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Custodians of Sacred Space

Constructing the Franciscan Holy Land through texts and sacri monti (ca. 1480-1650)

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Chapter 6: La Verna, the first *sacro monte*: a Franciscan Calvary and another Jerusalem in the West

In diverse writings, the Franciscans of the Holy Land reinterpreted and valorised the Life of St Francis in order to construct an illustrious past for the *custodia Terrae Sanctae*, which in turn served to bolster their territorial claims.¹ The present chapter deals with the *sacro monte* as a non-textual medium that likewise offered excellent opportunities to employ the Life of St Francis for similar purposes. As has already become clear in the previous chapter, the inception of the *sacro monte* as a phenomenon is often connected to the initiative of Bernardino Caimi at Varallo. However, this mode of creating a sacred geography of chapels on a mount had traditionally been one of the ways to commemorate the stigmatisation of St Francis for a good while already, when, around the turn of the sixteenth century, the Franciscan Holy Land veterans Caimi and Tommaso da Firenze chose the form of the *sacro monte* to translate Jerusalem to Italy.²

In order to analyse the development of the *sacro monte* as a mode for creating a very Franciscan sacred space in the absence of a relic, it is necessary to re-assess the origins of the phenomenon itself. The *status quaestionis* in the secondary literature on *sacri monti* is the widespread conviction that the *sacro monte* of Varallo, founded in 1491, was the first, and can be traced back no further than the devout mind of Bernardino Caimi.³ For example, Amilcare Barbero writes that the beginning of the *sacri monti* as a phenomenon is traditionally dated to 1491. Barbero complicates this statement somewhat by situating the *sacro monte* of Varallo in the art historical and devotional climate of Europe at the time, and by arguing for a comparison with the *sacro monte* of San Vivaldo in Tuscany, which was first recorded in 1509 but developed coevally with that of Varallo.⁴ He does not, however, trace the history of *sacri monti* further back in time.

The aim of this chapter is to do exactly that, namely to go back in time

1 See chapter four.

2 Tommaso da Firenze established the *sacro monte* of San Vivaldo in Tuscany; see chapter five.

3 For example, in a recent paper, Bram de Klerck observes: “Founded in the last decades of the fifteenth century, the *Sacro Monte* of Varallo is the first sanctuary of its kind.” Bram de Klerck, “Jerusalem in Renaissance Italy,” 218.

4 “Tradizionalmente la fondazione dei Sacri Monti è fatta risalire al 1491.” Amilcare Barbero, “Gerusalemme e la Terra Santa nei Complessi Devozionali,” in *Come a Gerusalemme: Evocazioni, Riproduzioni, Imitazioni dei Luoghi Santi tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, ed. Anna Benvenuti and Pierantonio Piatti (Florence: SISMEL, 2013), 385.

and integrate the sacro monte of La Verna, the location of the stigmatisation of Francis, into the historiography on sacri monti (fig. 1). It has been an odd exclusion, for La Verna sheds light on the origins and development of sacri monti as such, and itself presents a Franciscan Jerusalem in the West. While many important contributions have been made to the study of both the Northern Italian sacri monti, as well as the sacro monte of La Verna, the association between these two, or the sacro monte of San Vivaldo, is rarely made and is almost never accompanied by reflection on the type of connection that exists between them. The seminal essay collection on sacri monti edited by Luciano Vaccaro and Francesca Ricardi does include an excellent essay by Massimo Papi on Mariano da Firenze's *Dialogo del Sacro Monte della Verna* (1510-22).⁵ However, here as elsewhere, the relationship between the sacro monte of La Verna and other sacri monti is not the subject of attention. Generally speaking, the secondary literature on La Verna and on other sacri monti are two entirely discrete orbits: the Italian bibliography on sacri monti, published in 2010, lists only Papi's paper, and four references to primary sources on La Verna.⁶ Recently, Anna Giorgi did observe that La Verna is "a sort of natural sacro monte" in comparison to the later sanctuaries.⁷ This statement presents a bit of an inversion of reality: La Verna is not just somewhat similar to a sacro monte, it *is* the primordial sacro monte, and indeed the origin of later ones. The only real exceptions to the prevalent opinion are brief observations by Peter Cannon Brooks and Guido Gentile. In an excellent, but little cited contribution in the proceedings of a conference held at San Vivaldo in 1986, Peter Cannon Brooks avers that:

There has been a longstanding tendency to see the Sacri Monti as an entirely new creation of the Late Quattrocento and not to look at both Varallo and San Vivaldo in the broader context of Franciscan sanctuaries, above all La Verna.⁸

Cannon Brookes makes this observation within the context of an art historical

5 Massimo D. Papi, "Il Sacro Monte della Verna," in *Sacri Monti: Devozione, Arte e Cultura della Controriforma*, ed. Luciano Vaccaro and Francesca Ricardi (Milan: Jaca, 1992), 435-445.

6 *I Sacri Monti: Bibliografia Italiana*, 31, 45, 50, 97, 101.

7 "La Verna, per la sua conformazione geologica e per la sua storia mistica, è una sorte di sacro monte naturale." Anna Giorgi, "Il Convento della Verna e l'Osservanza Franciscana," in *Altro Monte Non ha Più Santo il Mondo: Storia, Architettura ed Arte alla Verna fra il XV ed il XVI Secolo*, ed. Nicoletta Baldini (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani, 2014), 21.

8 Peter Cannon Brookes, "The Sculptural Complexes of San Vivaldo," in *La 'Geru-*

analysis, with an eye to gaining a better understanding of the terra cotta sculptures at San Vivaldo. In a similar interpretative context, Guido Gentile has argued that the early iconography of the sacro monte of Varallo owes much to the image of La Verna.⁹ These remarks, nevertheless, certainly hold true more broadly, especially with respect to the development of the phenomenon of the sacro monte itself. It can point us in quite another direction for gaining more understanding of at least part of Bernardino Caimi's sources of inspiration for the sacro monte of Varallo. My approach is similar to that of Annabel Jane Wharton, who takes up the challenge of reconstructing Caimi's intention, not in the sense of speculating about 'what he would have wanted', but informed by the art historical theory of Michael Baxandall: "imagining the historical conditions or grounds against which his [Caimi's] actions appear coherent and intelligible."¹⁰ There are of course several ways in which this can be done, and Wharton seeks to contextualise Caimi's effort in reference to for example *Monti di Pietà*, charitable pawnbrokers, and the sacri monti of San Vivaldo and Varese.

My endeavour at reconstructing the intention, thus understood, of Caimi, or for that matter Tommaso da Firenze, founder of San Vivaldo, takes us back to the sacred geography of St Francis' stigmatisation at La Verna, which was a sacro monte long before either of the others existed. In what follows, I will consider both the material development of La Verna, as well as the significance of this location in Franciscan thought. Accordingly, the first section sketches the initial development of La Verna from the donation of this mount to St Francis in 1213, the subsequent construction of a sanctuary commonly referred to as a *sanctus mons*, and finally discusses the prominent place the sacro monte then received in the Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic of Ubertino da Casale. The second section examines the significance of La Verna in later texts from Spiritual Franciscan environments, and how all of these sources together informed Bartolomeo da Pisa's influential appraisal of La Verna, and the explicit associations with the Holy Land it helped crystal-

salemente' di San Vivaldo e i Sacri Monti in Europa (Firenze-San Vivaldo, 11-13 settembre 1986), ed. Sergio Gensini, (Montaione: Pacini, 1989), 275.

9 "..., non solo immagine della Palestina, ma anche rievocazione, memoria di un'esemplare esperienza contemplativa. E il modello era il sacro monte della Verna, consecrato da un "mistero" emblematico di san Francesco, ed integrato nella sua più tipica icona." Guido Gentile, "Da Bernardino Caimi a Gaudenzio Ferrari Immaginario e Regia del Sacro Monte," *De Valle Sicida* 7 (1996): 208.

10 Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replica's, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 118-9; Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985).

lise. The third section connects the transition of the sanctuary from conventual to observant Franciscans to late medieval modifications to the material lay out and increased prominence of the sacro monte. In the fourth section, Bernardino Caimi's visit to La Verna in 1484 is taken as a starting point for reconsidering his *intentions* with respect to the sacro monte of Varallo. Finally, the fifth and sixth sections examine how La Verna continued to be seen as another Jerusalem in the West from the late fifteenth century onwards, and well into the seventeenth century, as well as the role the sacro monte played in this guise in Franciscan Holy Land writing and other texts associated with the order. Accordingly, it will become clear that La Verna was seen as a *sanctus mons* as well as 'second Calvary' already early on, and how the sacro monte presented a very apt, Franciscan, template for translating Jerusalem to the West in the late fifteenth century. La Verna could thus function as a Jerusalem and Calvary, based on perceptions of divinely pre-ordained, instead of constructed, similarity.

6.1 From a solitary place to a *sacro monte*, and a mount of apocalyptic proportions

On May 8, 1213 Count Orlando of Chiusi in the Tuscan region of Casentino met Francis at the castle of San Leo in Montefeltro.¹¹ After hearing him preach, and following an interview about the state of his soul, Orlando offered to give Francis a mountain near his castle in Chiusi, which he praised as being very remote and apt for doing penance and solitary meditation; Francis accepted. The event of this donation, the effective start of the history of La Verna, is not recorded in the important hagiographical texts by Celano and Bonaventure, but it does appear in the *Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius* (1327-1341), as well as in the late fourteenth-century vernacular text *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate di San Francesco*, which depends on the *Actus* chapter IX: "De inventione montis Alvernae."¹² These texts were written more than a hundred years after the event of the donation, by exponents of the Franciscan

11 For a chronological overview of all the major events and developments at the sacro monte of La Verna, as well as references to the relevant sources, see: Marino Bernardo Barfucci, *Il Monte della Verna: Sintesi di un Millennio di Vita*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Giunti, 1992), 235-254; Anna Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità: Cronistoria del Santuario della Verna, Date ed Eventi, Spiritualità, Sviluppo Edilizio ed Artistico* (La Verna: Privately printed, 2011).

12 *Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius*, ed. Paul Sabatier (Paris: Fischbacher, 1902); The *Considerazioni of the Stigmata* is a text that is commonly found together with the *Fiorretti* of St Francis, a vernacular adaptation of the *Actus*, in manuscript compilations from late fourteenth century onwards. The *Considerazioni* is a much edited and translated, but

Spiritual movement. The relative lateness of these sources is reflected by the incorrect dating of the donation, the *Considerazioni* mention 1224, the year of Francis' stigmatisation, for this episode. However, a charter issued by the heirs of Count Orlando in 1274, confirms the oral act of donation and records the actual date of the event in 1213.¹³

Other early documents that mention La Verna are mostly papal bulls and letters, and these testify to the early identification of the sanctuary as a *sanctus mons*, as well as 'another Golgotha'. In 1239 Marcellino Pete, bishop of Arezzo, granted forty days of indulgence to those who assist "the friars minor staying on the rock of Verna" in extreme poverty.¹⁴ Then, in 1250, Pope Innocent IV granted forty days of indulgence to anyone who helps the friars of the holy mount La Verna (*montis sancti averne*) with the convent church they had started to construct.¹⁵ In the same year as this first sign of building activities, Innocent takes La Verna under papal as well as personal protection, twice referring to the mount as *sanctus mons Averne*.¹⁶ Following these first identifications of La Verna as a *sanctus mons*, referring to the sanctuary as such became commonplace. In a bull issued on April 8, 1255, Pope Alexander IV too refers to La Verna as a *sanctus mons* while taking it under his protection and ordering that it should never be abandoned by the friars. In addition, the bull explicitly identifies La Verna with Golgotha:

[T]he holy sanctuary of this mountain, which we are wont to call God's Horeb because on it a true servant of Christ burnt with seraphic ardour, or compare to another Golgotha because on it Francis was fixed to the Cross of Christ.¹⁷

little studied text. Arthur L. Fisher, "A Reconsideration of the Fioretti, the Little Flowers of St. Francis," *Collectanea Franciscana* 57 (1987): 5-24; Antonio Montefusco, "The History as a Pendulum: The *Actus* and the *Fioretti*," *Franciscan Studies* 71 (2013), 361-373; *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate di San Francesco, Introduzione di Alessandro Mastromatteo*, ed. Nunzio Bianchi (Modugno: Stilo Editrice, 2013); Daniele Solvi, "Spiritualità Franciscana dei Fioretti," *Vita Minorum* 84, no. 6 (2013), 47-126.

13 For the issue of dating the event see: Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 29-30; for the text of the charter see: Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 285-6, or *Codice Diplomatico della Verna e delle SS. Stimate*, ed. Saturnino Mencherini (Florence: Gualandi, 1924), 38-9.

14 Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 281; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 13-14.

15 Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 282; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 14-15.

16 Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 282; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 15.

17 "Nos igitur de tanti patris orationibus confidentes, hunc sacrum sanctum montis locum, quem Dei Horeb, eo quod in eo Christi revera famulus seraphico exarsit ardore, appellare, aut alteri Golgotha, eo quod in eo Franciscus Christi fixus fuit cruci, comparare consuevimus, in

The stigmatisation of Francis on La Verna had apparently, by this time, already suggested more or less commonly accepted associations with Calvary.

