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**Dragomans, tattooists, artisans:
Palestinian Christians and their encounters with Catholic Europe in the 17th and
18th centuries***

Abstract: In the 17th and 18th centuries the presence of European Catholic actors in the Ottoman Empire dramatically increased, particularly in the Palestinian provinces. The city of Jerusalem and its surrounding hinterland, referred to here by its Arabic name *Jabal al-Quds*, witnessed a particularly intensive Catholic presence due to its sanctified religious status. This article examines the ways in which the local Arabic-speaking Christian population of *Jabal al-Quds* interacted with these European Catholic actors. It situates these encounters within the wider scholarship on missionary encounters and cross-cultural interactions in the Mediterranean world, arguing global historians need to pay greater attention to the inequalities embedded in many of these relationships and the frequent episodes of violent conflict they gave rise to. By inverting the standard western gaze on Jerusalem and looking at these encounters from the inside out, the article seeks to restore local actors as important players within the global Counter-Reformation, albeit within a context of subjugation, conflict and stymied mobility.

Keywords: encounters, Ottoman Empire, Catholicism, Palestine, early modern

In August 1690 a man from Bethlehem calling himself 'Marco figlio di Pietro' wrote a letter of protest to the Pope in Rome. The letter described the attempt of Marco's brother 'Paolo' to travel to Rome earlier that year. Despite professing himself Roman Catholic, Paolo had been obstructed and harassed at every step of the way by a coalition of Franciscan friars, European consuls and Ottoman governors. In Jerusalem the Franciscans pressured the European consuls to deny him a travel permit, then in Cyprus the Franciscans detained him in their Larnaca convent after he had set out to reach Rome by other means. Warned by the friars 'he would be numbered among the dead' if he tried to continue his journey, and fearful they were trying to poison him, Paolo managed to

escape the convent.¹ But he soon found 'twelve friars running after him in the public streets of Cyprus'.² Seeking refuge in the French consul's office, he was instead bundled onto the first boat back to the Ottoman mainland. Disembarking at the port of Saida, Paolo suffered a series of further humiliations, this time at the hands of the local Ottoman garrison who beat him, stripped him of his clothes and money, and 'put chains around his neck and feet'.³ He was eventually placed before the local governor who granted him passage back to Bethlehem via Acre.

'Marco' and 'Paolo' were Arabic-speaking Christians from Bethlehem, six miles south of Jerusalem, and are hereby referred to by their Arabic names Murqus ibn Butrus and Bulus ibn Butrus. The letter opens a fascinating window onto a world of increasingly entangled relations between local Christians and European Catholics in Ottoman Palestine at the close of the 17th century. The city of Jerusalem is receiving increased attention as an important site of Catholic legitimation within the global Counter-Reformation project. Thus far this attention has largely focused on the European actors who sought to reclaim the 'Holy Land' within a distinctly Catholic sacral geography, either by travelling themselves to Jerusalem or recreating its shrines within Europe.⁴ The Christian population of the Jerusalem area has remained largely silent in this work despite its pivotal position as the subject of a renewed Catholic missionary enterprise and as local agents for visiting Europeans. Felicita Tramontana's recent study of 17th-century conversions to both Catholicism and Islam in Palestinian villages has provided a welcome counterpoint⁵, but much work remains to be done on the wider surface of contact between European Catholics and the local population.

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¹ Archives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide (SCPF), Rome, Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi (SC), Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 158-9.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Examples include Megan Armstrong, 'Spiritual legitimisation? Franciscan competition over the Holy Land (1517-1700)', in Alison Forrestal and Sean Alexander Smith, eds., *The frontiers of mission: perspectives on early modern missionary Catholicism*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, pp.159-79; Bernard Heyberger and Chantal Verdeil, 'Spirituality and scholarship: the Holy Land in Jesuit eyes (17th to 19th centuries)', in Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ed., *New faith in ancient lands: western missions in the Middle East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp.19-41; and Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: relics, replicas, theme parks*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006 (esp. ch. 3).

⁵ Felicita Tramontana, *Passages of faith: conversion in Palestinian villages (17th century)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014.

This article sets out to retell the story of Catholic resurgence in the Holy Land in the 17th and 18th centuries through the eyes of the local Christian population. The central thesis is that, by shifting the viewpoint to these local actors, we find a type of cross-cultural exchange that differs markedly from most of the recent writing on encounters in global history, and in particular those taking place in the early modern Mediterranean. In the story related here, themes of enforced stasis, subjugation and contestation predominate, with violence always lurking near the surface. Whereas most recent histories of European-Ottoman encounters follow fluid movements of people, ideas and goods through networks that criss-crossed the Mediterranean, this study pauses to consider people who aspired to traverse those networks but found themselves locked out.

Building this type of experience into global history can be a way to address recent criticisms that the discipline's 'cosmopolitan self-yearnings'⁶ have blinded it to the large numbers of people for whom globalisation represented a threat to their livelihoods or an imposition of new restraints.⁷ As the postcolonial turn gave way to the transnational one, frameworks of dominance, coercion and imperial subjugation were largely jettisoned in the study of encounters, giving way to an emphasis on exchange, adaptation and indigenous agency.⁸ This is especially the case in early modern Catholic missionary contexts in which Europeans were reliant on the cooperation of non-Christian rulers and negotiation with local populations.⁹ The flurry of recent literature on cross-cultural exchange in the early modern Mediterranean, meanwhile, has emphasised maritime mobility and the porous nature of sectarian and cultural boundaries. In this

⁶ Jeremy Adelman, 'What is global history now?', published online at <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment> (accessed 5 May 2017).

⁷ These concerns are addressed at a broader level in a recent discussion piece in the *Journal of Global History*. See Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: the futures of global history', *Journal of Global History*, 13(1), 2018, pp.1-21.

