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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Ritsema van Eck, M. P. (2017). Custodians of Sacred Space: Constructing the Franciscan Holy Land through texts and sacri monti (ca. 1480-1650)

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**CUSTODIANS OF SACRED SPACE:  
Constructing the Franciscan Holy Land through texts and *sacri monti*  
(ca. 1480-1650)**

**English Summary**

After the fall of Acre, the last Crusader stronghold to Saladin in 1291, Catholic presence in the Holy Land ceased entirely, until the Franciscan order managed to again set up an establishment in Jerusalem in 1333. Throughout the later middle ages they were the only Catholics present there, and played a key role in receiving and conducting all pilgrims from Western Europe, shaping the pilgrim's perceptions of the Mamluk ruled city to an extent. Following the Ottoman conquest of Jerusalem in 1517 and the Reformation that took place in Europe around the same time, the position of the Franciscan friars of the Holy Land changed significantly. During the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the Franciscans were then gradually edged out of their headquarters: the convent of Mount Sion in Jerusalem. These events and the often assumed end of pilgrimage associated with the Reformation have resulted in diminished scholarly interest in the role of the Franciscans, thereafter.

This dissertation challenges these assumptions and investigates how the friars, nonetheless still present in the Holy Land, responded to the new situation in their representations of the Holy Land ranging from the late medieval period, around 1480, to the late seventeenth century. Due to their evolving and increasingly insecure position the Franciscans of the *custodia Terrae Sanctae* sought to create ever-stronger ideological bonds between themselves and the sacred space that is the Holy Land. In terms of methodology, my analysis has benefited from a variety of insights from theories of social space, cultural memory studies, and the sociological concept of territoriality. Moreover, this dissertation seeks to historicise these insights for the purposes of its investigation, by paying particular attention to the process through which Palestine became a sacred space, a 'Holy Land,' for Christians, with reference to the medieval cult of the saints. The topic of inquiry is approached through a source corpus that is broadly defined by a twofold typology: Franciscan Holy Land writing on the one hand, and the earliest *sacri monti*, or holy mountains on the other.

The textual side of the corpus has been defined by means of introducing the blanket term Franciscan Holy Land writing, meant to facilitate the analysis of a vast and rather heterogeneous literature, consisting of a variety of texts such as travelogues, treatises, histories, etc. The main selective cri-

terion has been that a text needed to be written by a Franciscan, preferably connected to the *custodia Terrae Sanctae*, and offer not just any, but a particularly Franciscan perspective on the Holy Land. Apart from textual sources, this dissertation also engages with a number of sacri monti in Italy. A sacro monte is a sanctuary, typically on a relatively remote hill, that consists of a topography of several little chapels that mark out a devotional *parcours*. Around the turn of the sixteenth century two sacri monti that are also ‘new Jerusalems’ were founded at Varallo and San Vivaldo in Italy by observant Franciscan friars who had previously served in the Holy Land. It has not been the object of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive description of these sources, but rather to study the ideological relationship the Franciscans of the *custodia Terrae Sanctae* cultivated with the Holy Land. Accordingly, the chapters of this dissertation examine a number of case studies that exemplify central themes, which are then connected to larger trends and developments.

The starting point from which this dissertation has evolved into its current form, the sources that it studies and the questions that it seeks to answer, has been a relatively obscure and little studied text: the *Treatise on the Holy Land* (ca. 1485) by friar Paul Walther von Guglingen. This extensive late fifteenth-century text in Latin, had so far escaped scholarly scrutiny because of its unusual nature: it is neither a pilgrim’s account, nor a devotional tract on the Holy Places. Its single surviving manuscript thus remained unedited and largely unanalysed, even though it is an important source for the immensely popular and well-studied *Itinerarium in Terram Sanctam* (1486) by Bernhard von Breydenbach. Historians often vaguely refer to the edition of Guglingen’s travelogue, another text altogether, to substantiate this link. This dissertation seeks to remedy this gap by offering a substantial description and analysis of Guglingen’s *Tractatus*, its structure, sources, and aims; since, based on a thorough understanding of this treatise, it then becomes possible to discern connections to other, contemporaneous and later, Franciscan texts on the Holy Land. Guglingen’s *Treatise* thus serves as the starting point for Franciscan Holy Land writing, the term this dissertation posits for a new, particularly Franciscan, voice in the larger discourse on the Holy Land.