During these same years, La Verna started to develop into a sacro monte, in the sense of a mountain with a sacred topography marked out by several chapels. On August 25, 1256, the convent church *Santa Maria degli Angeli* was consecrated, and the convent presumably (near) completed.¹⁸ Few years later, building activities began for a complex of oratories on the location associated with the stigmatisation of Francis, under the patronage of count Simone Giudi di Battifolle, in 1263.¹⁹ While the first chapel of the stigmata was later replaced by the larger present structure, the original inscription that records the munificence of count Simone remains.²⁰ Around the same time, an oratory dedicated to St Anthony of Padua (1195-1231) was erected close by (fig. 2, Anthony had retired to La Verna for penance and contemplation in 1230); as well as another oratory, later dedicated to St Bonaventure, and a chapel dedicated to the Cross, were constructed under the patronage of the Count Simone.²¹ Soon after, in 1267, the count also assisted with the construction of five cells destined for secluded contemplation by respected religious of the Franciscan order. With these constructions, a first nucleus of chapels and cells around the site of the stigmatisation had been created (fig. 3). It was in this form that La Verna welcomed prominent members of the Franciscan Spiritual movement, such as Conrad of Offida (1241-1306), the blessed Giovanni della Verna (1259-1322), and Ubertino da Casale (1259 – ? after 1328).²²

The latter, a leading figure among the Spiritual Franciscans, especially put La Verna on the map as a place of singular significance. Ubertino's assertions about La Verna must be understood with reference to both his Spiritual affiliations and Franciscan apocalyptic thought at the time. The Franciscan

speciali assumimus cunctis nostris viribus protegendum, ac sub nostra ac Sedis Apostolice protectione perpetuo recepimus atque recipimus, ..." Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 284; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 17-20.

18 Anna Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento alla Verna dell'Osservanza," in *Altro Monte Non ha Più Santo il Mondo: Storia, Architettura ed Arte alla Verna dalle Origini al Primo Quattrocento*, ed. Nicoletta Baldini (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani, 2012), 47; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 21.

19 Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 47; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 19.

20 Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 66-70.

21 Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 47; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 16, 20; Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 76-77.

22 Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 48-49; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 20-23.

Spiritual movement emerged in the last three decades of the thirteenth century, and was heir to enduring controversies over the practice of poverty, as well as other aspects of regular life within the Franciscan order that had started even before Francis' death in 1226. The proponents of more strict observance of poverty had started to incorporate apocalyptic elements into their ideologies inspired by the writings of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), from round 1240 onwards. A specific "Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic" began to materialise, in which the final stage of history was imminent, and after significant tribulations the Church itself would be renewed and led by 'spiritual men' characterised by poverty, as prophesied by Joachim of Fiore. These men were, in this case, identified as the Franciscans, as well as the Dominicans. Moreover, Francis came to be identified as the angel of the sixth seal of the apocalypse (Apoc. 7:2), the herald of the final stage of history.²³

The interpretation of St Francis as an apocalyptic figure caught on within the Franciscan order in varying degrees, but in any case it offered possibilities for elevating also La Verna, from a place comparable to Golgotha, to the place where history itself had been renewed. These Joachite overtones are, for example, detectable in the document issued by the bishop of Arezzo, Guglielmo Ubertini, on May 23, 1256, which offers protection and exalts La Verna, as well as Francis' stigmata.²⁴ The year before, in 1255, Alexander IV had issued a bull in which La Verna was called "another Golgotha"; while in the same year, on October 23, this pope had also condemned the writings of the Franciscan Gerardo of Borgo San Donnino (d. 1276), who had circulated

23 Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola* (Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1979), 150-152; David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001); Stanislao da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo e L'Alter Christus: Genesi e Sviluppo di Due Temi Francescani nei Secoli XIII-XIV* (Rome: Ed. Lauretanium, Ed. Antonianum, 1971); Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 175-229; Marjorie Reeves, "The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 269-316; David Burr, "Olivi, Apocalyptic Expectation, and Visionary Experience," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 273-288; David Burr, "Mendicant Readings of the Apocalypse," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 89- 102; David Burr, "Franciscan Exegesis and Francis as an Apocalyptic Figure," in *Monks, Nuns, and Friars in Mediaeval Society*, ed. Edward B. King, Jacqueline T. Schaefer, and William B. Wadley (Sewanee: The Press of the University of the South, 1989), 51- 62; Raoul Manselli, "L'Apocalisse e L'Interpretazione Francescana della Storia," in *The Bible and Medieval Culture*, ed. W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1979), 157-170.

24 "Sanctum locum montis Alvernici cunctis profecto montibus orbis terre sublimitate

a text at the university of Paris that proclaimed the advent of the third dispensation of the Holy Spirit, in the shape of Francis and his followers, and the overthrow of previous authority and institutions, based on the teachings of Joachim of Fiore.²⁵ These rather radical ideas about Francis as an apocalyptic figure rendered being a Franciscan Joachimite more dangerous than it had been previously. At the time, several prominent members of the Franciscan order were Joachimites, such as for example John of Parma, minister general of the order in the years 1247-1257. The scandal ignited by Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino in Paris contributed to the termination of John's generalate. The following general, Bonaventure de Bagnoregio (1257-1274), mostly managed to steer clear of a reputation as a Joachimist, but he did identify Francis with the sixth angel of the apocalypse in his official legend of St Francis, approved in 1263. Thus, Bonaventure paved the way for many Franciscan thinkers, who subsequently explored Francis as an apocalyptic figure, within and without the bounds of orthodoxy.²⁶ Most Franciscan exegetes avoided a literal identification of Francis with the angel of Apocalypse 7:2, with the notable exception of Peter John Olivi (1248-1298), a Franciscan theologian whose ideas on Franciscan poverty were influential with the Spiritual Franciscans.²⁷

Ubertino da Casale was profoundly influenced by the apocalyptic expectations of Olivi, during the latter's lectorate at the Franciscan convent of

stupendi miraculi, ... Illic nempe humane salutis provisor Deus et cuncte creature prudentissimus gubernator sacratissimorum Christi Stigmatum iam abolitas a fidelium cordibus cicatrices in eorundem non solum cordibus, sed et affectibus in finem seculorum novo et inaudito miraculo renovavit, dum sol in stella splenduit et in corpore strenui militis beatissimi confessoris Francisci triumphatoris pariter et triumpho victoriosissima fulxerunt insignia passionis, ... talis in predicto loco gemma lucidissima claruit, ... ubi densa fagus tripartito fecunda fructu, sacratissime Trinitatis secreto misterio suavem facundiam celestis affaminis obumbrabat, ubi saxorum durities et durior asperitas scopulorum delectabilem mentis in Christo militiam disponebat ..." Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 284-5; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 29-31.

25 At the Lateran Council of 1215, Joachim of Fiore's attack on the trinitarian doctrine of Peter Lombard had already been condemned as heretical, while the rest of his writings and his person remained accepted. The scandal of the Eternal Evangel at the university of Paris in the years 1254-1255, cast another, more definitive blemish on Joachim's teachings. The scandal, started by Gerardo de Borgo San Donnino, rendered the Calabrian Abbot's works dangerous because of potential interpretations by others and in 1263 at the council of Arles the doctrine of the three status was condemned. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, 28-36, 57-62; da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 157-162.

26 Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, 175-181; Burr, "Franciscan Exegesis," 51-2; da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 163-198; cf. Ratzinger. *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*.

27 Burr, "Franciscan Exegesis," 52-62; Burr, "Olivi, Apocalyptic Expectation," 273-6, 278-80, 284; da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 234-251.

Santa Croce in Florence.²⁸ During the years 1289-1302, Ubertino held the same position of lector himself, and subsequently went on preaching tour in central Italy. After preaching against the papacy at Perugia, he was banished to La Verna by his superiors. There, at La Verna, in 1305 Ubertino wrote his major and most influential work, the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*. The *Arbor* is an expansive book that enjoyed a considerable circulation in manuscript well into the fifteenth century, and was first printed in 1485.²⁹ It interprets the life of Christ and the apocalypse in the light of the history of the church, especially the period since the foundation of the Franciscan order up 1305. Thus it proposes an ideological backbone, as well as a past and a future for the Spiritual Franciscans.³⁰ The fifth and final book of the *Arbor* is infused with Olivi's apocalyptic thought, but Ubertino goes further, filling Olivi's mould with much more radical content, for example by identifying Popes Benedict VIII and XI with the mystical Antichrist.³¹ Ubertino likewise identifies Francis with the angel of the sixth seal of the apocalypse, as the *renovator vitae Christi*, and with the second coming of Christ that instigates the final stage of history and a historical renewal of the Church.³²

According to Ubertino, this key historical transition was effected by the stigmatisation of Francis, an event that took place at La Verna. He pays particular attention to this location while writing *Arbor* there. He speaks of La Verna in the highest terms, making the astronomical proportions of the occasion and its location very clear:

O such reverence is due to that sacred mount (*sacer mons*) La Verna, on which so singularly, so sublimely, so familiarly, so efficaciously, Jesus deigned to appear in the form of a seraph, and to return not only to men, but seraphic spirits, so to seal, to inflame, and to signal the foundation of the third stage (*status*) of the world. This place truly is the house of God and the gate of heaven, truly the place of spiritual fire, that those two, the

28 Ubertino was born in Casale Monferrato near Vercelli in the North of Italy, and he entered the Franciscan order in 1273. He spent nine years at the university of Paris, but he was also formed by a meeting with the aging John of Parma at Greccio, as well as by the teaching of Peter Olivi. Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 46-8.

29 Da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 251-3; Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor vite crucifixe Jesu* (Venice: Andrea de Bonettis de Papia, 1485); Stephen Mossman, "Ubertino da Casale and the Devotio Moderna," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 80, no. 3 (2009): 199-280.

30 Gian Luca Potestà, *Storia ed Escatologia in Ubertino da Casale* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1980), 16-21.

31 Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 96-100.

32 Potestà, *Storia ed Escatologia*, 115- 8.

big and the small seraph, wanted to inflame with their presence.³³

Elsewhere in the *Arbor*, Ubertino utters more praise for La Verna, opening his eulogy with the words: “Happy is this holy mountain,” calling it “the mountain of God, a fertile mountain [Ps. 67:16],” and comparing it to Mount Lebanon, Mount Sion, Mount Sinai, and Mount Moria, repeatedly calling it “the mountain of the temple of God,” and once more “the house of God,” and the “gate of heaven [Gen. 28:17].”³⁴ Thus, Ubertino makes La Verna out to be a mountain of scriptural proportions, as well as the place where a new era of salvation history has started.

At the same time, Ubertino seems to have made some effort towards furthering the prestige of La Verna in his own present day as well. It is very likely that during the same year that Ubertino wrote the *Arbor* he managed to inspire Cardinal Napoleone Orsini to grant a letter of indulgences for La Verna, dated to July 10, 1305.³⁵ The letter refers to Francis as *vitae evangelicae renovator* and indicates that through the stigmatisation he became the angel of the sixth seal, rising from the East *in sacro loco montis Alvernae*.³⁶ Even though the first secure evidence of contact between cardinal Orsini and

33 “O quante reverentie locus iste sacer mons Alverne, in quo sic singulariter, sic sublimiter et sic familiariter, sic efficaciter, in forma seraphica dignatus est Jesus apparere et fundamentum tertii status mundi sic sigillare, sic inflammare, sic insignire, non solum hominibus sed seraphicis spiritibus reddere. Vere locus iste est domus Dei et porta celi, vere locus spiritualis incendii, quem illi duo seraph magnus et parvus voluerunt sua presentia inflammare.” Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor*, Lib. V, Cap. IV, fol. 218r.

34 “Felix hic mons sanctus.” Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor*, Lib. V, Cap. IV, fol. 221r; for extensive quotations from the *Arbor* concerning La Verna, see Adolfo Martini, “Ubertino da Casale alla Verna e La Verna nell’Arbor Vitae,” in *La Verna: Contributi alla Storia del Santuario (Studi e Documenti)*, ed. Saturnino Mencherini (Arezzo: Cooperativa Tipografia, 1913), 240-9.

35 The letter is signed: “Datum, Immolae, VI idus iulii, pontificatus domini Clemes V, anno I.” The pontificate of Clement V started on June 5, 1305, nevertheless Mencherini and Barfucci date the letter to 1306. Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 286; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 47-9.

36 “Almus Christi confessor beatus Franciscus, vitae evangelicae renovator, fulsit in ecclesia militante ut fulgentissimum luminare. Hic *velut angelus ascendens ab ortu solis in sacro loco montis Alvernae, per operationem Christi in specie seraphi meruit sacris eiusdem passionis Stigmatibus insigniri. O grande privilegium omnibus retro saeculis inauditum, quo eiusdem confessoris vita, regula et persona seraphici calculi incendio tota flammea redditur, tamquam bulla Jesu Christi veri pontificis confirmatur, et ipsius Agni Iesu similitudine decoratur!*” Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 286; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 47-9; Paolo Vian, “‘Noster Familiaris Sollicitus et Discretus’: Napoleone Orsini e Ubertino da Casale,” in *Ubertino da Casale: Atti del XLI Convegno Internazionale, Assisi 18-20 ottobre 2013* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’Alto Medioevo, 2014), 287-9.