⁸ For examples of the older, postcolonial approaches to cross-cultural encounters see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992; and Walter D. Mignolo, *The darker side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality, and colonization*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

⁹ See for example Tara Alberts, *Conflict and conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500-1700*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; and many of the contributions in Tara Alberts and D. R. M. Irving, eds., *Intercultural exchange in Southeast Asia: history and society in the early modern world*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2013. The emphasis on negotiation and hybridity in the Catholic historiography has recently seeped into scholarship on Protestant missionaries in the early modern period. See for example Charles H. Parker, 'Converting souls across cultural borders: Dutch Calvinism and early modern missionary encounters', in *Journal of Global History*, 8, 1, 2013, pp. 50-71.

historiography, Ottoman actors participate as equal partners within domains previously reserved for western Europeans such as 'Renaissance', 'exploration' and 'globalisation'.¹⁰

While this scholarship has helped define the limits of European exceptionalism and hegemony, there is a danger of losing sight of the very real inequalities that often governed such encounters. By the middle of the 18th century Catholic influence was more deeply embedded in the Jerusalem area than at any time since the Crusades, as it was more broadly across Ottoman Syria.¹¹ Bernard Heyberger has uncovered the opportunities for mobility this afforded some local Christians who now began to appear in Rome's new missionary colleges as instructors of Arabic and students of Catholic theology.¹² But beyond a handful of cherry-picked clergy, this was not the type of opportunity open to the wider Christian population in the Ottoman Empire. The European friars and pilgrims who flooded into Jerusalem in this period did not come to engage in cross-cultural exchange or theological dialogue. They came to claim ownership over key shrines, as well as to convert and discipline an Orthodox Christian population they considered morally and spiritually deviant or 'schismatic'. Crucially, in the city of Jerusalem and its surrounding Christian villages (namely Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour and Ein Karem) they possessed the necessary wealth and access to political protection to assume this role. It was in this sanctified highland area, referred to here by its historic Arabic name, *Jabal al-Quds* ('the Jerusalem hills'), that the local population was subjected to one of the most intensive Catholicisation projects anywhere in the early modern Ottoman Empire.

The power imbalances between the two groups need not detract from local agency. The examples discussed in this article show that local Christians in Jabal al-Quds played an important role in propagating the idea of a 'Catholic Holy Land' among

¹⁰ For examples see Molly Greene, *A shared world: Christians and Muslims in the early modern Mediterranean*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and early modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman world*, London: Ashgate, 2013; Sean Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean world: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of geography*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012; Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance art and Arab science*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011; Jack Goody, *Renaissance: the one or the many?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹¹ Bernard Heyberger describes the period between 1660 and 1730 as the 'apogee of Catholic missions' in Ottoman Syria. See Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du proche-orient au temps de la Réforme Catholique*, Rome: École française de Rome, 1994, 300.

¹² Bernard Heyberger, 'Chrétiens orientaux dans l'Europe Catholique (XIIe - XIIIe)', in Bernard Heyberger and Chantal Verdeil (eds.), *Hommes de l'entre deux. Parcours individuels et portraits de groupe sur la frontière méditerranéenne*, Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2009, pp.61-94.

European audiences, which in turn constituted a vital part of the global Counter-Reformation. Recovering this role is a challenging task as only a smattering of sources produced by the local Christian population in the 17th and 18th centuries survive today. But by cross-referencing them against the copious writings of European missionaries, pilgrims and diplomats, as well as the records of the Ottoman shari'a court in Jerusalem, we can begin to tease out the everyday agendas of these forgotten voices. Far from passive bystanders, they emerge from these sources as contesting Catholic authority at virtually every point of contact, frequently finding ways to subvert or exploit that authority to their advantage. Whereas the postcolonial approaches of the 1980s and 90s were sometimes accused of disempowering non-western actors, Ottoman Christians are portrayed here as protagonists in their own drama, albeit within a restricted role of servitude to their European patrons.

To capture this sense of local agency, the first section of the paper sketches out the people and places in Jabal al-Quds most affected by the heightened Catholic presence. On one level, the focus is narrowed to those local Christians who formally converted to the Catholic faith and, even more specifically, to the 'dragomans' who served the Franciscans as their inner circle of converts. But the fragility of Catholic conversions and the fluidity of sectarian affiliation in Jabal al-Quds renders it difficult to speak in such specific terms. As a result, many of the examples discussed can only be characterised as involving the broader local Christian population, some of whom might self-identify as Catholic when they deemed it advantageous. The second section of the article then looks more closely at the most common zone of interaction between European Catholics and local Christians: that of the trade in religious souvenirs. Consisting mainly of devotional objects carved by local artisans from olive wood and mother-of-pearl, these souvenirs were increasingly aimed at Catholic pilgrims, as well as exported to Catholic Europe via the Franciscan convents. It is here that the encounter between Europeans and locals was established as a fundamentally economic exchange in which local actors were confined to the role of artisans and street hawkers. The third section then demonstrates how the economic inequalities embedded within these interactions ensured the relationship was constantly marked by tension and violence. Finally, some concluding remarks are offered concerning the importance of excavating these largely untold stories, not only in terms of their impact on the global Counter-Reformation, but also as a way to complicate understandings of cross-cultural exchange in the early modern era.

In the aforementioned letter written by Murqus ibn Butrus, a seemingly incidental detail confirms the essentially economic and material nature of these encounters. When describing his brother Bulus' attempt to take refuge in the French consulate in Cyprus, Murqus nonchalantly mentions that the consul 'bought from him crowns from the Holy Land and crosses that those in Bethlehem are accustomed to making, paying him...7 scudi and 10 secchini'.¹³ When combined with Ottoman tax surveys listing Bulus as a rosary maker by profession, we can deduce he was travelling to Rome as an itinerant merchant attempting to sell religious souvenirs. By 1690 it seems the likes of Murqus and his brother were attempting to move above their station as local producers and sell directly to European markets. The vehemence with which the Franciscans attempted to restrict Bulus' journey speaks volumes for how they perceived the role of local Christians within their Counter-Reformation mission: a subservient local population who were to be disciplined in the 'true faith' but could play no active role in the circulation of Catholic culture and capital around the Mediterranean. Yet when the perspective is reversed, and we take seriously the agency of local Christians, we are struck by their restlessness and their refusal to be content with their assigned position. By the late 19th century Christians from Jabal al-Quds were breaking free from the Franciscan shackles and travelling to all corners of the world, especially Catholic Europe and Latin America, selling Holy Land devotional objects.¹⁴ To study the earlier interactions of the 17th and 18th centuries between the Christians of Jabal al-Quds and European Catholics is to trace the slow, painful origins of a Palestinian Christian diaspora in an era when global mobility remained firmly out of reach for most local residents.

The 'Catholic' parishes of Jabal al-Quds

By the end of the 17th century, the local population in Jabal al-Quds would have been keenly aware of a growing cast of Catholic characters walking the streets of Jerusalem

¹³ SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 158-9.

