

9

Chapter 5 examines the Custody's place in the construction of the global ambitions of a post-Tridentine papacy by looking at relations between the Franciscan brothers and the newly established Congregation of the Propaganda Fide (1622). The correspondence found in the archives of the Propaganda Fide reveals a persistent effort on the part of the Congregation to erode the autonomy of the friars and mold them to a new model of ministry that better reflected the globalizing ambitions of the post-Tridentine Church. Of critical importance in this regard was the Custody's jurisdiction in the Holy Places. These sacred spaces offered crucial sites of contact with other Christian communities while mediating the flow of the sanctifying authority of the region to Rome. Thus, this chapter ponders the Holy Land's function both as a Catholic *frontier* and a spiritual *center* of a globalizing Catholic Church, functions that help to explain, in particular, the papacy's concern with the conversion of local Eastern Christians.

In Chapter 6, we turn our attention to the meaning of the Holy Land for the Franciscan brothers, an international Franciscan community that found itself divided internally by the seventeenth century over competing conceptions of the Franciscan ideal. This conflict emerges into view in a series of disputes during the seventeenth century following the arrival of members of the Capuchin, Recollect, and *Riformati* reforming traditions in the Custody. For the brothers of the Holy Land, most of whom were drawn from mainstream or "regular" communities of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), these reformed brethren posed a direct threat to their administration of the Custody. Why they did so is clear when we consider these disputes in conjunction with contemporary Franciscan writings on the Holy Land. These illuminate a decidedly Franciscan understanding of the Holy Land that privileged it as a Franciscan sacred landscape through its association with the life and spirituality of Francis of Assisi. In these sacred histories, the Custody was a legacy of Christ to Francis, one that recognized his role, and that of his most faithful followers, as latter-day apostles.

\*\*\*

This monograph marks a continuation of over two decades of research on, and fascination with, the Franciscan tradition. What began as a dissertation and then a book on the political and spiritual influence of Franciscan preachers during the French Wars of Religion (1560–1600)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Megan C. Armstrong, *The Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers during the French Wars of Religion, 1560–1600* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

has since developed into a more broadly construed study of a revered pilgrimage administration, one that had global reach because it was managed by an international community of friars at a site of global pilgrimage. This study of the Custody of the Holy Land is also by necessity an international project because most of its internal records were destroyed in the nineteenth century,<sup>7</sup> a reality that requires the researcher to look outward to other archives to fill in key gaps in the historical record. Thankfully, the friars were actively in communication with a diverse array of Catholic institutions and powers throughout their history, leaving important repositories of documents in archives across Europe. In addition to the archives of the Custody in Jerusalem, which has an extensive collection of firmans (Ottoman decrees) and a registry of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher among other documents, this research has culled documents from a multitude of archives in Spain, France, and Italy, three regions that enjoyed particularly close ties with the Custody throughout the Early Modern Period. With regard to particular archives, the extraordinary richness of those belonging to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide (Rome) and the Venetian ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, the latter found at the national archives in Venice, have been especially important. The royal archives at Simancas in Spain, the National Historical Archives in Madrid, and the Archives Nationales in France also contain valuable collections of diplomatic and Franciscan correspondence. In addition to these archival sources, this study has relied extensively upon travel accounts to the Holy Land. Pilgrimage treatises, in particular, have been a rich resource, treated here simultaneously as historical records, literary narratives and, perhaps most importantly, as sacred histories. In addition to pilgrimage treatises, of which they produced quite a few, the friars associated with the Custody also wrote a broad array of other texts including chronicles. Together, these diverse writings provide another important filter through which this project has examined the meaning of the Holy Land for early modern Catholics.

As should be abundantly clear from this discussion, the present project has cast a wide net with the objective of studying a diverse array of Catholic actors and diverse modes of religious and political engagement in the early modern Holy Land. It does not claim to be an exhaustive let alone definitive study but rather an interjection into recent scholarly

<sup>7</sup> On the destruction of the archives, see, in particular, Narcyz Klimas, “I danni subiti nei secoli dall’Archivio gerosolimitano: Principale causè e fattori,” *Antonianum* 3 (2009): 531–564.