Ubertino dates to November 26, 1306, it is very likely indeed that Ubertino had a hand in obtaining this letter, as well as possibly its phrasing, given the presence of Ubertino at La Verna at the time, and the fact that he entered the service of the cardinal directly after leaving La Verna.³⁷ Even though Ubertino eventually ended as a wandering vagabond in conflict with the papacy, the *Arbor* continued to be read by following generations of Franciscans as well as others.³⁸

6.2 La Verna in the *Actus*, the *Considerazioni*, and the *Liber de Conformitate*

Following Ubertino's rather exultant appraisal of La Verna, the first subsequent text that pays attention to the sacro monte also originated from a spiritual environment. The *Actus Beati Sancti Francisci et Sociorum Eius* is a florilegium of the deeds of St Francis and his companions, written between 1327 to around 1340 in a decidedly spiritual context.³⁹ The *Actus* is based on preexisting written legends as well as oral traditions. Overall, the short anecdotes in the text aim to demonstrate Francis' conformity with Christ in everything. Indeed, the *Actus* is the first text to designate Francis as the *alter Christus*, although it does so without overt eschatological connotations.⁴⁰ The

37 Martini, "Ubertino da Casale alla Verna," 204 n. 2; Vian, "'Noster Familiaris Sollicitus et Discretus,'" 244-5, 287-291.

38 Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 277; Frédégand Callaey, *L'Idéalisme Franciscain Spirituel au XIV Siècle: Étude sur Ubertin de Casale* (Louvain: Bureau du Recueil, 1911), 100-140; Frédégand Callaey, "L'Influence et la Diffusion de L'Arbor Vitae d'Ubertin de Casale," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 17 (1921): 533-546; Emmerich Blondeel d'Isegem, "L'Influence d'Ubertin de Casale sur les Écrits de S. Bernardin de Sienne," *Collectanea Franciscana* 5 (1935): 5-44; Diomede Scaramuzzi, "L'Influsso di Ubertino da Casale su S. Bernardino da Siena," *Bullettino di Studi Bernardiniani* 1 (1935): 94-104; Emmerich Blondeel d'Isegem, "Encore l'Influence d'Ubertin de Casale sur les Écrits de S. Bernardin de Sienne," *Collectanea Franciscana* 6 (1936): 57-76; Mossman, "Ubertino da Casale and the Devotio Moderna," 199-280; da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 251-2, 277-284.

39 Friar Ugolino Boninsegna de Montegiorgo is often identified as the author of the text, although he may have acted as compiler, as well as author of certain parts. Montefusco, "The History as a Pendulum," 363-7; Alessandro Mastromatteo, "Introduzione," in *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate di San Francesco*, ed. Nunzio Bianchi (Modugno: Stilo Editrice, 2013), 7-10; it is not known whether the convent of La Verna was governed by a spiritual outlook, however, life there must have been austere because of its isolated and climatological conditions. Arthur L. Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation of the Convent of la Verna," *Collectanea Franciscana* 51 (1981): 113-122.

40 Da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 200-4.

choice of the terms ‘acts’, however, may be taken as a reference to the Acts of the Apostles, thus implying Francis and his companions are renovators of the Church.⁴¹ As mentioned above, it also is the first text to record the donation of the mountain by count Orlando to Francis, as well as a vision experienced by Francis there that foretells the stigmatisation, recounted by brother Leo.⁴² Moreover, La Verna receives attention in the *Actus* through the person of friar Giovanni della Verna (1259-1322), a Spiritual ascetic from the Marche region, who spent the last thirty years of his life at La Verna.⁴³

The popular vernacular text *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate di San Francesco*, which partly relies on the *Actus*, truly turned the spotlight on La Verna itself, as an important location. This text is devoted mostly to events set on La Verna, and was in all probability written by a Tuscan friar who knew the environment of the sacro monte very well.⁴⁴ Although the *Considerazioni* are often considered to be an addendum to the vernacular adaptation of the *Actus*: the *Fioretti di S. Francesco* (ca. 1370-90); these two texts are not necessarily the work of the same translator-compiler. However, they did often figure together, along with other texts, in early manuscript compilations of late fourteenth century, and when the immensely popular *Fioretti* were first printed in 1476, the *Considerazioni* were printed along with it.⁴⁵ Like in the *Actus* and the *Fioretti*, the theme of Francis’ conformity with Christ is pervasive in the *Considerazioni*.⁴⁶ Apart from the *Actus*, the *Considerazioni* rely on sources such as the hagiographies by Celano and Bonaventure, the *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, a text called the *Instrumentum de Stigmatibus beati Fran-*

41 Solvi, “Spiritualità Francescana dei Fioretti,” 51-2; cf. Da Campagnola, *L’Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 305-6.

42 “Cap IX: De inventione Alverne.” *Actus*, ed. Sabatier.

43 Caps. XLIX-LVII, *Actus*, ed. Sabatier.; the *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (1374) likewise records the life of Giovanni della Verna. Arnald Of Sarrant, *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals of the Order of the Friars Minor*, trans. Noel Muscat (Malta: TAU Franciscan Communications, 2010), 592-604.

44 Benvenuto Bughetti, “Alcune Idee Fondamentali sui ‘Fioretti di S. Francesco,’” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 29 (1926): 323-333; Alessandro Mastromatteo, “Introduzione,” 9; Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 9.

45 The *Considerazioni* seem to date to the same period, although the earliest surviving manuscript witness of the *Considerazioni* dates to 1396. Nunzio Bianchi, “Premessa al Testo,” in *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate di San Francesco*, ed. Nunzio Bianchi (Modugno: Stilo Editrice, 2013), 22; Montefusco, “The History as a Pendulum,” 369; Mastromatteo, “Introduzione,” 12; Bughetti, “Alcune Idee Fondamentali,” 322-327.

46 Solvi, “Spiritualità Francescana dei Fioretti,” 51-2; cf. Da Campagnola, *L’Angelo del Sesto Sigillo*, 305-6.

cisci, and oral traditions concerning La Verna.⁴⁷

The particular attention for La Verna within the *Considerazioni* already becomes clear in the prologue to the text. It informs us that it is about “the glorious stigmata of the blessed father, our lord St Francis, which he received from Christ on the holy mountain of La Verna,” and since the stigmata and wounds of Christ both number five, the present work consist of five topics or considerations.⁴⁸ The first consideration deals with how Francis first came to La Verna, the second with his sojourns on La Verna with his companions, the third with the appearance of the seraph and the stigmatisation, the fourth with how Francis left La Verna, and the final with apparitions and revelations after Francis’s death, for example to Giovanni della Verna.⁴⁹

The second consideration describes a particular revelation about the nature of La Verna that Francis is supposed to have had after pondering his surroundings, the disposition of the mountain, and the big cracks and chasms in its rocks:

And then it was revealed to him by God that those marvellous fissures, were made miraculously in the hour of the passion of Christ, when, according to what the Evangelist says, the rocks were split. And God, who singularly appeared on the mount of La Verna, wanted this particularly, to signify that on this mountain the passion of Jesus Christ must be renewed, in his soul through love and compassion, and by the impression of the stigmata in his body.⁵⁰

47 Mastromatteo, “Introduzione,” 12; Bianchi, “Premessa al Testo,” 23-4.

48 “delle gloriose Stimmate del beato padre nostro messere santo Francesco, le quali egli ricevette da Cristo in sul santo monte della Verna; e imperò che le dette Stimmate furono cinque, secondo le cinque piaghi di Christo, però questo trattato avrà cinque considerazioni.” *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate*, ed. Bianchi, 37-8.

49 “La prima sarà del modo come santo Francesco pervenne al monte santo della Verna. La Seconda sarà della vita e conversazione ch’egli ebbe e tenne co’ suoi compagni in sul detto monte. La terza sarà della apparizione seraphica e impressione delle Stimmate. La quarta sarà come santo Francesco discese del monte della Verna poi ch’egli ebbe ricevute le Stimmate, e tornò a Santa Maria degli Angeli. La Quarta sarà di certe apparizioni e rivelazioni divine fatte dopo la morte di santo Francesco a santi frati e altre persone devote, delle dette Stimmate gloriose.” *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate*, ed. Bianchi, 38-9.

50 “Ivi a pochi dì, standosi santo Francesco allato alla detta cella e considerando la disposizione del monte e maravigliandosi delle grandi fessure e aperture de’ sassi grandissimi, si pose in orazione; e allora gli fu rivelato da Dio che quelle fessure così maravigliose erano state fatte miracolosamente nell’ora della passione di Cristo, quando, secondo che dice il Vangelista, le pietre si spezzarono. E questo volle Iddio che singularmente apparisse in su quel monte della Verna, a significare che in esso monte si dovea rinnovare la passione di

The cracks and fissures in the rocks of La Verna, then, are a sign so willed by God, that have marked this mountain in the moment of the crucifixion as a second Calvary, the place where the passion would be renewed. Although not too overt, there is an apocalyptic flavour to these words in the *Considerazioni*; they make it is easy to imagine La Verna as the location of the second coming of Christ, where the passion is renewed by Francis, the *renovator*. Along with the *Fioretti*, the *Considerazioni* enjoyed a wide circulation in manuscript as well as in print, thus helping to spread and establish the conception of La Verna as a place of key-importance, both in Franciscan and salvation history.

As such, it was soon picked up by Bartolomeo de Rinonichi da Pisa (1338-1401), who used the *Considerazioni* as a source for his discussion of La Verna in his *Liber de Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, written between 1385-1390 and officially approved by the general chapter of 1399. Just as its title suggests, this book aims to demonstrate the unique conformity between Christ and Francis, by examining biographical parallels.⁵¹ Although Bartolomeo takes a more systematic approach than Ubertino da Casale and manages to stay within the bounds of orthodoxy, Ubertino's *Arbor Vitae* is an important source for the *Liber de Conformitate*, as is Joachim of Fiore's *Liber de Concordie*.⁵²

When Bartolomeo turns to discussing the "location where Christ impressed the stigmata on him," he indicates that this happened *in monte sacro Alvernae*.⁵³ For his evaluation of La Verna he seems to mostly rely on the *Considerazioni*, the *Arbor*, and possibly on the *Actus*: he refers to the *legenda de inventione montis Alvernae*, which corresponds to the title of a chapter in the *Actus*. Bartolomeo starts by briefly retelling the donation of La Verna to Francis, the reception of Francis by a host of happy birds when he first arrived at La Verna, and Francis seen levitating in the air during prayer by his companion brother Leo; these episodes are found in both the *Actus* and the *Considerazioni*. By way of conclusion to his summary of these stories, Bartolomeo observes:

Gesù Cristo, nell'anima sua per amore e compassione, e nel corpo suo per impressione delle Stimmate." *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate*, ed. Bianchi, 62-3.

51 Carolly Louise Erickson, *Francis Conformed to Christ: Bartholomew of Pisa's 'De Conformitate' in Franciscan Thought* (PhD Diss. Columbia University, 1969), 26-51.

52 Erickson, *Francis Conformed to Christ*, 77-103; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, 181-3.

53 "Secundum videndum est in quo loco sibi Christus stigmata impraessit [*sic*]. Responditur quod in loco monte sacro Alvernae." Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus Liber Conformitatum Vitae Beati ac Seraphici Patris Francisci ad Vitam Iesu Christi Domini Nostri* (Bologna: Alessandro Benacci, 1590), fol. 302v.

As will be said, this mount La Verna was prepared by God for the blessed Francis, so that on it he might be stigmatised. This mountain extends to a great height, it is very tall, clean of corruption and sincere, completely separated from other mountains; and especially endowed with the signs of Christ's passion. Because at the time of the passion (according to the Gospel) the rocks were torn; which is visible on this mountain in a unique way. Because it is split from top to bottom. To those who look, it is clear that its parts, i.e. the rocks, are divided from one another. All the aforesaid things were very apt for the impression of the stigmata.⁵⁴

The idea that the fissures in the rocks of La Verna demonstrate its connection to the passion and its suitability for the stigmatisation, Bartolomeo gathered from the *Considerazioni*. To this, he adds that the height, the purity, and the sequestered location of La Verna also contribute to the mount's suitability. However, the cracks in the rocks, which are vestiges of the passion, most of all indicate that the stigmatisation had to happen there.⁵⁵

Bartolomeo then goes on to explain that La Verna was made truly exceptional, *valde singularis*, primarily by the stigmatisation, nevertheless, other things have contributed to its sanctity as well. He feels that this becomes most apparent by comparing La Verna to other, Biblical, mountains. At this point, Bartolomeo must have taken inspiration from Ubertino's *Arbor Vitae*, for turning La Verna into a mountain of scriptural proportions.⁵⁶ Quite characteristically, Bartolomeo sets out to make a systematic, point-by-point comparison of what happened on a long list of Biblical mountains, and what happened on La Verna. These include Mount Morach, Bethel, Gilead, Thisgah, Hor, Abirin, Sinai, Gezirim, Moria, Libanon, Golghota, Olives, and Sion. Thus, through his step-by-step comparison, Bartolomeo creates several con-

54 "Ut dicetur, Mons iste Alvernae a Deo fuit beato Francisco praeparatus; ut in ipso stigmatizaretur. Hic mons altitudine est procerus: est enim valde altus, a corruptione mundus, & sincerus: ab aliis montibus totaliter separatus: & passionis Christi signis specialiter praedonatus. Nam tempore passionis (ut patet in Evangelio) Petrae scissae sunt; quod singulari modo in monte isto apparet. Nam divisus est a capite usque deorsum. Partes eius: ut patet cernentibus, scilicet saxa abinuicem sunt divisa. Et praefata omnia impraessione stigmatum fuerunt apta." Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus*, fol. 303r.