¹⁴ See Jacob Norris, 'Exporting the Holy Land: artisans and merchant migrants in Ottoman-Era Bethlehem,' *Mashriq and Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies*, 2, 2013, pp.14-40.

and the surrounding Christian villages.¹⁵ Some locals, however, were more likely than others to meet a European Catholic. The principal conduit for interaction with Catholic actors was the Order of Franciscan Friars Minor – established in the area since the 13th century and centred around their convents in Jerusalem (St. Saviour’s) and Bethlehem (St. Catherine’s).¹⁶ In the wake of the European Reformations, these sites were reimagined as a specifically Catholic form of guardianship over the Holy Land.¹⁷ When the Vatican formed the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, or ‘Propaganda Fide’, in 1622 to coordinate Catholic missions around the world, the Franciscans were granted a papal monopoly over proselytism in the area. Their convents were now further transformed, serving as parish churches charged with ‘returning’ local Christians to the ‘true faith’.¹⁸ This quickly led to a widening of the Franciscans’ reach in Jabal al-Quds. By the end of the 17th century they had established a new convent in Ein Karem (1676), the village associated with the birth of John the Baptist, located 5 miles west of Jerusalem. Meanwhile the Bethlehem parish was extended in the same period to include the neighbouring Christian villages of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour.

It was in this area in and around Jerusalem that the only discernible local community of Roman Catholics (*lātīn* in local terms) in the Arabic speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire took shape. Further north in Ottoman Syria, Catholic proselytism was mostly channelled through Jesuit missionaries and was focused on the adhesion of long established local churches such as the Maronites and Greek Catholics (or ‘Melkites’) to Rome within the Uniate family of Catholic churches.¹⁹ But in Jabal al-Quds where the majority of local Christians were Greek Orthodox (*rumī*), no locally based church existed that was prepared to affiliate with Rome. Thus local Christians interested in entering the Catholic fold had little option but to declare themselves Roman Catholic under Franciscan

¹⁵ For the rise in pilgrimage numbers see Nathan Schur, ‘Itineraries by pilgrims and travelers as source material for the history of Palestine in the Ottoman period’, in David Kushner, ed., *Palestine in the late Ottoman period: political, social, and economic transformation*, Leiden: Brill, 1986, p.382.

¹⁶ The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land was formally established in 1342, but Franciscans date their presence in the region back to the visit of St. Francis himself who is held to have visited Jerusalem in 1219. See Paolo Pieraccini, *Cattolici di Terra Santa: 1330-2000*, Florence, 2003, 13-20. For St. Francis’ visit see John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: the curious history of a Christian-Muslim encounter*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.257-93.

¹⁷ See Armstrong, ‘Spiritual legitimisation’.

¹⁸ Hanna Kildani, *Modern Christianity in the Holy Land* (trans. George Musleh), Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010, pp.227-8.

¹⁹ For an overview see Robert M. Haddad, ‘Conversion of the Eastern Orthodox Christians to the Unia in the 17th and 18th century’, in Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi, eds., *Conversion and continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990, pp.449-59.

tutelage. The Franciscan conversion registers show only a handful of local Christians were prepared to do this before the 1670s, after which time more substantial conversion numbers began to be recorded. By 1692 a total of 682 local Christians in Jabal al-Quds had been registered by the Franciscans as Catholic, with Bethlehem (385) and Jerusalem (297) the only established parishes at that time.²⁰ By 1715 the total had risen to 769 with Ein Karem (46) now appearing as a parish.²¹ The numbers rose steadily over the next half century, reaching a total of 2,081 by 1764, distributed among Bethlehem (1,030), Jerusalem (961) and Ein Karem (90).²²

The reasons for the surge in Catholic numbers during the late 17th and early 18th centuries are multifarious. The Ottoman state's decision to strengthen its alliance with France must count as an important factor, producing by 1690 the first legislation allowing Catholic priests to preach freely among Ottoman Christians. From this point, Ottoman support fluctuated between Catholics and their increasingly hostile Orthodox counterparts, but no longer could the Orthodox patriarch in Istanbul command exclusive influence over Christian affairs in the Empire. Equally important to Catholic success were the Franciscan schools established in Jerusalem and Bethlehem that provided local Christians with the skills – namely Italian language and European styles of artisanship – that enabled them to interact with a growing stream of Catholic pilgrims. By 1715 there were 58 boys enrolled in the parish schools of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ein Karem, with the figure rising to 163 by 1764.²³ Finally, the Franciscans' allowance of Arabic as a liturgical language appealed to what Bruce Masters has called in the context of Jesuits in Aleppo 'the pull of localism' – a policy that contrasted strongly with the Orthodox Church's insistence on using Greek.²⁴ A letter written in 1681 and signed by 64 Catholics from Jerusalem and Bethlehem expressed the community's 'infinite gratitude' to the Roman Church for providing Arabic training to a particularly popular local friar named

²⁰ Lemmens, *Acta Parte I*, p.288.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.338. Felicita Tramontana found the earliest mention of a local Catholic community in Ein Karem to be in 1698 when a Franciscan report to the Propaganda Fide stated 20 Catholics were living there. See Tramontana, *Passages of faith*, p.107.

²² Lemmens, *Acta Parte II*, pp.222-4.

²³ *Ibid.*, *Parte I*, pp.338-40 and *Parte II*, pp.223-4.

²⁴ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab world: the roots of sectarianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.87.

Marc'Angelo di Seraglio.²⁵ The letter goes on to state that at least 15 local Christians were ready to convert if Marc'Angelo was allowed to continue preaching in Arabic.²⁶

But when this local population is brought more squarely into the historical limelight we find the Franciscan claims to missionary success were highly fragile. The friars experienced great difficulty retaining parish members and they frequently resorted to financial rewards to stop them returning to the Orthodox Church, as well as to gain new converts.²⁷ Inter-confessional marriage commonly brought out the inherent tensions in the relationship. In one episode from 1754, a local Catholic from Bethlehem named as 'Michele' requested one of the ordained friars marry him to an Orthodox woman, 'Anastasia'. The friar, named Felice, agreed on condition that Anastasia 'learn the ways of the faith and made the profession of Catholic faith'.²⁸ A conflict ensued when Felice discovered 'out of great ignorance she was capable neither of the sacraments nor the profession of faith', and that her family had barred him from entering their Orthodox home. Felice's refusal to perform the wedding evoked an angry response from Michele who went as far as to threaten to kill Anastasia at the altar if he could not marry her.²⁹ In the end, the more lenient voices within the Franciscan community prevailed and a different friar married the couple under the agreement that Michele would later teach his wife the Catholic doctrine.³⁰ In the eyes of the local population, confessional conformity was thus viewed in highly pragmatic terms – an obstacle to be overcome to validate social functions that cut across denominational lines. From the Franciscan viewpoint, the dispute shows the importance of converting whole families rather than isolated individuals. If Michele and Anastasia's marriage took place within the Catholic fold a new family would be incorporated into the Franciscan parish, guaranteeing the baptism and schooling of their children as Catholics.