Paul Walther von Guglingen was not an isolated eccentric: apart from personal contacts with several prominent pilgrim authors of his day, he worked together with another Franciscan friar when developing his *Treatise*. Francesco Suriano served as a friar of the Franciscan *custodia Terrae Sanctae* in the same years as Guglingen, and likewise wrote a treatise, the *Trattato di Terra Santa* (1485). Chapter one of the dissertation not only gives an overview of the main structure and contents of Guglingen’s *Treatise*, but also

demonstrates how it corresponds to Suriano's *Trattato* in terms of the complex ideas about the Holy Land it contains, to the extent that they must have discussed these topics together. What is significant about this collaboration is that Guglingen and Suriano analyse the Holy Land, as a sacred space, from a particularly Franciscan worldview, informed by the theology of St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. A number of the ideas they express re-appear in later Franciscan sources on the Holy Land, but the most important aspect of their collaborative 'treatise on the Holy Land' project is that they saw a particular role for themselves, as *Franciscans*, to write about the Holy Land. This new Franciscan self-assertiveness may be related to insecurity of the Franciscan position in Jerusalem due to conflicts with the Georgian patriarchate, which enjoyed a strengthened position, following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

While Guglingen and Suriano could still present the Holy Land to their readers as an uncontested sacred space, such matters were more complicated for the Franciscans of the Holy Land following the Reformation. Chapter two deals with the fascinating and relatively unexplored terrain of the cross-confessional encounter that took place between the Franciscans and their Protestant guests in Jerusalem. My analysis complicates the existing picture of this meeting, based on travelogues by Protestants, by comparing it to Franciscan reports of the same. Contrary to what has previously been suggested, the friars were not anything like the demure laughingstock that is sometimes portrayed in Protestant reports. They staunchly defended both sanctity of space and pilgrimage, at the same time reserving a special role for themselves as friars of the Holy Land to be the judges of such matters. Moreover, they overwhelmingly wrote about their experiences in the Holy Land as both pilgrimage as well as travel, engaging in complex ways with categories such as the curious and the devout, while actively participating in the vibrant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature of Levantine travel. The friars thus fulfilled a key role in broadcasting a Catholic, Counter-Reform perspective on the Holy Land, and they consciously fulfilled this role, which they regarded as a specifically Franciscan prerogative.

Apart from seeing it as their particular task to supervise all aspects of Jerusalem pilgrimage and travel, the Franciscans also began to claim the Holy Land as a Franciscan territory during the period this dissertation studies. Chapter three examines the beginnings of this development in book VII of Guglingen's *Treatise*, which for the first time introduced a number of defining features of Franciscan Holy Land writing. Firstly, Guglingen was the first friar of the *custodia Terrae Sanctae* to compose a cohesive history of the

Holy Land, working with the pre-existing tradition of historical compilations present at the convent on Mount Sion. The eschatological outlook of this history allots a particular role to the Franciscans, as catalysts of the unfolding of history towards the only right conclusion according to Guglingen, namely Christian recapture of the Holy Land. Book VII of the *Treatise* is also the first text by a Franciscan of the Holy Land to explicitly call for Crusade, even though the *custodia* engaged in Crusade campaigning at prominent European courts, such as those of Burgundy and on the Iberian Peninsula in the same period. Finally, Guglingen's text is also the first by a friar of the Holy Land to contain the first possible, if covert, reference to the foundation of the Franciscan custody of the Holy Land by St Francis himself.

These features, first attested in Guglingen's *Treatise*, namely looking at the past to understand the role of the Franciscans in the Holy Land, legitimising their claims to a presence there by referring to St Francis, and calling for a Crusade, were to become hallmarks of the increasingly territorial Franciscan literature on the Holy Land of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Chapter four first outlines how the position of the Franciscans in Ottoman Jerusalem transformed, becoming less secure than before. The attempts of Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries to establish in the Holy Land particularly incited the Franciscans to vociferously defend their position as representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem as a uniquely Franciscan right. Contrary to the assumptions of previous scholarship, this dissertation argues that the Franciscan literature of appropriation that proliferated during this period was directed at Western European audiences, instead of Ottoman or Eastern Orthodox ones.

Moreover, chapter four aims to demonstrate that the repeated calls for Crusade, in for example, Francesco Quaresmio's *Terrae Sanctae Elucidatio* (1639) were genuinely sincere, instead of empty convention, as has previously been suggested. Quaresmio's *Elucidatio* emerges as a text that transformed Franciscan perspectives on the Holy Land for a while to come. It influentially reinterprets history, first presenting St Francis as the heir to the biblical promise of the land to Abraham, and then rewriting the life of the saint to say that he went to take possession of the Holy Land for his heirs, the Franciscan friars, who are thus turned into divinely appointed keepers and protectors of the Holy Places for the Catholic Church. In addition, parallelism between Francis and Christ, informed by the Franciscan Joachite apocalyptic, emerged as an important strategy to transform the Holy Land into a Franciscan territory, as Diego de Cea's *Thesaurus Terrae Sanctae* (1639) testifies, as well as the *Elucidatio* and other texts.