55 "Sed passionis vestigia prae aliis indicant stimatizari aliquem ibidem debere: ac stigmatizandum nihil aliud in se habere debere, nisi assiduum crucis baiulationem, per assiduum passionis meditationem. In monte ergo sacro Alvernae beato Francisco a Christo stigmata sunt impressa." Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus*, fol. 303r.

56 "Et attendendum est, quod mons iste stigmatizatione beati Francisci est primo factus

ceptual links between La Verna and a number of mountains in the Holy Land. About the mount associated with the event that elevated La Verna most of all, according to Bartolomeo, he writes: “On Mount Golgotha, and Calvary, Jesus is crucified. On mount La Verna Francis is nailed to the Cross by Christ.”⁵⁷ He concludes his comparisons by saying that on La Verna Francis became one in spirit with God and Christ, and that he could mention many other comparable scriptural mountains, but the aforesaid suffice for now: “Thus one can express the merit of the said mountain: that it is a mountain on which it is pleasing for God to live, and God will live on it in the end [Ps. 67:17].”⁵⁸

Bartolomeo’s neat and orderly synthesis of the accounts of La Verna offered by the *Considerazioni* and Ubertino’s *Arbor*, amended with his own additions, stresses the prodigious importance of this mount and establishes clear links with the Holy Land. This image of La Verna could then reach a large audience of Franciscan readers, because the *Liber de Conformitate* went on to become a popular text within the Franciscan order throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, valued among other things for its encyclopaedic lists of Franciscan saints, authors, provinces, and convents.⁵⁹ We know that a late fifteenth-century manuscript of *De Conformitate* was present on La Verna itself too.⁶⁰ In years to come, several Franciscans authors had recourse to the *Liber* for characterising the importance of this sacro monte, as we shall see below.

6.3 The development of La Verna under observant rule

La Verna was certainly presented as a location of outstanding importance by the influential Franciscan texts discussed above. Yet by the end of the four-

valde singularis. Secundo in ipso facta sunt multa miranda. Est facta valde singularis. Quod apparet si fiat comparatio factorum in ipso, ad facta in montibus aliis; quos sacra Scriptura commemorat.” Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus*, fol. 303r.

57 “In monte Golgotha, & Calvariae, Iesus crucifigitur. In Monte Alvernae a Christo Franciscus crucifixo clauatur.” Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus*, fol. 303r.

58 “Sic ergo de praefato monte potest merito dici; quod est mons, in quo beneplacitum est Deo habitare in eo; & dominus habitabit in eo in finem.” Bartolomeus Pisanus, *Liber Aureus Inscriptus*, fol. 303v.

59 Erickson, *Francis Conformed to Christ*, 2; only after the Reformation the *Liber* became an object of enduring controversy, starting with the *Alcoranum Franciscanorum*, a partial edition with a satirical commentary published in 1542 by the Lutheran Erasmus Alber. Erickson, *Francis Conformed to Christ*, 104-150.

60 Patrizia Stoppacci, “Manoscritti e Libri da Coro alla Verna tra i Secoli XV e XVI,” in *Altro Monte Non ha Più Santo il Mondo: Storia, Architettura ed Arte alla Verna fra il XV ed il XVI Secolo*, ed. Nicoletta Baldini (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani, 2014), 203.

teenth century, the sanctuary itself had remained largely unchanged since the building activities in middle of the thirteenth century. This section examines the socio-economic forces behind a new surge in building activities, under the auspices of the newly arrived observant friars and their Florentine patrons. Under their influence, La Verna not only evolved into an important observant Franciscan stronghold, but it also expanded with a growing number of chapels decorated with terra cotta sculptures. In short, the sacro monte developed into the material configuration in which it would serve as a model for the observant Franciscan founders of the later sacri monti, which are also new Jerusalems, at the turn of the sixteenth century.

The first, tentative step in this process is recorded in the will of Count Tarlato di Pietramala, who in 1348 earmarked 1000 florins, plus 25 florins per annum, to assist the friars with the building of a new church, the *Chiesa Maggiore*. The will was never executed and the construction works remained unfinished, exposed to the elements for more than a hundred years to come. Other donations to the convent seem to have been few and modest, and include two more unexecuted wills: by Roberto di Battifolle in 1400 and Legale di Pietramala in 1403.⁶¹ During the last decades of the fourteenth century a new chapel was added to the sacro monte, halfway between the convent and the nucleus of the stigmata, called the chapel of the Cardinal because Cardinal Galeotto di Pietamala was buried there in 1396. It was built on the purported location of the first cell of St Francis, and dedicated to St Mary Magdalen (fig. 4).⁶²

The convent and sanctuary of La Verna only really began to grow and develop into a thriving community and destination for pilgrimage, after the arrival of the observant Franciscan friars, who turned their conventual brethren out, after prolonged struggles in 1431.⁶³ Prosperity arrived with the observant friars, which is perhaps slightly ironic, since they belonged to a reform movement that insisted on a stricter interpretation of the Franciscan rule, more austerity and poverty. An interest in living in hermitages, inspired by Francis' preference for secluded locations and the eremitical life, led the observants to acquire a growing number of hermitages, such as those at Fie-

61 Arthur L. Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation of the Convent of la Verna," *Collec-tanea Franciscana* 51 (1981): 122-3; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 23-26.

62 In 1669 an upper level on top of this chapel was dedicated to St Pietro d'Alcantara, and in 1719 the lower chapel received an altar made out of the so-called 'table of St Francis' on which Christ was supposed to have sat during a conversation with Francis. Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 53-4.

63 Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 27-8.

sole and Bosco ai Frati. Because of preaching activities, the observants generally preferred hermitages close to urban centres; the more remote La Verna most likely recommended itself by the potent Franciscan order memories it presented.⁶⁴

In his *Dialogo del Sacro Monte* (1510-22), the observant friar Mariano da Firenze tells the story of the transition in the typical terms of a reform movement: laxity and decay reign at La Verna until the observants restore proper rigour.⁶⁵ According to Mariano, the Franciscan tertiary Francesco Catani da Chiusi had been evicted from his hermitage on La Verna by the conventuals for criticising their way of life. Francesco then retreated to a hermitage at Fiesole outside Florence, took to the idea of observant rule at La Verna, rounded up support in Florence, and eventually obtaining approval from Pope Martin V in 1430; a bull that transfers La Verna to the observants is otherwise unrecorded.⁶⁶ The conventuals refused to leave La Verna, and had to be evicted with the assistance of the armed troops of the Florentine Signoria. After the death of Martin V on February 20, 1431, they repossessed themselves of the convent once more. A letter by Cardinal Giordano Orsini dated to November 28, 1431 orders that La Verna be returned to the observants on pain of excommunication.⁶⁷ On December 12, 1431 the conventual friars permanently left the premises, and on June 1, 1432 the first observant guardian, Andrea da Colle (d. 1476) arrived. He proceeded to tear down the five cells, which had fallen in disrepair, and to initiate a daily procession from the convent church to the chapel of the stigmata; measures that are often interpreted as an attempt to make La Verna more attractive for outside visitors.⁶⁸

64 Trinita Kennedy, "In Search of Authenticity: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in the Age of Observant Reform," in *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trinita Kennedy (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2014), 77-8; Grado Merlo, *Tra Eremo e Città: Studi su Francesco d'Assisi e sul Francescanismo Medioevale* (Assisi: Ed. Porziuncula, 1991); Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 54; Anna Benvenuti, "Gli Osservanti e le Mimesi di Gerusalemme. Divagazioni tra San Vivaldo e il Levante," in *Come a Gerusalemme: Evocazioni, Riproduzioni, Imitazioni dei Luoghi Santi tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, ed. Anna Benvenuti and Pierantonio Piatti (Florence: SISMEL, 2013), 291; for an overview of the development of the Franciscan observance, see Michael Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 181- 223.

65 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo del Sacro Monte della Verna di fra Mariano da Firenze*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1930), 97-100; Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation," 125.

66 Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 54.

67 *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 80-1.

68 Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 55; Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation,"

The increased prosperity of La Verna after the arrival of the observants is in many respects due to an agreement made on June 28-30, 1432 between Pope Eugene IV, the Florentine authorities, and the rich Florentine wool guild: the *Arte della Lana*.⁶⁹ Since the observants were not allowed to hold property, the *Arte della Lana* would manage their goods for them; the guild took this responsibility very seriously, and under their patronage and protection La Verna developed into a pilgrimage shrine that attracted visitors from further a-field. In 1433, the *Arte della Lana* was permitted to receive donations and legates for the benefit of the sanctuary, which in turn allowed the carrying out of maintenance to existing structures and the building of new ones.⁷⁰ The next chapel that was added to the sacro monte, that of St Anthony the abbot built in 1441, however, was not financed by the wool guild, but by a prominent visitor who had been miraculously cured of paralysis on La Verna the year before.⁷¹ When works on the *Chiesa Maggiore* resumed in 1451, after being left unfinished for more than a century, it was under the direction of the *Arte della Lana*; the work was finally completed in 1459 (fig. 5).⁷² Few years later the convent building of La Verna was largely destroyed by fire. Although Mariano da Firenze dates this fire to 1472 in his *Dialogo del Sacro monte*, it appears that the *Arte della Lana* obtained papal permission to use funds destined for a church in Florence to repair the damage of a large fire at La Verna already in 1469.⁷³ In the years 1473-74, the convent was rebuilt in much grander proportions by the *Arte della Lana* with the help of Florentine patrons.⁷⁴

126, 128.

69 Paola Benigni, "Il Sacro Monte della Verna e il Protettorato dell'Arte della Lana (1341-1436) Nuovi Documenti," in *Altro Monte Non ha Più Santo il Mondo: Storia, Architettura ed Arte alla Verna dalle Origini al Primo Quattrocento*, ed. Nicoletta Baldini (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani, 2012), 256-268; Francesco Giudi Bruscoli, "Sotto il Patronato dell'Arte della Lana. L'Amministrazione della Verna nel Quattrocento: le Entrate e le Uscite," in *Altro Monte Non ha Più Santo il Mondo: Storia, Architettura ed Arte alla Verna dalle Origini al Primo Quattrocento*, ed. Nicoletta Baldini (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani, 2012), 269-290.

70 *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 84-6; Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation," 126-8.

71 The chapel is no longer existent today, since it was ruined in earthquakes in 1917-8. Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 30; Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation," 130.

72 Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation," 129; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 31.

73 Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 32; Fisher, "The Observants' Transformation," 132; *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 104-8.

74 Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell'Umanità*, 32-3; Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 56.

The second half of the fifteenth century continued to bring more and more illustrious visitors, as well as important donations to La Verna.⁷⁵ This is illustrated by a series of glazed terracotta altarpieces by the renowned Florentine artist Andrea della Robbia (1435-1525) and his workshop, that would define the aspect of the sacro monte, and have a profound influence on the furnishing of later sacri monti. There had been freschi at La Verna, but due to the cold and humid conditions, they were fated to deteriorate quickly; glazed terra cotta pieces may have proved an answer to this problem.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the austere and relatively modest character of terra cotta sculpture turned out to be well suited to the restraint the observant Franciscans wished to exercise with regards to the decoration of their churches. The sculptures of Andrea, who has been called “the interpreter of the observants” by Giancarlo Gentilini, became a common feature of observant churches in the region.⁷⁷ La Verna, however, stands out because of the large number of terra cotta altarpieces: no less than twelve, of which seven by Andrea’s hand, three contemporary pieces by his atelier, and two by his son Giovanni.⁷⁸

The first altarpiece by Andrea, the *Annunciation* in the *Chiesa Maggiore*, was commissioned by the Niccolini family from Florence, and completed sometime in the years 1475-9 (fig. 6). The altarpiece (2.10 x 2.14m) is characterised by a formal architectural frame, within which the lively high-relief human figures of Mary and the angel seem to overflow the borders, set off from a blue background.⁷⁹ During the same years, two terra cotta figures (1.70 x 0.45m) of Francis and the desert father Anthony the Great (ca. 251 – 356) were added to the church, in niches flanking the choir. In 1479, a table of the *Virgin in Adoration* (0.97 x 0.64 m) followed, which had great success and of which around seventy-five reproductions were sold from the Della Robbia workshop in Florence in the subsequent year.⁸⁰ The *Nativity* altarpiece (2.20 x 1.70m) for the Brizi chapel in the *Chiesa Maggiore* dates to 1479 as

75 Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 131-4.