It was in Bethlehem, where this incident took place, that the Franciscans had found the most fertile conditions for their missionary enterprise, allowing them to build up an inner circle of Catholic families by the time Felice demanded his marriage to

²⁵ SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 2, 383-4.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Such practices in Jerusalem and Bethlehem have already been documented in Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du proche-orient*, p.461 ; and Tramontana, *Passages of faith*, pp.36-7 and 102-3.

²⁸ ASCTS, Bethlehem: S. Caterina, Carteggio Cronologico, letter dated 4 June 1754.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Generally speaking the Franciscans resident in Jabal al-Quds adopted a more tolerant attitude towards mixed marriages than their superiors in Propaganda Fide in Rome. See Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du proche-orient*, pp.385-98.

Anastasia. As the figures above demonstrate, it was Bethlehem that consistently formed the largest Latin Catholic parish in Jabal al-Quds, and by extension anywhere in the Ottoman Middle East.³¹ Although the overall number of Christians in Jerusalem was higher, Bethlehem's Christian population was more locally rooted and therefore more amenable to long-term missionary success. In Jerusalem the conversion records are dominated by people likely to have been recent immigrants - Nestorians, Maronites, Copts, Syriacs, Armenians, even Calvinists and Lutherans, as well as the occasional Muslim (Ottoman slaves freed for ransom by the Franciscans).³² But in Bethlehem every convert to Catholicism in the 17th century was listed as previously Greek Orthodox. This was the indigenous Christian population of Palestine - under the patronage of the Greek Orthodox Church since the Ottoman conquest of 1517, but with its own Arabic-speaking identity and local traditions, developed under centuries of Islamic rule.

From this base in Bethlehem a core group of Catholic families had emerged by the mid 17th century that was closely attached to the Franciscan convent. Over time, the Franciscans came to refer to them as their 'dragomans' - a category usually reserved in Ottoman legal terms for individual translators appointed to European consuls. In Bethlehem, however, an altogether looser definition of the term evolved to refer to the network of families living around the St. Catherine's convent and serving the Franciscans as pilgrim guides and translators, as well as carrying out general maintenance and upkeep of the convent. Locally in Bethlehem these families came to be known as the *tarajmeh* ('translators'), with a district of the town named after them that extends down Star Street, the main entrance for pilgrims arriving from Jerusalem. Tradition even holds that the *tarajmeh* families descended from intermarriages between Frankish Crusaders and the local population. While there is little documentary evidence to confirm this, we do know that the Crusader regime in Bethlehem refrained from expelling the local Christian population the way it did in Jerusalem.³³ The result was most likely a tradition of Frankish-Arabic co-habitation in the town that persisted into the subsequent periods of Muslim rule and eventually evolved into the dragoman community. By the early 18th

³¹ Franciscan records show no other town in the Custodia di Terra Santa (which included Syria, Mount Lebanon and Cyprus) had a larger local Latin Catholic population.

³² ASCTS, Sacramenti: Riconciliati e convertiti (3).

³³ See Andrew Jotischky, *Crusading and the crusader states*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp.154-8. More generally, the historiography of rural Crusader society now emphasises Frankish-Arabic co-habitation. See for example Ronnie Ellenblum, *Frankish rural settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

century Franciscan reports on parish numbers in Bethlehem distinguished between the general Catholic population and their *turcimanni* (dragomans), with the latter regarded as their inner circle of more reliable converts. In 1714, 157 such dragomans were recorded in Bethlehem out of a total Catholic parish of 438 people.³⁴

The value of this community to the Franciscans is demonstrated in episodes such as the marriage of Michele and Anastasia. While Michele was a baptised Catholic, he did not belong to the dragoman community.³⁵ But throughout the saga, the friar Felice relied on local dragomans as cultural mediators. In his report he writes that he communicated with Michele and Anastasia via 'Giovanni di Davidde' and 'Giovanni di Musa di Tilimas' – two family names (Dawed and Talmas) still associated with the *tarajmeh* clan in Bethlehem today. He also goes on to state it was only³ after conferring with 'Andrea Torjimanno di questo convento' that he later discovered another friar was prepared to carry out the wedding.³⁶ Numerous other cases show the dragomans mediating between the Franciscans, the local community and the Ottoman state. In a 1681 hearing at the Ottoman shari'a court in Jerusalem, for example, we find two men listed as 'Ibrahim and Isa, dragomans of the Frankish monks in Jerusalem' requesting the Ottoman judge, or *qadi*, sanction the friars' request to build new fortifications at their Bethlehem convent.³⁷ In 1689 two other Jerusalem-based dragomans, Anton and Mansour, appeared at the court, representing the Franciscans in a dispute with the Armenian monks.³⁸ In the village of Ein Karem, meanwhile, dragomans from Bethlehem established a form of Catholic 'colony' following the Franciscan acquisition of a convent there in 1676. By 1698 a small community of 20 dragomans had been transplanted to Ein Karem, rising to 90 by 1764.³⁹

It was within these dragoman communities that the most intimate relations between local Christians and European Catholics developed. Murqus ibn Butrus, author of the aforementioned letter of 1690, came from one of Bethlehem's earliest dragoman

³⁴ Note from 26 Jul, 1714 written by the Franciscan curate. ASCTS, Archivio della Curia Custodiale, Betlemme: S. Caterina Carteggio cronologico 1 (1637-1827).

³⁵ His family name, Maamer, has never been part of the Tarajmeh clan in Bethlehem.

³⁶ ASCTS, Bethlehem: S. Caterina, Carteggio Cronologico, letter dated 4 June 1754.