Reinterpreting the past, and especially the Life of St Francis, thus emerged as a prime strategy to create ideological connections between the Franciscans and the Holy Land. These links in turn served the exclusivist territorial agenda of the friars. At the sacro monte of Varallo, which is the subject of chapter five, engaging with the memory of a founding father, friar Bernardino Caimi in this case, also served a similar purpose. This chapter argues that when Caimi founded this new Jerusalem at Varallo in the last decade of the fifteenth century, the significance of this sanctuary depended mostly on a formal and relatively undefined ‘similarity’ to the Holy Places overseas. However, in the secondary literature on this sacro monte there has been a preponderant tendency to speculate about Caimi’s largely undocumented wishes, in order to reconstruct and understand the elusive first phase of the sacro monte. I argue, on the one hand, that most of these points can be made without any reference to Caimi, and on the other hand, that the scholarly fascination with Caimi may be traced back to sixteenth and seventeenth-century historiography on the sacro monte. During that period, the star of Caimi began to rise in the context of territorial disputes at this sacro monte between the civic patrons of the sanctuary, the *fabbricieri*, and its Franciscan keepers.

The *fabbricieri* sought to legitimise their controversial plans for restructuring the sacro monte by claiming to have a superior understanding of Caimi’s original intent, implicitly accusing the friars of having obscured his design. The Franciscans, on the other hand, sought to regain control over the sacro monte also by referring to Caimi; since the observant Franciscan founder is named in a foundational document with which the *fabbricieri* supposedly handed over the sacro monte to Caimi. In the enduring conflicts over the management and development of the sanctuary between these two groups, the figure of Caimi was raised up to the saintlike status still recognisable in present day literature. In coeval Franciscan Holy Land writing the figure of Caimi was likewise used to claim the sacro monte of Varallo as an achievement of the Franciscan custody of the Holy Land. Important though Caimi may have been for the territorial agendas of several groups, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the new Jerusalem of Varallo, and what may have been particularly Franciscan about it this way of citing the sacred geography of the Holy Land, we need to turn to yet another sacro monte.

Scholarship has long since associated the beginnings of the phenomenon of the sacro monte with the foundation of the new Jerusalem at Varallo in 1491, and traces it back no further than the devout mind of Bernardino Caimi. Chapter six of this dissertation seeks to challenge the *status quaestionis* on this topic, by paying attention to the sacro monte of La Verna. In

1213 the mount of La Verna in Tuscany was donated to St Francis by a local landowner. On this secluded mount, Francis then had a particular religious experience called the stigmatisation, which involved the marking of this body with the wounds of Christ during a session of meditative prayer in 1224. During the second half of the thirteenth century, a Franciscan convent and sanctuary were built there. Already then, La Verna was called a *sacer mons* as well as ‘another Golgotha’ on account of the stigmatisation. In the centuries that followed La Verna was increasingly associated with locations in the Holy Land, in Franciscan texts inspired by particular apocalyptic understandings of history that paralleled Francis with Christ. Moreover, after the observant Franciscans gained control of the sanctuary at La Verna in the fifteenth century, the material layout of the sacro monte was developed into the form that we nowadays recognise as a sacro monte: a topography of chapels on a hill, decorated with terracotta sculpture.

This dissertation argues that Bernardino Caimi’s initiative of founding the sacro monte and new Jerusalem of Varallo, was profoundly influenced by the much older, pre-existing Franciscan sanctuary at La Verna, which Caimi had visited in 1484. Moreover, chapter six demonstrates that he was not unique in making this association: La Verna itself was increasingly and generally respected within the Franciscan order as a Franciscan Calvary and Jerusalem in the West from the late fifteenth up to the eighteenth century. This was the case to such a degree that, in 1642, friar Vincenzo Berdini used the very cracks in the rocks at La Verna to back the legal rights of the Franciscan friars in the Holy Land. The sacro monte was thus, not only a fundamentally Franciscan way of translating the Holy Land to Europe, but it also offered possibilities to make the Holy Land Franciscan: Franciscan Holy Land territoriality materialised, in short.

In conclusion, both the earliest sacri monti and the texts that make up Franciscan Holy Land writing are two sides of the same ideological coin. It has been the object of this dissertation to lay bare the tissue of the particularly Franciscan order memories and ideologies that informs the territorial claims implicit in both of them. From the late fifteenth, up to and including the seventeenth century, the Franciscans sought to create ever stronger ideological bonds between themselves as a group and the Holy Land. Their goal was to keep the Jesuits and the Capuchins out of Palestine, as well as cultivate a particular self-image as uniquely and divinely appointed heirs to the Holy Land, with an important role in the unfolding of salvation history. The conclusions of this study suggest a number of directions for future research, such as, for example the wider readership and reception of both Franciscan Holy Land

writing, and the *sacri monti*. In addition, it offers starting points for exploring the role and significance of the Franciscans, as a traditional mendicant order, within the Counter-Reformation Church, alongside the Jesuits on whom scholarship has tended to focus. The conclusions of this dissertation suggest at the very least that the Franciscans were neither ineffective, nor mute in their dealings with rivalling orders, as well as in cross-confessional debates.