76 Piero Bargellini and Pacifico Brun, *Le Robbiane della Verna* (Arezzo: Edizioni la Verna, 1988).

77 Kennedy, “In Search of Authenticity,” 87-8; Giancarlo Gentilini, *I della Robbia: La Scultura Invetriata nel Rinascimento*, vol. 1 (Florence: Cantini, 1991), 175-212; Andrea Muzzi, “Gli Osservanti Francescani, i Savonarolini e Andrea della Robbia,” in *I Della Robbia e l’Arte Nuova della Scultura Invetriata*, ed. Giancarlo Gentilini (Fiesole: Giunti, 1998), 43-57.

78 Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 8; Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 140.

79 Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 58-61; Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 142-3.

80 Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 50-1; Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 143-4.

well (fig. 7).⁸¹ In 1481, accounts testify that Andrea della Robbia was paid for his work in the chapel of the stigmata by the Alessandri family; it is the largest terra cotta altarpiece at La Verna and it shows the *Crucifixion* (5.65 x 4.20m) with Francis and St Jerome in tormented devotion (fig. 8).⁸² Again, the expressive high-relief human figures are set off against a deep blue background, and are encased in a monumental arch decorated with vegetal motifs and cherubs. Only the focal point of the scene, the crucified Christ, is entirely detached from the background.

More terra cotta sculptures by the Della Robbia would be introduced to decorate the altars of La Verna, in and outside of the *Chiesa Maggiore* and convent church *Santa Maria degli Angeli*.⁸³ However, already by 1481 the presence of these art works, commissioned by prominent Florentine families, testified to the growing importance of La Verna. Moreover, the increasing standing of the sanctuary is also illustrated by the resolve of the general chapter of the Franciscan observance held at Ferrara in 1481, that from now on all such general chapters would be held “at the *sacro monte* of La Verna.”⁸⁴ The following general chapter was indeed held at La Verna in June 1484; however, the practice was immediately abandoned thereafter, because feeding large groups of friars at such a remote location proved too challenging.⁸⁵ Bernardino Caimi was numbered among the attendants of this general chapter, and thus had the opportunity to become familiar with the *sacro monte* of La Verna in its evolved dimensions and its sacred geography of several chapels on a mount, decorated with terra cotta sculpture.

81 Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 44-9; Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 143-4; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell’Umanità*, 33.

82 Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 68-71; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell’Umanità*, 34.

83 These include the *Assumption of Mary*, another *Nativity* scene, the *Disposition of Christ* in the sepulchre, the *Ascension*, and the *Pietà*. Bargellini and Brun, *Le Robbiane*, 30-43, 54-7, 64-5.

84 “In questo Capitolo fu ordinato, che di quivi in poi tutti i Capitoli Generali dell’Osservanza si celebrassero nel sacro monte della Verna.” Dionisio Pulinari, *Cronache dei Frati Minori della Provincia di Toscana*, ed. Saturnino Mencherini (Arezzo: Cooperativa Tipografica, 1913), 53.

85 “L’anno del Signore 1484 e dell’Ordine 278, il Capitolo della Provincia si celebrò nel sacro monte della Verna ... e parimente fra Pietro da Napoli, Vicario Generale, secondo lo statuto del Capitolo Generale di Ferrara, vi tenne il Capitolo Generale, ... E questo Capitolo si fece con grandi spese, per la scomodezza e asprezza del luoco e per la lontananza dalle terre; per il che si revocò lo statuto di Ferrara e si determinò il Capitolo seguente a S. Maria degli Angeli.” Pulinari, *Cronache*, 54; Fisher, “The Observants’ Transformation,” 134; Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell’Umanità*, 34-5.

6.4 Bernardino Caimi and his “little *sacro monte*”

At the general chapter of the observance held at La Verna in 1484, Caimi was sent to the Italian province of Calabria to pacify disputes and unrest among the friars there.⁸⁶ He recalls his visit to the *sacro monte* of La Verna in the sermon collection by this own hand, in which he writes that he saw the beech tree, under which blessed Giovanni della Verna used to meditate, with his own eyes.⁸⁷ In 1484, he had already enjoyed quite a career in the Franciscan province of Lombardy, and had been in the Holy Land, in 1478.⁸⁸ Only after the general chapter held at La Verna and his assignment in Calabria, we find the first signs of Caimi being active at Varallo Sesia: a brief by Pope Innocent VIII dated on December 21, 1486, which allows him to accept donations by the citizens of Varallo for the construction of a convent.⁸⁹ Construction works for the *sacro monte* close to Varallo must have started sometime between the date of this brief and October 7, 1491, when the inscription above the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre chapel at Varallo singles out Caimi as the ideator behind the *sacro monte*.⁹⁰

This chapter argues that when Bernardino Caimi founded the *sacro monte* of Varallo, he took inspiration from the *sacro monte* of La Verna. The

86 For an orderly chronological overview of the most important events in Caimi's life, see Pier Giorgio Longo, “Bernardino Caimi Franciscano Osservante: Tra Eremitori e Città,” *Novarien* 29 (2000): 17-19.

87 Within the context of the sermon *Ipsa trinitas et unitas in Deo demonstratur miraculis* Bernardino exclaims: “Dic exemplum, tu fr. Bernardine, beate Clare de Monte Falco, illius fagi trinice quam vidisti in monte Alverne, datam et demonstratam a Domine Iesu fratri nostro Iohanni de la Verna.” Celestino Piana, “Il Beato Bernardino Caimi da Milano: Un Epigono della Predicazione Bernardiana nell’Ultimo Quattrocento,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 64 (1971): 320; only in 1518 the said beech tree was blown over by the wind; a chapel called the “cappella del faggio” was built in its place. Giorgi, *La Verna Santuario dell’Umanità*, 42.

88 A purported second visit to the Holy Land in 1487-90 remains uncertain and unlikely. Longo, “Bernardino Caimi Franciscano Osservante,” 17.

89 Longo, “Bernardino Caimi Franciscano Osservante,” 18.

90 “MAGNIFICVS DOMINVS MILANVS SCARROGNINVS HOC SEPULCHRUM CVM FABRICA SIBI CONTIGVA CHRISTO POSVIT MCCCCLXXXI DIE SEPTIMO OCTOBRIS: R.P. FRATER BERNARDINVS CAIMVS DE MILANO .OR.MI.DE OBS. SACRA HVIVS MONTIS EXCOGITAVIT LOCA.VT HIC HIERUSALEM VIDEAT. QVI PERAGRARE NEQUIT.” The magnificent Milanese Lord Scarrognino erected this sepulchre with its adjoining workshop for Christ on the seventh day of October 1491 / The reverend father Bernardino Caimi of Milan, of the observance of the friars minor, conceived the sacred places of this mount, so that he who cannot go on pilgrimage sees Jerusalem here. Cf. the previous chapter.

fact that he chose this, quintessentially Franciscan, form of the sacro monte to translate the Holy Places to Italy, is highly significant. At the time, numerous Holy Sepulchre copies of various shapes and typologies existed all over Western Europe.⁹¹ Caimi could have thus installed any sort of a Holy Sepulchre copy, or other commemorations of the Holy Places, in a chapel of the Franciscan convent church Santa Maria delle Grazie, situated in the town of Varallo, or for that matter, in the church of the Sant'Angelo convent in his native city Milan. Instead, he chose to take the trouble of constructing several free-standing chapels on top of the mount that rises steeply next to the town of Varallo. Although the chapels are only around one hundred and fifty meters apart from the Franciscan church in beeline, they are also one hundred and fifty meters higher up; it takes a twenty minute walk to arrive from one place to the other (fig. 9). The choice for this location was undoubtedly ideologically motivated, and also goes beyond semi-hagiographical indications that Caimi was in search of a patch of land that was somehow particularly suited to represent Jerusalem or the Holy Land.⁹²

Why the mount next to Varallo suited Caimi's purposes may simply have to do with its being a mount. It was close enough to the urban centre to facilitate construction works, but far enough for the first chapels in the donation act of 1493 to be called 'hermitages'.⁹³ In terms of the specific form these constructions took, the choice of building little chapels on top of the mount next to Varallo, may reflect what Caimi encountered on his visit to the sacro monte of La Verna. There, he found a Franciscan hermitage that was gaining prominence within the order, on a mount jutting out above the surrounding landscape.⁹⁴ This mount was characterised by several holy *loci* and chapels, independent from the convent complex, some decorated with terra cotta sculptures. Moreover, as a well-educated Franciscan, Caimi could hardly have been unaware of the strong conceptual links to places in the Holy Land, suggested by the stigmatisation of Francis at La Verna, presented in rather well-known texts such as the *Considerazioni delle Stimmate* and Bartolomeo da Pisa's *Liber de Conformitate*, as well as Ubertino da Casale's *Ar-*

91 Justin Kroesen, *The Sepulchrum Domini through the Ages: Its Form and Function* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

92 See for example Calahorra, *Chronica de la Provincia di Syria y di Tierra Santa* (1684), 315.

93 The act mentions the *Remitorium Sancti Sepulchri*, the *Heremitorium Sancti Sepulchri*, the *Capella existente subtus Crucem*, the *Capella Ascensionis*, and three times refers to these as *dicti Heremitorii*. Galloni, *Sacro Monte di Varallo: Atti di Fondazione*, 8, 10; cf. Gentile, "Da Bernardino Caimi," 210.

94 Cf. Gentile, "Da Bernardino Caimi," 210.

bor. La Verna could, in short, potentially provide a great deal of inspiration to a Franciscan who was perhaps consciously looking for an appropriate way to translate the Holy Places to Italy, or perhaps even suggest the idea to a friar who had previously not had any intention of founding a Holy Land recreation.

Seen in this light, Caimi's designation of the sanctuary at Varallo as a 'sacro monte' is particularly telling. On August 22, 1498 Caimi sent a letter to his patron Duke Lodovico Sforza (1452-1508) in which he tells the duke about how he witnessed a lady being cured miraculously at the sacro monte of Varallo. In this letter, Caimi refers to the sanctuary as "our little holy mountain": *il Santo Monticello nostro*.⁹⁵ His use of the first person plural refers to Caimi himself and his fellow friars at Varallo, but might also include the Duke, in the capacity of patron of the sanctuary. On September 16 of the same year, Caimi wrote to the duke to report another miraculous healing referring to the location as "that of our Holy mount of St Mary of the Holy Sepulchre": *quello nostro Sancto monte de santa Maria del Santo Sepolcro*.⁹⁶ It seems very unlikely that, especially in the case of the diminutive *santo monticello*, the larger, pre-existing sacro monte of La Verna is not at all implied; even more so, because we are dealing with the writings of an erudite Franciscan, who had visited this important Franciscan sanctuary, which had been called a sacro monte or *sanctus* or *sacer mons* since the late thirteenth century.

The sacro monte of La Verna thus informs at least part of the *intention* of Bernardino Caimi, in founding the new Jerusalem of Varallo. With the exception of the asides in the art-historical arguments by Peter Cannon Brooks and Guido Gentile, scholarship on sacri monti, either La Verna or later sacri monti, has yet to recognize the crucial connection between the first sanctuary and the latter ones.⁹⁷ However, it is difficult to fully understand the significance of, for example, the sacro monte of Varallo during its initial phase, without acknowledging that the phenomenon of the *sacro monte* did not start out as a Jerusalem copy, but as a tribute to the stigmatisation of St Francis. It is a particularly Franciscan mode for topographic commemoration of decisive events in salvation history. Especially in the case of the sacri monti of Varallo and San Vivaldo, the late fourteenth-century 'new Jerusalems' founded

95 Galloni, *Sacro Monte di Varallo: Atti di Fondazione*, 66; Emilio Motta, *Beato Bernardino Caimi: Fondatore del Santuario di Varallo, Documenti e Lettere Inedite* (Milan, 1891), manuscript copy preserved at the Biblioteca Civica at Varallo: 17-18.

96 Galloni, *Sacro Monte di Varallo: Atti di Fondazione*, 68; Motta, *Beato Bernardino Caimi*, 19.

97 Cannon Brookes, "The Sculptural Complexes," 275; Gentile, "Da Bernardino Caimi," 208-211.

by observant Franciscans, we should not forget that these sanctuaries comprise a very specific, Franciscan mode for invoking the sacred topography of the Holy Land, ultimately suggested by correspondences between the crucifixion of Christ and the stigmatisation of Francis.

6.5 La Verna: the Franciscan Calvary and another Jerusalem in the West

The founders of the sacri monti of Varallo and San Vivaldo were certainly not the only Franciscan friars to associate the sacro monte of La Verna with Jerusalem around the turn of the sixteenth century. These later sacri monti can actually be interpreted as expressions of the idea that La Verna is a new Jerusalem, along with other expressions of the same idea. The description of La Verna by Alessandro de Riciis (1434- ca.1497) dates to the same period, and renders the idea that one would even need to construct a whole new sacro monte to represent Jerusalem altogether superfluous.⁹⁸ On May 19, 1493, Alessandro, a friar from the Marche region, passed by La Verna on his way to the general chapter of the observance, to be held at Florence that year. He decided to include a description of what he saw at La Verna in his *Chronica Ordinis Minorum* (1493-1497):

And because this place and mountain, as it seems to me, is another Jerusalem in the West because of the very singular privileges renewed on that mountain, and primarily the privilege of the renovation of the passion of Christ in the stigmatisation of the blessed father Francis; therefore, I speak of it here, exactly as I saw and noted, in the present writing.⁹⁹

Thus, the renewal of the passion at La Verna, in the shape of the stigmatisation of Francis, is enough to turn the sacro monte into a Jerusalem in Alessandro's eyes. His understanding of La Verna is clearly informed by what is said about the sacro monte in Bartolomeo da Pisa's *Liber de Conformitate*;

98 Anicetus Chiappini, "De Vita et Scriptis fr. Alexandri de Riciis," in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 20 (1927): 314-335.