³⁷ Jerusalem shari'a court sijill (hereafter sijill), Center for Palestinian heritage, Abu Dis, Palestinian Territories, 183, p.453, 1092 H/1681 CE.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ For 1698 see SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 393. For 1764 see Status Terrae Sanctae a P. guard. Paulo, in Lemmens, ed., *Acta S. Congregationis parte II*, p.224. For the transfer of Catholics from Bethlehem see Bellarmino Bagatti, 'L'industria della madreperla a Betlemme', in *Custodia di Terra Santa 1342-1942*, Jerusalem: Tipografia dei Francescani, 1951, p.138; Lemmens, ed., *Acta parte II*, pp.139-40; and Tramontana, *Passages of Faith*, p.107-8.

families, instilling in him an unusually strong sense of Catholic identity. In near perfect Italian he employed a range of Catholic symbolism to make the case for his brother's passage to Rome. His brother Bulus' only aim, he claimed, was to carry out a pilgrimage to the Papal See, 'before which we bow our heads and our souls, considering it our true Mother to whom God has revealed all the mysteries in which we believe'.⁴⁰ To a Catholic reader the analogy with Paul the Apostle would have been clear and further reinforced by Murqus' rendering of his brother's name 'Paolo'. In similar fashion to Bulus, Paul the Apostle had been arrested and imprisoned in Caesarea (just south of Saida where Bulus was arrested), before embarking on his long journey to salvation in Rome.

Murqus' impressive command of Catholic doctrine and symbolism was the result of a lifetime spent in close proximity to European Catholics. Records show his family played a central role in the diffusion of Catholicism in Jabal al-Quds in the early 17th century. His grandfather, Elias, appears as the very first recorded Catholic confirmation, occurring in Bethlehem on Christmas Day 1616.⁴¹ Elias always appears in these records with the appellation of 'il dottore', as later does his son Butrus (the father of Murqus and Bulus), suggesting the family served a physicians to the Franciscans. In 1627 Elias' wife, Salha, became the first entry for Bethlehem in the new conversion records required by Propaganda Fide.⁴² Her and Elias' numerous children and grandchildren subsequently appear multiple times in the baptism and confirmation registers over the next 25 years, confirming the extent to which one family, over successive generations, could form the nucleus of an emergent Catholic community.⁴³ By the time Murqus and his brother Bulus were born (1641 and 1647 respectively), this growing network of dragoman families could be expected to baptise their children as Catholics and send them to the local Franciscan school. Upon reaching adulthood, Murqus and Bulus were already immersed in this Catholic environment and betrothed to local Catholic girls.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 158.

⁴¹ Archivio Storico della Custodia di Terra Santa (ASCTS), Jerusalem, Archivi delle parrocchie, Betlemme S. Caterina, Registri sacramentali, 1/2: Liber confirmatorum,, 25 Dec., 1616.

⁴² ASCTS, Sacramenti: Riconciliati e convertiti (3), 4 Apr., 1627.

⁴³ See ASCTS, Archivi delle parrocchie, Betlemme S. Caterina, Registri sacramentali, 1/1: Liber baptizatorum and 1/2: Liber confirmatorum. Elias' children are always listed as 'f. Elie Doctoris' (son of Elias the Doctor). Likewise with Butrus and his children.

⁴⁴ These genealogical records are preserved in the local Bethlehem Latin Parish Records (BLPR), within the Batarseh family records. The family assumed the Batarseh surname in the 18th century – a family name that continues to hold a prominent place in Bethlehem today, as reflected in the election of Victor Batarseh as mayor of Bethlehem from 2005 to 2012.

Murqus' letter of 1690 provides a rare opportunity to examine the encounter with Catholic Europe through the eyes of the local dragoman community. But the majority of this community – men, women and children - remain voiceless in the historical record. Dragoman children were recorded as a distinct category in the Franciscan reports, but scant detail survives on their experiences in the Catholic schools of Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ein Karem. Women too were an integral part of the dragoman community and played a vital role in facilitating further conversions to Catholicism, as noted by Felicita Tramontana.⁴⁵ During the early and mid-17th century, when the dragoman community was first emerging, women often feature more prominently than men in the conversion registers. For example in the single highest year for conversions in Bethlehem, that of 1671, women make up 19 of the 36 names recorded.⁴⁶ The day to day experiences of these women are harder to glean, but snippets of information suggest they served the Franciscan convents as domestic workers and manual labourers.⁴⁷ Occasionally they appear in accusations of sexual affairs with the friars, indicating the close proximity in which they lived with European Catholics.⁴⁸ In 1769 a friar at the Bethlehem convent called Serafino was found harbouring an unnamed local widow in his cell at night. Having initially been dismissed from his position, Serafino convinced the Franciscan guardian in Jerusalem to give him a second chance. But when the same woman was later found pregnant, there would be no more leniency. According to the curate in Bethlehem, the woman's family threatened to kill both her and the friar 'following the Arabic law always practiced here'. This time Serafino was immediately dispatched to Verona and the woman sent 'far away'. Meanwhile the woman's family had to be placated in the Ottoman law courts to the tune of 'at least 15,000 piasters'.⁴⁹ This was clearly not an isolated incident at the convent in Bethlehem, as testified by a nearly identical case occurring in 1783.⁵⁰

Examples such as these provide glimpses of a wider cast of local Christians whose lives became increasingly intertwined with those of European Catholics in Jabal al-Quds in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is often only in tragic or controversial circumstances that

⁴⁵ Tramontana, *Passages of Faith*, pp.94-5.

⁴⁶ ASCTS, Sacramenti: Riconciliati e convertiti (3).

⁴⁷ See for example S. Kosmopolites, *A series of letters, addressed to Sir William Fordyce, containing a voyage and journey from England to Smyrna*, London: Payne and Son, 1788, vol. 2, pp.190-1.

⁴⁸ Some European travellers' accounts from the period hint at the licentiousness of local women in the dealings with pilgrims. See for example Richard Pococke's description of Jerusalemite women in *A description of the East, and some other countries, vol. II, part I*, London: W. Bowyer, 1743, pp.39-40.

⁴⁹ SCPF, SC, Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 12, 89-90.

⁵⁰ Hogget-Attestato 1 Dec., 1783, Maiarelli, ed., *L'Archivio*, no. 1058.

we gain information on the day-to-day roles they performed. Such was the case with Isa ibn Marzuq, a man from Bethlehem who tended the gardens of the Franciscan convent and each day ensured the fiercely contested boundary with the adjacent Greek Orthodox convent was maintained. In 1665 Isa was found dead under a collapsed wall in the lower northern garden of the convent. He had been trapped under the rubble, unable to be freed by local people who had run to help. A dragoman from Jerusalem named Ibrahim brought the case to the Jerusalem shari'a court which investigated the matter and found no wrongdoing on the part of the Franciscans.⁵¹ Two of Isa's nephews, Yusef ibn Ibrahim and Mansour ibn Za'nun, are recorded as attending the court hearing – a rare and sad moment in which the rank and file of the dragoman community is made briefly visible.

Encounter as economic transaction: the trade in Catholic souvenirs

Beyond the immediate confines of the Franciscan convent walls, encounters between European Catholics and local Christians took place on a primarily economic footing. This was most visibly manifested through the production and sale of religious souvenirs. The prevalence of the trade among local Christians is widely testified in European sources from the 17th and 18th centuries. In a typical and very early example from 1600, the French traveller Henry Castela described the staple items on offer to pilgrims as 'pistachio and olive wood crosses, crowns and rosaries'.⁵² By the mid-18th century the growth of the industry was sufficient for the Swedish scientist and travel writer Fredrik Hasselquist to remark: 'No pilgrim goes away without carrying with him a store of these wares, and therefore the making of these holy things is a constant and certain employ for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Bethlehem'.⁵³

There was nothing new about local Christians producing and selling souvenirs to pilgrims from Europe. In the 15th century, the Dominican theologian Felix Fabri described the experience of visiting the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as something akin to shopping in a bazaar.⁵⁴ Among the goods for sale, Fabri listed prayer beads, as well as precious

⁵¹ Sijill 166, p.329, 1076 H/1665 CE.

⁵² The quote is taken from one of the earliest such references, found in Henry Castela, *Le Sainct Voyage De Hierusalem et Mont Sinay faict en l'an du grand Iubilé 1600*, Paris: Laurens Sonnius, 1612, p.274. A similarly early reference is provided by Nicolas Bénard who visited the Holy Land in 1617. See *Le Voyage De Hierusalem et Autres Lieux De La Terre Saincte*, Paris, 1621, p.122.

⁵³ Fredrik Hasselquist, *Voyages and travels in the Levant in the years 1749, 50, 51, 52*, London: Royal Society, 1766, p.149.

⁵⁴ Felix Fabri cited in Barbara Drake Boehm and Melanie Holcomb, *Jerusalem, 1000–1400: Every people under heaven*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016, p.14.

stones and cloths. Two hundred years later many of the same items could still be purchased at the Holy Sepulchre, but the trade had now greatly expanded and was increasingly focused on a specifically Catholic market. Not surprisingly, the emergent community of local Catholics was best positioned to benefit from this upsurge in sales. To a Greek traveller such as L. S. Kosmopolites, who visited the area in 1753, the Catholicisation of the trade was all the more noticeable:

Christians [in Bethlehem] are divided into two persuasions, namely, Greek and Romish [Catholic]; the former cultivate the lands...the latter live upon their industry, in making beads, crosses of different sizes from olive trees, wood, and inlaid with mother of pearl...of which they sell great numbers to the convents, and to the pilgrims.⁵⁵

While rosaries and crosses were the most commonly purchased souvenirs, pilgrims were presented with a range of other options including precious stones, Holy Land soil, pressed flowers, replica models of churches and all kinds of relics. One type of souvenir that demonstrates the integral role of local women in the encounter with Catholic Europe were the pieces of chalky limestone lining the walls of the 'Milk Grotto' in Bethlehem. This was the network of caves where a drop of Mary's breast milk was said to have spilled as she fed the infant Jesus, giving the stone walls restorative powers for women with lactation or fertility problems. Corneille le Bruyn described in 1698 how local Christians had collaborated with the Franciscans to develop a more commercialised use of the stone aimed at Catholic markets: 'At Jerusalem they wash a great many Pieces of that Stone, and afterwards clap the Seal of the City [ie. the Franciscan 'Jerusalem Cross'] upon them, to send them over all Europe'.⁵⁶ Having purchased a piece, he later gifted it to a physician friend in Venice to treat a young woman. As Leigh Ann Craig describes in her discussion of the later Middle Ages, male pilgrims' purchase of these 'gynaecological souvenirs' served to strengthen European women's devotion to the Holy Land when the journey was considered too costly or dangerous for women to undertake themselves.⁵⁷ But it is also a reminder that local women in Jabal al-Quds were deeply engaged in the encounter with

⁵⁵ Kosmopolites, *A series of letters*, vol. 2, pp.190-1.

⁵⁶ Corneille le Bruyn, *A voyage to the Levant: or, travels in the principal parts of Asia Minor*, translated by W. J. London: Jacob Tonson, 1702, p.200.

⁵⁷ Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering women and holy matrons: women as pilgrims in the later Middle Ages*, Leiden: BRILL, 2009, p.239.

Catholic Europe, even when the surface of contact was more visibly male-to-male. The Milk Grotto has long been revered as a distinctly female shrine - a place where local women, both Christian and Muslim, have gathered in prayer and extracted powder from the cave walls to mix with water and make into small cakes, either for their own consumption or for sale to pilgrims.⁵⁸

The more adventurous pilgrim, meanwhile, could opt for a tattoo as souvenir. 17th and 18th century accounts abound with descriptions of the 'pricking' technique employed by Christians in Jerusalem and Bethlehem which left permanent images of Holy Land motifs on a pilgrim's arm. Long before European imperial expeditions discovered the Polynesian practice of *tatau*, visitors to Jabal al-Quds were encountering similar forms of body art practiced by the local population. Pilgrims remarked with amazement how 'this Colour continues always Fresh, as long as a Man Lives.'⁵⁹ The patterns were chosen from a range of pre-prepared wooden stencils of Holy Land iconography, most common of which was the 'Arms of Jerusalem' or 'Jerusalem Cross', usually featuring the initials IHS in reference to the first three Greek letters for Jesus. In local terms, the Jerusalem Cross and IHS Christogram were specifically Frankish symbols associated with the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem. While not all the pilgrims who received tattoos were Catholic, the practice clearly took place under Franciscan supervision with the expectation that only Catholic images should be imprinted on pilgrims' bodies. When the Scottish traveller William Lithgow managed in 1612 to persuade a local artist he named as 'Elias Areacheros' to give him a distinctly Protestant tattoo (featuring the crown of King James), the Franciscan guardian became 'greatly offended'.⁶⁰ Lithgow managed to placate the friar, but more violent Catholic recriminations would later follow when he was interrogated by the Spanish Inquisition in Malaga in 1620 and had the tattoo torn from his flesh.⁶¹

More broadly, Holy Land tattoos chimed with Catholic notions of bodily suffering as a route to spiritual purification, evoking the stigmata of Christ and echoing similar

⁵⁸ Kosmopolites describes the method of making the cakes in *A series of letters*, vol.2, pp.198-9.