99 "Et quia locus ille et mons, ut mihi videtur, est alia Yerusalem in occidente propter singularissimas prerogativas in dicto monte renovatas et precipue prerogativa renovationis passionis Christi in B. P. Francisci Stigmatizatione, ideo prout vidi et annotavi, hic in presentiarum de illo loquor." Alessandro de Riciis, *Chronica Ordinis Minorum*, ed. Chiappini in "De Vita et Scriptis," 331; The section of Alessandro de Riciis that speaks of La Verna is also printed in an appendix to a recent paper by Giorgi. Giorgi, "Il Convento della Verna," 28-32; cf. Giorgi, "Dal Primitivo Insediamento," 55-57.

he refers explicitly to this source, as well as to the *Fioretti*.¹⁰⁰ Following his introduction of La Verna as a Jerusalem in the West, he offers the very first description of the various churches and chapels found on the mountain, with mention of their dimensions and decorations.¹⁰¹ De Riciis then concludes his detailed discussion by repeating the reason why he included a description in the first place:

Whence making an end to my words, I say that if a person wanted to travel to Jerusalem and could not, he should at least travel to the aforesaid mount of La Verna, which is seen as another Jerusalem out of devotion.¹⁰²

This remark puts La Verna at the same level with Varallo and San Vivaldo, a place to which you can travel in case it is not possible to go all the way to the Holy Land. De Riciis' words are reminiscent of the 1491 inscription above the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre chapel at Varallo: "so that he who cannot go on pilgrimage sees Jerusalem here."¹⁰³ Quite independently from each other, then, Bernardino Caimi, Tommaso da Firenze, founder of San Vivaldo, and Alessandro de Riciis seem to have associated La Verna with Jerusalem. Perhaps, it was a self-suggestive connection to make for a well-educated Franciscan friar who came into contact with La Verna at the time. Even more so, if one takes into account previous personal experience with the Holy Land, the general atmosphere of crusade preaching inspired by the Ottoman advance, and Girolamo Savonarola's representation of near-by Florence as the new Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴

100 "De quo Sancto Monte locuntur Conformitates et etiam Floriculli," Alessandro de Riciis, *Chronica Ordinis Minorum*, ed. Chiappini in "De Vita et Scriptis," 331.

101 Giorgi, "Il Convento della Verna," 20-1.

102 "Unde faciens finem meis verbis, dico quod si quis vellet pergere in Yerusalem et non posset, ad minus pergat ad montem predictum della Verna, in quo ex devotione videtur esse altera Yerusalem." Alessandro de Riciis, *Chronica Ordinis Minorum*, ed. Chiappini in "De Vita et Scriptis," 335.

103 "MAGNIFICVS DOMINVS MILANVS SCARROGNINVS HOC SEPULCHRUM CVM FABRICA SIBI CONTIGVA CHRISTO POSVIT MCCCCLXXXI DIE SEPTIMO OCTOBRIS: R.P. FRATER BERNARDINVS CAIMVS DE MILANO .OR.MI.DE OBS. SACRA HVIVS MONTIS EXCOGITAVIT LOCA.VT HIC HIERUSALEM VIDEAT. QVI PERAGRARE NEQUIT." The magnificent Milanese Lord Scarrognino erected this sepulchre with its adjoining workshop for Christ on the seventh day of October 1491 / The reverend father Bernardino Caimi of Milan, of the observance of the friars minor, conceived the sacred places of this mount, so that he who cannot go on pilgrimage sees Jerusalem here. See chapter five.

104 Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New

Alessandro de Riciis' description of the sanctuary does not seem to have had a great impact on the discourse on La Verna within the order. Nevertheless, his assessment of the sacro monte is highly illustrative of the association with Jerusalem that the sanctuary was very likely to call to the educated Franciscan's mind. The source that most likely suggested the association to him, Bartolomeo da Pisa's *Liber de Conformitate*, did remain a very important point of reference for later authors dealing with La Verna. Both the influence of Bartolomeo's *Liber* and the association with Calvary and by extension Jerusalem continued to be felt in monographs dedicated entirely to the sacro monte, as well as in more general Franciscan order historiography. These texts testify to the enduring importance of La Verna as a Franciscan *lieu de mémoire* that could be linked to the Holy Land.

Mariano da Firenze (d. 1523), a prolific chronicler of the Tuscan observance, wrote the first text that is dedicated solely to La Verna.¹⁰⁵ His influential *Dialogo del Sacro Monte delle Verna*, written between 1510 and 1522, can be contextualised within the polemics between Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, concerning the authenticity of the stigmata of St Catherine of Siena (1346-1380).¹⁰⁶ Mariano presents his argument in the shape of a didactic dialogue in the vernacular, with four interlocutors: the author himself (*Auctore del Libro*), Francesco, his incredulous friend Thomaso, and friar Filippo.¹⁰⁷ Following the introduction of these characters, the *Dialogo* goes on to discuss in an orderly fashion: why the sacro monte is holy, how it compares to other mountains, the miracle of the stigmata, the donation to Francis and early history of the sacro monte, its several chapels and churches; when and by whom they were built, the transition to the observance, several guardians of La Verna and their deeds, illustrious protectors and visitors; in short, it is a rather exhaustive treatment of all aspects of the sacro monte.¹⁰⁸

When it comes to defining the importance of La Verna with respect to the events that took place there, Mariano relies on both Ubertino da Casale and Bartolomeo da Pisa. At the end of the table of contents of a manuscript of the *Dialogo* preserved in the Capitular Library of Verona, there is a schematic drawing of a mountain topped by a cross, and surrounded by the words *Mons dei / Mons pinquis / Mons in quo beneplacitum est deo Habitare in eo* (fig.

Haven: Yale UP, 2011); Norman Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453-1505* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).

105 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, v-vii.

106 Papi, "Il Sacro Monte," 436-8.

107 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, 4-5.

108 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, 1-2.

10).¹⁰⁹ Thus, even before the start of the dialogue proper, Mariano combines the characterisation of La Verna as a “mount of God,” and a “fertile mount” given by Ubertino (Ps. 67:16), and Bartolomeo’s reference to Psalms 67:17: “a mount on which it pleasing for God to live.” In line with what these authors write, Mariano very much sees La Verna as the location where the passion of Christ was renewed.

First, Mariano lists all the briefs and bulls by various popes and bishops that designate La Verna as a holy place, concluding that all these authorities concur that this is truly a “sacro et sancto monte.”¹¹⁰ Then, when the sceptic Thomaso inquires why all these people hold La Verna to be so holy, Mariano responds that it was consecrated primarily by the appearance of Christ there and the stigmatisation. He also cites the 1256 letter with apocalyptic overtones by Guglielmo Ubertini, bishop of Arezzo, which says that La Verna exceeds all other mountains in the world.¹¹¹ Thomas, still incredulous, then asks how it could ever be comparable to a number of scriptural mountains, conveniently posing a set of rhetorical questions that suggest the comparisons made by Ubertino and Bartolomeo, expanding the list to include Mount Horeb, where the Ten Commandments were delivered, and Tabor, location of the transfiguration of Christ. Thus, how can La Verna be comparable to Mount Bethel which is “the house of God and the gate of heaven [Gen. 28:17],” Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, Mount Tabor, Mount Olives, Mount Calvary, Mount Moria, or Mount Sion?¹¹² This, of course, offers the *Auctore* an excellent opportunity to confirm that La Verna is in fact superior when compared to all of these mountains, a true ‘house of God and a gate of heaven’ and in the case of Calvary he explains:

There, the scriptures were fulfilled, but on mount La Verna the law, the life, and the Cross were renewed by the blessed Jesus Christ, through St Francis. This mount still today breaks and cracks like Mount Calvary during the passion and death of Christ. Still, on this mount one feels the merit of the passion of Jesus Christ in the soul, that is, the remission of

109 This manuscript was copied by an anonymous Florentine friar in 1544. Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, vi-vii; Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CCCCLXXXI, fol. 2r.

110 Mariano is very well informed of the several privileges that were granted to La Verna through time. Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, xiii-xix, 6-9.

111 “Sanctum locum montis Alvernici cunctis profecto montibus orbis terre sublimate stupendi miraculi ...” *Codice*, ed. Mencherini, 29.

112 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, 11.

one's sins.¹¹³

By referring to the geology of the mountain that is indeed characterised by recurring earthquakes and landslides, Mariano adds a sense of urgency: time was not only renewed on La Verna, the transition is somehow still going on.¹¹⁴ While Calvary is location of events past, the rocks at La Verna are still breaking and cracking, and one still feels the benefits of the passion. Although Mariano does not associate La Verna with Jerusalem, he greatly emphasises the comparison with several mountains in the Holy Land, which the sacro monte exceeds in merit; in addition, he makes it out to be a sort of Calvary in action, because of its cracks in motion.

Mariano's *Dialogo* had quite some influence on later authors dealing with the sacro monte, although surviving manuscripts are scarce; it was known to the Franciscan chroniclers Dionisio Pulinari (d. 1582) and Luke Wadding (1588-1657) for example.¹¹⁵ The next monograph on the sacro monte, published in 1568, relies on the *Dialogo* too. The *Nuovo Dialogo delle Devozioni del Sacro Monte della Verna* by Agostino di Miglio da Cetica, guardian of La Verna in 1554-5, is very much an expanded reshuffling of the *Dialogo antiquo*, to which it refers explicitly (fig. 11).¹¹⁶ The choice of the dialogue form, in this case, seems to have been motivated primarily by a wish to produce a worthy successor of this older, authoritative text. The *Nuovo Dialogo* is the first real guide to the sacro monte. The first part of the text discusses all edifices on La Verna one by one, while the second and third part offer further reading about the history and spirituality of the sacro monte. The idea of writing a guide was perhaps inspired by difficulties that the author himself experienced when he was guardian at La Verna. The preface states that the guardian cannot always spare his more well-instructed friars to act as guide;

113 "Quivi fu adempiuta la scriptura, ma nel monte della Vernia fù renovate da Jesu Christo benedecto, per sancto Francesco, la legge, la vita et la croce. Questo monte anchora si ruppe et fesse come el monte Calvario nella passione e morte di Christo. Anchora in questo monte si senti el merito della passione di Jesu Christo nella anima, cioè la remissione de'sua peccatj." Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, 13.

114 P. Lunardi et al, "Il Santuario della Verna: La Geoingegneria ed il Restauro dei Beni Storico-Ambientali, Studio dei Dissesti e Progettazione degli Interventi di Consolidamento," *Quarry and Construction* 31, no. 7 (July 1993): 67-80.

115 Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, vii-viii.

116 "Et sarà chiamato Dialogo nuovo, à differenza del Dialogo antiquo, chegia fù composto di detto monte." Augustino di Miglio, *Nuovo Dialogo delle Devozioni del Sacro Monte della Verna* (Florence: Stampa Ducale, 1568), PROEMIO, [no pagination]; Mariano da Firenze, *Dialogo*, ed. Cannarozzi, viii-xii; Giorgi, "Il Convento della Verna," 10.

the *Nuovo Dialogo* was an answer to this problem.¹¹⁷

Possibly due to this more practical purpose, the book is more concise on spiritual issues. It does contain a chapter on why sacro monte is called “sacro, & santo”, inspired by Mariano’s treatment of this topic, but Miglio has done away with the extensive comparison to mountains in the Holy Land. He seems to have replaced them with a single, well-placed comparison to Jerusalem, embedded in the first reason for sanctity, namely holy apparitions: “Just like sometimes in the sacred scriptures the city of Jerusalem is called holy for the divine cult, for which the said city was especially esteemed.”¹¹⁸ Jerusalem and the Holy Places are also present on La Verna, in the form of a cross made of Holy Land mementos, brought home by a lay friar called Angiolo da Corzano who collected them there around 1545: “This cross is made from several things of the Holy Land, that is olives of Mount Olives, of the soil, and pieces of stone of the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, and of his holy mother.”¹¹⁹ The lay friar who collected the earth relics for this cross, may have engaged in making a type of devotional artwork similar to the *besloten hoffes* or ‘enclosed gardens’ described by Kathryn Rudy, elaborately crafted devotional scenes that sometimes incorporated Holy Land souvenirs such as earth or pebbles, made by nuns in the Low Countries a few decades previously.¹²⁰ The cross does not seem to have survived into the present relic collection at La Verna; however, at the time it seems to have been respected because Dionisio Pulinari copied the description of this cross verbatim into his *Cronache dei Frati Minori della Provincia di Toscana* (up to 1581). Pulinari apparently deigned it worthy of

117 “Et sempre il prelado del convento, non ha commodità di mandare un frate che sia bene instrutto di tal cose come meritamente si conviene. Per questo considerando la utilità universale, . . . , mi sono imaginato, ad honore di Dio, & di S. Francesco di compilare, & scrivere la sopradetta opera distincta in tre parti,” Miglio, *Nuovo Dialogo*, PROEMIO, [no pagination].