⁵⁹ Le Bruyn, *A voyage to the Levant*, pp.201-2.

⁶⁰ William Lithgow, *Travels and voyages through Europe, Asia and Africa for nineteen years*, London: J. Meuros, 1770, p.269.

⁶¹ See Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *An intrepid Scot: William Lithgow of Lanark's travels in the Ottoman lands, North Africa and Central Europe, 1609-21*, London: Ashgate, 2006, p.89.

examples of pilgrims marking their bodies at Catholic shrines in Europe.⁶² Accounts of Catholic pilgrims who received tattoos in Jabal al-Quds frequently emphasise the physical pain that accompanied the process.⁶³ As Richard Coyle has noted, Catholic writers in the 17th century sought to ‘rescue the practice of pilgrimage from the derision of...Calvinist polemicists’, emphasising pilgrimage as a physically punishing experience rather than an object of Renaissance humanist curiosity.⁶⁴ In their efforts to serve the growing numbers of European Catholic pilgrims, local Christians recognised the appeal of tattoos as a means to connect with the physical suffering endured by Christ. For those skilled in the art, such potent symbolism could bring considerable financial reward. Lithgow, for example, states he paid Elias 2 piastres for his customised tattoo. This was a lot of money by local standards: in 1679 the annual rate of the jizya tax paid by non-Muslims *per person* was 4.5 piastres.⁶⁵

Such transactions can be viewed as intrinsic to pilgrimage itself. Since at least the medieval period, managers of Christian pilgrimage sites have sought to profit from pilgrims’ desire to bring home, or ‘consume’, physical mementos. From the marketing of relics at Glastonbury Abbey in the 12th century to the production of plastic Madonnas at Lourdes in the 20th, scholars have increasingly focused on the commodification of souvenirs as an integral part of pilgrimage rather than a corruption of its spiritual essence.⁶⁶ Likewise, there is nothing uniquely Christian about the process.⁶⁷ But in the case of Jabal al-Quds, the growth of Catholic souvenir production in the 17th and 18th centuries was tied to a specific process whereby local Christians were being repositioned, and repositioning themselves, in a relationship of servitude to European Catholics. As a

⁶² Examples include Santiago de Compostela and Loreto, as noted in Jane Caplan, ‘Introduction’, in Jane Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁶³ See for example Le Bruyn, *A voyage to the Levant*, pp.201-2. For a broader discussion of the Jerusalem tattoos and their symbolism as a ‘seal’ of the physicality of pilgrimage, see Robert Ousterhout, ‘Permanent ephemera: the “honourable stigmatisation” of Jerusalem pilgrims’, in Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt, eds., *Between Jerusalem and Europe: essays in honour of Bianca Kühnel*, Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 94-111.

⁶⁴ Richard Coyle, ‘Rescuing the Holy Land in friar Jean Boucher’s *Bouquet sacré composé des plus belles fleurs de la Terre sainte*’, in Judy A. Hayden and Nabil Matar, eds., *Through the eyes of the beholder: the Holy Land, 1517-1713*, Leiden: BRILL, 2012, pp.98-100.

⁶⁵ A dispute in the Jerusalem’s shari’a court in 1679 determined the rate of jizya per person in Bethlehem to be 4.5 kurush. See Sijill 181, p.100, 1090 H/1679 CE.

⁶⁶ For these two particular examples see Robin Croft, ‘The veneration of relics at Glastonbury Abbey in the Middle Ages’, in Diego Rinallo, Linda Scott and Pauline Maclaran, eds., *Consumption and Spirituality*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp.119-31; and Suzanne Kaufman, *Consuming visions: mass culture and the Lourdes shrine*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the Muslim context, see Moufahim, ‘Religious gift-giving’.

community of non-Muslims in a relatively poor province of the Ottoman Empire, Christians in Jabal al-Quds had limited access to economic and social mobility. The marked rise in European Catholic investment (human and material) in the region offered them new opportunities but it dictated they adopt a subordinate position vis-à-vis the European Catholic community. Accounts of these encounters emit a sense of dependency, and often desperation, on the part of local Christians. George Sandys described in 1610 the 'beggarly living' Christians made from the trade, while Nicolas Benard's account from 1621 viewed pilgrims' purchase of souvenirs as an act of charity or 'alms', without which the Christians of Bethlehem would not survive.⁶⁸

Those who achieved most success in the trade tended to hail from the community of Catholic converts, and in particular the dragoman families whose children were taught European styles of carving in the Franciscan schools. They also had the linguistic skills to converse and barter with pilgrims in a more intimate manner, further improving their prospects of commercial success. A classic example was provided by the visiting Italian writer Giovanni Mariti during his stay in Jerusalem: 'I had scarcely advanced a few steps in the city, when a man who seemed to be of the Latin communion, but native to Jerusalem, accosted me and politely asked if I was a Frenchman, which is what they call all Europeans here. Upon hearing that I was, he told me to follow him to the convent of St. Saviour.'⁶⁹ In the case of the tattooists, numerous travellers who received the 'Jerusalem mark' noted the artists worked as dragomans for the Franciscans. Corneille le Bruyn wrote in 1702, 'this is generally the Drogeman's Business, who likewise keep these Patterns by them', while William Lithgow's artist of 1612 was described as 'a purveyor for the friars'.⁷⁰

Murqus ibn Butrus and his brother Bulus typified these linkages between artisanship and servitude to the Franciscans. Murqus' letter of 1690 alludes to the family's employment as carvers and sellers of devotional objects when describing Bulus' attempt to sell 'crosses and crowns that those in Bethlehem are wont to making' to the French consul in Larnaca.⁷¹ This is confirmed in the Ottoman jizya tax survey of 1691

⁶⁸ George Sandys, *Sandys travels. Containing a history of the original and present state of the Turkish empire*, London: Philip Chetwin, 1670, p.141. Nicolas Benard, *Le voyage de Hierusalem et autres lieux de la Terre Sainte*, Paris, 1621, p.122.