118 “La prima ragione si è questa. Si come alcuna volta, nelle sacre lettere, la città di Hierusalem; e nominata santa per el culto divino, alquale ditta città, era specialmente deputata. Et si come da Dio fù detto a Moise nel Esodo al terzo [Solue calciamentum de pedibus tuis, nam terra in qua stas, sancta est.] E questo secondo lyra per la diuina apparizione quiui fatta. Così questo monte benedetto ciamato santo per la serafica apparizione in esso celebrata. Et etiam per molte altre apparizioni, . . .” Miglio, *Nuovo Dialogo*, 224-5.

119 “Questa e una croce fatta di diverse cose di terra santa, cio è degli ulivi del monte Uliueto, & della terra, & sassi del santo Sepulcro del nostro Signore Iesu Christo, & della sua santa madre. Et di molti di quelli santissimi luoghi, la quale croce portò di Hierusalem frate Angiolo da Corzano laico, huomo austero, & deuoto l’anno del Signore 1545. o circa.” Miglio, *Nuovo Dialogo*, 169-170.

120 Kathryn Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 107-118.

mention within the context of his succinct discussion of La Verna, which he explicitly promises to keep short because of the existing dialogues by Mariano da Firenze and Agostino Miglio.¹²¹

At the level of contemporaneous Franciscan order historiography, both Bartolomeo's comparison of La Verna with scriptural mountains and the association with Jerusalem continued to resonate. Pietro Ridolfi di Tossignano's *Historiarum Seraphicae Religionis*, published in 1586, refers to Miglio's book, and contains an engraving of the sanctuary done after the frontispiece of the *Nuovo Dialogo* at the start of his description of La Verna (fig. 12).¹²² This more scholarly discussion of La Verna in Latin retains Miglio's suggestion of comparison with Jerusalem, calling it "like another Jerusalem."¹²³ Moreover, Ridolfi also reintroduces Bartolomeo da Pisa's comparison of La Verna with scriptural mountains. In a section that opens with the words "Mons dei, mons pinguis," Ridolfi copies Bartolomeo's comparisons to Mount Morach, Bethel, Gilead, Phisgah, Hor, Abirin, Sinai, Gezirim, Moria, Libanon, Olives, only moving Golgotha to a concluding position for extra prominence; he then concludes with reference to Ps 67:16-17: "Mons itaque Dei, Mons Pinguis, in quo beneplacitum est DEO inhabitare."¹²⁴ Not all important Franciscan order chronicles make these connections, Francesco Gongaza's important *De Origine Seraphicae Religionis* (1587) provides a substantial description of La Verna, but does not identify the sacro monte with Jerusalem, Calvary, or other mountains.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the idea that La Verna was some sort of Calvary does seem to have been still current, as a collection of poems on La Verna published in 1606 testifies.¹²⁶ Moreover, Bartolomeo da Pisa's comparison of La Verna with scriptural mountains is included once again, even though in this case attributed to Pietro Ridolfi, in the first volume of *Annales Minorum* by the famous Franciscan chronicler Luke Wadding, first published in 1625.¹²⁷ In

121 Pulinari, *Cronache*, 147-8, 157.

122 Pietro Ridolfi di Tossignano, *Historiarum Seraphicae Religionis Libri Tres* (Venetiis: apud Franciscum de Franciscis Senensem, 1586), fol. 261v-265r.

123 "Si quidem mons ille est veluti altera Hierusalem in sublimi posita," Ridolfi, *Historiarum*, fol. 264r.

124 Ridolfi, *Historiarum*, fol. 263r.

125 Francesco Gonzaga, *De Origine Seraphicae Religionis Franciscana, de Regularis Observantiae Institutione, Forma, Administratione ac Legibus, Admirabilique eius Propagatione* (Rome: 1587), 233-244.

126 Silvestro da Poppi, *Sette Canzoni di Sette Famosi Autori in Lode del Serafico P.S. Francesco, e del Sacro Monte della Verna. Raccolte da F. Silvestro da Poppi Minore Osservante* (Florence: Gio. Antonio Caneo & Raffaello Grossi, 1606), 13, 17.

127 Luca Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco Institutorum*, vol.

sum, the texts cited above attest that from the late fifteenth century onwards the idea that La Verna was a Franciscan sanctuary that presented strong ties with Calvary and Jerusalem was part of the mainstream Franciscan imaginary. In the seventeenth century, a number of Franciscan authors then turned to cultivate this connection with the Holy Land in an even greater degree.

6.6 Topographical parallelism between Jerusalem and La Verna

During the second half of the seventeenth century, Franciscan discourse on La Verna was increasingly in dialogue with texts on the sacred geography of the Holy Land. Informed by both these texts, as well as of course the enduringly important Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic tradition, quite specific topographical parallels between Jerusalem and La Verna were worked out, in order to provide additional proof that it was the preordained second Calvary. Moreover, La Verna also started to appear in Franciscan Holy Land writing during this period. Authors of the *custodia Terrae Sanctae* displayed a particular interest in the cracks in the rocks at La Verna, even basing the claims of Franciscan Holy Land territoriality (discussed in chapter four) on them. In the end, La Verna entered both traditionalist order historiography as well as more radical texts informed by Franciscan New World apocalypticism, as a particularly important Franciscan Jerusalemite *lieu de mémoire*.

The next author to really develop the idea of La Verna as a Jerusalem and a Calvary again, is Salvatore Vitale (1582-1647), characterised as a “colossus of historiography on La Verna” by Barfucci.¹²⁸ Vitale lived on La Verna in the years 1624-1629 and published no less than four monographs on the sacro monte. The first, the *Flower Garden of La Verna* published in 1626, discusses the Life of St Francis in chronological order, dwelling on his conformity with Christ in every aspect. The introduction explains how Francis was predestined for this dignity, based on the prophesies in the apocalypse of St John, and cites the “Theologian of the Conformities” (Bartolomeo da Pisa), and Ubertino da Casale, and Joachim of Fiore even receives a dedicated section of praise: *Abbatibus Joachim commendatio*.¹²⁹ This apocalyptic outlook of course offers fertile ground for comparing La Verna with Jerusalem and Calvary, and Vitale seems bent on proving this status of La Verna through

I (Rome: Rochi Bernabò, 1731), 175-6.

128 “un colosso della storiografia della Verna.” Barfucci, *Il Monte*, 12.

129 Salvatore Vitale, *Floretum Alverninum in quo de Seraphici Patriarchae Francisci Sanctitatis Praestantia Luculenter, ac Piè Dissertitur* (Florence: Zenobius Pignoni, 1626), 45-70, esp. 63-8.

topographical similarities.

He opens the chapter about the similarity of the location of Francis' stigmatisation to Calvary with words of Ps 74:12: "Operatus est Dominus Salutem in medio terrae." Thus, salvation was worked in Jerusalem, *umbilicus mundi*, situated in the middle of the world. Vitale then proposes that when the passion was renewed it happened "at the navel of Italy," for La Verna is situated in the middle of Italy.¹³⁰ The similarities do not stop there, Vitale indicates it has been called a 'mystical Calvary' by many, and can also be called an *alter Golgotha*; moreover, that the position of La Verna within Italy is similar to that of Calvary within the Holy Land, referring Holy Land Literature to back up his point: *De Locis Hebraicis* by St Jerome (347-420) and *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae* by Christianus Adrichomus (Christiaan Cruys, 1533-1585).¹³¹ La Verna is most similar, *simillimus*, to Calvary because of the cracks and fissures in the rocks of La Verna. First, Vitale lists testimonies for the crack in Calvary, including authors of *geographia sacra* such as Adrichomus, Bernard von Breydenbach (ca. 1440-1497), and Jean Zuallart (1541-1634).¹³² Then, he turns to the very similar "horrific rents" of La Verna. At the start of this section we find the same mount of six *coupeaux* with a cross on top, as in the manuscript of Mariano da Firenze's *Dialogo*, which suggests Vitale may have used it as a source (fig. 13). Vitale then cites the various testimonies to the similarity of La Verna to Calvary by for example Bartolomeo da Pisa, Francisco Jimémez de Cisneros (1436-1517), and Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444).¹³³

With this insistence on topographical similarity, and a substantial amount of references to literature on the *geographia sacra* of the Holy Land, the tone is set for Vitale's following publications. These present, especially in the case of the *D.O.M. Teatro Serafico delle Stimmate di Christo* (1629), a fleshed-out version of the arguments given in the *Floretum*. In the *Teatro*, Vitale discusses more at length how La Verna is very similar to Jerusalem, called *Ierusalem nova*, and *un'altra Gerusalem*, starting out with the point that La Verna is the navel of Italy.¹³⁴ He then indicates that Jerusalem is surrounded by a number of valleys, such as those of Siloes and Kedron; La Verna too is surrounded by valleys of the same length, depth, and fertility.

130 "... in umbilico Italiae, in medio terrae, non universae, sed particularis. Mons enim Alvernae, in medio Italiae est, ..." Vitale, *Floretum*, 352.

131 Vitale, *Floretum*, 353-4.

132 Vitale, *Floretum*, 355-6.

133 Vitale, *Floretum*, 364-372.

134 Salvatore Vitale, *D.O.M. Teatro Serafico delle Stimmate di Christo* (Florence: Zenobius

Furthermore, the sources of water in Jerusalem are comparable to the fountains found on La Verna; the castle of Bethpage to the ruined castle of Count Orlando; the village of Chiusi used to have a garden, and corresponds to the location of the *hortus conclusus* on sacred maps; and finally Jerusalem used to be the dwelling place of the austere Rechabites, while on La Verna there are Franciscans.¹³⁵ With regards to Mount Calvary, Vitale provides another just as detailed and multifaceted comparison with La Verna, availing himself of a variety of literature on the Holy Land. For example, Calvary is rocky and of medium height according to Adrichomus' *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae*; La Verna too is rocky and of medium height according to the first part of Marc of Lisbon's (ca. 1511- 1591) chronicle of the Franciscan orders, and Vitale's personal experience: "the eye gives testimony of it."¹³⁶

Vitale's study of sacred geography of the Holy Land in Italy can be seen as the early seventeenth-century culmination of several centuries of finding parallels between La Verna, Calvary, Jerusalem, and the Holy Land. Earlier representations by Ubertino da Casale, the *Considerazioni sulle Stimate*, and Bartolomeo da Pisa are mostly based on a conceptual similarity to Calvary because of the renovation of the Passion on La Verna through the stigmatisation of Francis. Apart from the cracks in the rocks of La Verna, it is the event that made the difference. Bartolomeo da Pisa's comparisons to various mountains in the Holy Land then helped suggest the idea of La Verna as a Jerusalem to various Franciscan authors from the late fifteenth century onwards. The sacri monti of San Vivaldo and Varallo can be seen as expressions of this shift towards seeing the sacro monte of La Verna as a Jerusalem. Making use of the accomplishments of the genre of early modern *geographia sacra*, Salvatore Vitale then turns La Verna into a topo-mimetic sacro monte *avant la lettre*, where the signs of the destiny of this location were written into landscape long before the stigmatisation ever took place.

Not long after Vitale's publications, La Verna also made its way into Franciscan Holy Land writing, albeit initially in a relatively modest way: in his *Elucidatio* Francesco Quaresmio refers to La Verna in a chapter on the crack in Mount Calvary, he writes: "Also, in Tuscany, the holy mountain of La Verna was torn during the passion of Christ, as the Angel of the Lord re-

Pignoni, 1629), 221-3.

135 Vitale, *D.O.M. Teatro Serafico*, 223-6.

136 "e l'occhio n'è da testimonio." Vitale, *D.O.M. Teatro Serafico*, 226-230, esp. 226; the first part of Marc of Lisbon's *Chronicas da Ordem dos Frades Menores* was first published in Lisbon in 1556, for a later Italian edition see: *Croniche de gli ordini instituiti dal padre San Francesco* (Napels, 1680).

vealed to St Francis; these fissures are still seen with great admiration.”¹³⁷ On the page facing this assertion, a copperplate engraving, done after a plan and image by Bernardino Amico that shows Mount Calvary in the Holy Sepulchre church, significantly includes this crack on the plan (absent on Amico’s original image), accompanied by the caption *Scissura Calvariae Montis* (fig. 14).¹³⁸ Although Quaresmio’s reference to La Verna is brief, he makes the connection to the Franciscan Calvary at a point in his discussion that evidently matters to him, in a dedicated chapter on the crack in Calvary. In comparison to his longer discussion of the sacro monte of Varallo, entirely copied from other authors, La Verna thus appears as the more significant sanctuary (cf. chapter five). Elsewhere, in his plea for the veneration of sacred places, especially those in the Holy Land, Quaresmio again mentions La Verna, referring to a stone there on which Christ sat during apparitions to St Francis, also intimating that he saw and venerated this stone in person.¹³⁹

Only three years after Quaresmio’s brief references, Vincenzo Berdini is the first friar of the Holy Land to attach a great deal of importance to La Verna in his *History of Palestine* (1642) in three parts, written while he was Commissary General of the Franciscans in the Holy Land.¹⁴⁰ The third part of this book deals with how the Holy Land should, legally speaking, be in the possession of the observant Franciscans: *La Palestina Antica e Moderna esser Givridicamente Possedvta Da’Padri Minori Osservanti*.¹⁴¹ In the first chapter of this book, Berdini briefly discusses rights granted by popes, by the Mamluk and Ottoman authorities, but concludes that the Franciscans possess the Holy Places, more than anything, by divine right.¹⁴² The following chapter then proceeds to explain this divine right, in order to serve the purposes of seventeenth-century territorial Franciscan Holy Land writing (see chapter

137 “Item in Hetruria, sacer Alverniae mons in Christi Passione scissus fuit, ut Angelus Domini B. Francisco revelavit; & scissurae adhuc, non sine magna admiratione, inspicuntur.” Quaresmio, *Elucidatio*, vol. II, 462.

138 “Pianta et alzata del S. monte Calvario,” plates 29 and 30 in Bernardino Amico, *Trattato delle Piante & Immaginj de Sacri Edifizi di Terra Santa* (Florence: Cacconcelli, 1620), 40-1.

139 “Hic lapis siue tabula lapidea honorifice asservatur & monstratur in sacro Alverniae monte, & ego eum vidi, & veneratus sum. Si ergo lapidem illum, in quo semel tantum Christus sedit, voluit honorati S. Franciscus; quanto magis honorari voluisset loca illa, in quibus Christus fuit natus, quae triginta trium annorum curriculo suo incolatu sacrauit, vbi mortuus est, & tandem ascendit ad caelos? Quaresmio, *Elucidatio*, vol.I, 865.

140 Vincenzo Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna, Descritta in Tre Parti*. Venice: Battista Surian., 1642.

141 *La Palestina Antica e Moderna esser Givridicamente Possedvta Da’Padri Minori Osservanti*. Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, [title page of part III].

142 Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 1-8.

four). This chapter is titled “How the sacred stigmata of St Francis are a most evident argument, and a strong congruence, to prove that the friars minor of the Franciscan religion legitimately possess the Holy Places of Palestine,” which would lead us to expect an argument similar to that of Diego de Cea.¹⁴³ In his *Thesaurus Terrae Sanctae* (1639), De Cea claims the Holy Land for the Franciscans based on the Franciscan Joachite Apocalyptic and Francis’s conformity with Christ (see chapter four). Berdini goes about proving his point in a comparable, but slightly different way.

First, Berdini points out that he does not mean to give an in-depth discussion of the stigmata themselves, or Francis’ conformity with Christ, since others have done that; he just wants to demonstrate how these things prove Franciscan rights in the Holy Land. He does this by reminding us that Christ was crucified on Mount Calvary, and that in the hour of the Crucifixion, there was an earthquake, and the rocks of Calvary split.¹⁴⁴ Berdini then emphasises that, at the very same moment, the sacro monte of La Verna, location of the stigmatisation that used to be one solid piece of rock, cracked up.¹⁴⁵ Subsequently, he cites at length all the authorities that confirm this, and insists that Francis bled from his wounds, on La Verna.¹⁴⁶ Based on this, he concludes that the Franciscans are the only order meant to possess the Holy Places, and celebrate the divine office on Mount Calvary.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Berdini uses La Verna as a sacred location, where Passion was renewed, to claim rights for the Franciscans in the Holy Land. The stigmatisation of St Francis thus facilitated an ideological two-way street to the Holy Land, which could bring Jerusalem to

143 “Cap. II. Come le sacre stimate di Francesco santo siano vn argomento euidentissimo, & vna congruenza potentissima per prouare, che i Frati Minori della Religion Francescana legittimamente possiedano quei luoghi Santi della Palestina, e che più à loro, che ad altri Religiosi si conuiene questo possesso, poiche soli marborano lo stendardo delle piaghe, cicatrici del Signore.” Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 8.

144 “..., ma solo pretendo dimostrare, che queste Stimate sono vn motiuo, & vna congruenza per provare che più à questa religione si conuiene questo dominio, che ad altra Religione, ... Quanto al primo dico, che Christo volse eleggere il Monte Caluario per esser crocifisso in quel luoco, e questo stesso per pietà del suo fattore morendo in Croce s’apri, e si squarciò senò, all’hora quando *petrae scissae sunt*,...” Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 8-9.

145 “..., e laciando noi da parte tutte confirmità di questo Sacratissimo Monte con il Monte della Verna essendo state tractato egregiamente da altri solo dirò con realtà, et verità, che il Monte della Verna nella morte del Christo Signor nostro, essendo tutto vn masso di sasso vnito senza alcuna concauità, s’apri e si squarciò in più parte, e luoghi in mille stani modi, ...” Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 9.

146 Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 9-14.

147 Berdini, *La Palestina Antica e Moderna*, part III, 15.

La Verna, but which could also in turn bring the Franciscans to the Holy Land.

Nor did La Verna have to be the final destination; connections could be made to places further afield. In 1651, the Spanish Franciscan friar Pedro Alva y Astorga (1601-1667) published *Naturae Prodigium Gratiae Portentum*, an expansive revisiting of the topic of parallelism between Christ and Francis, informed by a rather radical semblance of the Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic.¹⁴⁸ Even though the book was banned by the Catholic Church because it elevated Francis to a godlike position, it nevertheless enjoyed a wide readership both in the Old and the New World, where Alva y Astorga had initially joined the Franciscan order.¹⁴⁹ The frontispiece of this publication has received some scholarly attention because it quite remarkably represents Christ and Francis merged, as parts of the same six-winged seraph, instead of as a separate seraph stigmatising St Francis (fig. 15).¹⁵⁰ In the background of this image, to the left of this seraphic figure, Calvary, and below that, Nazareth are shown. To the right, the Italian parallels of these locations in the Holy Land, associated with St Francis are represented: the sacro monte of La Verna and Assisi. The choice of Nazareth instead of Bethlehem was probably inspired by the importance Alva y Astorga attached to the Immaculate Conception.¹⁵¹ The frontispiece thus significantly refers to the locations that, in the view of the author, hosted the events of important new stages in salvation history: the crucifixion and the stigmatisation.

The parallelism so conspicuously present on the frontispiece then continues throughout *Prodigium Naturae*, which is printed in two columns of text throughout, literally setting side by side the parallels that are its main subject. So too, the section with dedications to Old and New World potentates, the first of these being St Francis and the beatified Peruvian Francisco Solano (1549-1610), whom Alva y Astorga respects as a saint. The image that heads this section extends the parallelism of the frontispiece (fig. 16). It shows St Francis standing in the continent of Europe, with Rome in the background, and Francisco Solano standing in America, with Lima in the background, keeping the allegorical ship of the Catholic Church afloat between them. Assisi and La Verna, shown on the frontispiece, are thus not final destinations,

148 Pedro Alva y Astorga, *Naturae Prodigium Gratiae Portentum* (Madrid: 1651). ‘Prodigy of Nature, Portent of Grace.’

149 Lara, “Francis Alive and Aloft,” 151-4.

150 Lara, “Francis Alive and Aloft,” 152-3, n. 50; Pamela Askew, “The Angelic Consolation of St. Francis of Assisi in Post-Tridentine Italian Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969): 305-6.

151 Lara, “Francis Alive and Aloft,” 151, 154.

but pit stops along the way in the unfolding of history according to the Franciscan blend of New World Apocalypticism of Alva y Astorga.

Alongside this more radical east-west translation, the more traditional connection between Jerusalem and La Verna continued to be of importance within the Franciscan order. The ideas about preordained topographical parallelism formulated by Salvatore Vitale eventually found their way into the *Giardino Serafico Istorico* (1710), Pietro Antonio da Venezia's celebratory history of the Franciscan order. At the start of his description of La Verna, Pietro Antonio gives an orderly summary of all the points of topographical similarity raised by "P. Salvator Sardo," and also states that because the passion was renewed on La Verna, it is a new Jerusalem, a new Calvary, in the middle of Italy.¹⁵² According to him, La Verna is one of the most important assets of the order, one of ten particular triumphs of the Franciscan order, which for example also include indulgence of the portiuncula and the sacro monte of Varallo. A crucial place therefore, when it comes to defining what it means to be a Franciscan, and perhaps even more so, what it means to be Franciscan of the Holy Land.

6.7 Conclusion

From a solitary and remote mount donated to St Francis for secluded prayer, La Verna already during the thirteenth century evolved to a *sanctus mons* or *alter Golgotha* where the miraculous stigmatisation of Francis was said to have taken place. Within the context of the Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic La Verna was then raised up, particularly by Ubertino da Casale, to a mount of apocalyptic proportions where history was renewed, with biblical parallels in the Holy Land. These links to Calvary and the Holy Land were developed further in the *Considerazioni sulle Stimmate*, and the *Liber de Conformitate* by Bartolomeo da Pisa. Both these texts, which stress Francis' conformity with Christ, and were to become part of the mainstream reading digest of the Franciscan order, thus shaped the perception of La Verna for generations of friars to come.

The material development of La Verna was not entirely concurrent with that of these ideological perspectives. Following the construction of the convent church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in 1256, the complex of chapels surrounding the location of the stigmata in 1263, and the five cells in 1267, there was an interval of almost a century before new construction works started again. Around the middle of the fourteenth century the building of the

152 Pietro Antonio, *Giardino Serafico*, vol. II, 308.

Chiesa Maggiore was started but left unfinished. The sanctuary only really began to grow after the observant friars took over from their conventual brethren in 1431, and the patronage of the Florentine wool guild in 1432. In the decades following this transition the Chiesa Maggiore was completed, more new chapels started to be added, and glazed terra cotta sculpture from the Della Robbia workshop found its way into the churches.

In this form, the sacro monte of La Verna offered a template, both in the sense of spiritual significance and material lay out, for new Jerusalems at Varallo and San Vivaldo founded around the turn of the sixteenth century. This very first sacro monte defined the medium, a constructed sacred geography of individual chapels on a hill, that was commonly connected with Calvary and Jerusalem because of the stigmatisation of Francis. By examining the origins of the phenomenon of the sacro monte, it has become clear that this is a quintessentially Franciscan mode for translating Jerusalem to Europe. This Franciscan Calvary itself was then translated in turn to other locations, such as the Capuchin sacro monte of St Francis at Orta in the Italian province of Novara in the late sixteenth century, where a plaque under the statue of St Francis that welcomed visitors was to remind them, upon entering the sacro monte, of the Calvary of La Verna (fig. 17).¹⁵³ The attraction of the sanctuary was apparently undiminished still in the twentieth century, when a ‘La Verna Cave’ was included in the Capuchin devotional complex of the *Genadendal* in Meersel-Dreef in Belgium.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, La Verna not only provided inspiration for the sacri monti of San Vivaldo and Varallo, but it was also increasingly and generally respected as a Franciscan Calvary and Jerusalem in both monographs on the sanctu-

153 G. Melzi d’Eril, “Sacro Monte d’Orta,” in *Isola San Giulio e Sacro Monte d’Orta*, ed. G.A. Dell’Acqua (Turin: Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino: 1977), 101-227; the projected inscription is recorded in Filippo Bagliotti’s book on the sacro monte: “Seraphico Pauperum patriarchae / Emerito Crucifixi Iesu Signifero, / Cui viuere Christus fuit, & mori lucrum / Et salvatoris stigmata pro stemmatt [*sic*] gloriae. / Ne mireris pie Spectator / Si & asperrimae Alverniae cautes in Hortensis Montis/ delicias abiere/ Nam & Redemptori nostro/ Calvariae Montis Supplicia, gloriam resurrectionis/ in Horto aquisivere [*sic*].” Filippo Bagliotti, *Le Delizie Seraphiche de Sagro Monte di S. Francesco* (Milan: Ambrogio Ramellati, 1636), 37; “To the Seraphic Patriarch of the poor/ The veteran standard-bearer of the crucified Jesus/ To whom living was Christ and dying was gain /And the Saviour’s stigmata for the family-tree of glory /Do not be amazed, pious onlooker, / If even the harsh rocks of La Verna have turned /Into the delights of mount Orta [the garden mountain]/ For to our Redeemer also, /The harsh fate of Mount Calvary acquired the glory of Resurrection in a garden.” English translation by Corinna Vermeulen, with minor adaptations by the author.

154 Wim Meulenkamp and Paulina de Nijs. *Buiten de Kerk: Processieparken, Lourdesgrotten en Calvariebergen in Nederland en België* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 1998), 184-189.

ary as well as other Franciscan texts from the late fifteenth century to the turn of the eighteenth century. So much so, that in 1642 friar Vincenzo Berdini thought he could stake a legal argument about the claims of the Franciscans in the Holy Land on the cracks in the rocks on La Verna. Much as the seventeenth-century literature on La Verna and the Franciscan Holy Land were in communication, so little modern scholarly literature on La Verna on the one side, and work on the sixteenth-century *sacri monti* and *geographia sacra* of the Holy Land on the other side, have been able to benefit from each other. It is hard to pinpoint exactly how these divides developed, beyond that *sacri monti* have long been the domain of regionally oriented historians. However, this chapter hopefully makes a clear case for both historians and art historians, but above all historians of religion to start having the same conversation as these primary sources did.