⁶⁹ Giovanni Mariti, *Viaggi per l'isola di Cipro e per la Soria e Palestina, fatti da Giovanni Mariti fiorentino dall'anno 1760 al 1768, tomo 3*, Florence: Stamperia di S. A. R., 1770, p.44.

⁷⁰ Le Bruyn, *A voyage to the Levant*, p.202; Lithgow, *Travels and voyages*, p.269.

⁷¹ SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 158.

which lists Bulus as a 'rosary maker' who was tall in height with hazel eyes, wide eyebrows and a grey beard.⁷² He was 44 at the time, recently returned from his attempted journey to Rome.⁷³ Curiously, Bulus is listed as Orthodox (*rumi*) in the survey, as were all the Christians in Bethlehem. Equally curious is Murqus' absence from the survey altogether, just a year after he penned his letter to Rome. The notorious unreliability of the jizya surveys means no definitive answer to this riddle can be provided. But the absence in the survey of numerous individuals like Murqus who are listed in Franciscan records as Catholics suggests at least some of the Bethlehem dragomans were able to gain exemption from the jizya in the same way as dragomans in larger Ottoman cities.⁷⁴ This is corroborated from cases recorded in the late 17th century of the Franciscans paying the jizya on behalf of Catholic converts.⁷⁵

The anomalies in the jizya survey call into question Oded Peri's claim that the low head count for Bethlehem and Beit Jala in the 1691 survey signified a migration of Christians away from these semi-rural areas towards the city of Jerusalem.⁷⁶ On the contrary, the more precise record keeping of the Franciscans indicates a sizeable community of Catholic dragomans had taken shape in Bethlehem that evaded Ottoman tax records and was highly specialised in the trade in religious souvenirs. While it was usually men who dealt face to face with European Catholics, the lives of women within this growing Catholic community were also profoundly affected. When Kosmopolites described the gravitation of Catholic men in Bethlehem toward the souvenir business, he noted that 'their wives are employed in fetching wood, and providing victuals, tilling the field, looking for their cattel [sic], and carting their husband's work for Jerusalem, for sale'.⁷⁷ These were the exact same tasks he had previously described Orthodox men fulfilling in the town, suggesting a newly gendered division of labour was emerging among Catholic families as a result of their heightened interaction with Europeans. Little

⁷² Başbakanlık Arşivleri (Office of the Prime Minister Ottoman Archives, hereafter: BA), Istanbul, Maliyeden Müdevver Defter (hereafter: MM), no. 03643, p.39.

⁷³ BA, MM, no. 03643, p.39. In total there are 10 rosary makers out of the 144 tax paying males in Bethlehem.

⁷⁴ For lists of Catholics in Bethlehem registered by the Franciscans who do not appear in the jizya survey, see ASCTS, Sacramenti: Riconciliati e convertiti (3). See also the aforementioned letter of 1681 found in SCPF, Scritture Riferite, Terra Santa, Vol. 2, 383-4.

⁷⁵ See Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du proche-orient*, p.48.

⁷⁶ Oded Peri, 'The Christian population of Jerusalem in the late seventeenth century: Aspects of Demography, economy and society', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39, 4, 1996, pp.404-6.

⁷⁷ Kosmopolites, *A series of letters*, vol.2, pp.190-1.

wonder then that Franciscan reports emphasised the difficulties young Catholic men from Bethlehem faced when searching for suitable wives in Jerusalem: 'they have no need for women [from Jerusalem] who are always indoors, but rather for those who are out working in the fields.'⁷⁸

A relationship of tension and conflict

Local Christians in Jabal al-Quds constantly probed the boundaries of their role of servitude in the encounter with Catholic Europe. For every 'favourable impression' and 'polite accosting'⁷⁹, there was an accusation of theft, extortion or violent attack. A lurking sense of unease permeates all these encounters, particularly where trade was involved. As Diana Webb notes in her study of medieval Christian pilgrimage, the conversion of holy shrines into profitable businesses threw open the question of church ownership over such sites. What right did church clergy have to claim monopolies over the sale of devotional objects, especially when those objects were produced by lay artisans? The result, according to Webb, was 'a modest chapter in the history of conflict between ecclesiastical institutions and the urban societies that so frequently grew up around them and serviced them.'⁸⁰ Whether or not modest, this inherent tension drove much of the discord between the Franciscans resident in Jabal al-Quds and the local Christian population.

In more simple terms, relations between European Catholics and local Christians were structured by very visible disparities of wealth. The Franciscan convents in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ein Kerem were adorned with displays of material wealth that contrasted sharply with the poverty of ordinary life in Jabal al-Quds. Despite their founding principles of austerity and mendicancy, the Friars Minor had been among the earliest Christian orders to incorporate trade and finance into monastic life.⁸¹ By the time of their expansion in missionary activity in Jabal al-Quds in the 17th century, the Franciscans were operating within well-established traditions of commerce and economic sustainability. As well as enabling them to forge new export markets for Holy Land devotional objects, this embrace of finance and trade also allowed them to act as the

⁷⁸ Lemmens, *Acta parte I*, p.78.

⁷⁹ Mariti, *Viaggi tomo 3*, p.44.

⁸⁰ Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and pilgrimage in the medieval west*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, p.126.

⁸¹ See Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: relics, replicas, theme parks*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp.120-5.

recipients of a great outpouring of material objects from Europe. The Friars Minor developed a complex administration to manage the collection of alms and the donation of liturgical objects from European monarchs, dignitaries, convents and lay communities, all managed by their Commissioners of the Holy Land. As meticulous book keepers, the Franciscans assiduously recorded the arrival of paintings, icons, vestments, candlesticks, goblets, bowls, furniture, tapestries, lamps, vases, crucifixes, and a host of other items in the inventories of each parish. Donated as gifts by Catholic dignitaries from the Patriarch of Venice to the King of Spain, and often exchanged for Holy Land devotional objects moving in the opposite direction, these items were produced by some of Europe's finest artisans and carved from a range of precious metals and stones.⁸²

The traffic in these goods can be set against broader trends in the ornamentation of monastic interiors within early modern Europe.⁸³ Recent scholarship is teasing out the specific functions performed by frescoes, devotional objects and furnishings within the Counter-Reformation, such as signaling new forms of patronage or disciplining monastic communities in prayer rituals.⁸⁴ In the specific context of the Franciscan convents in Jabal al-Quds, Megan Armstrong has noted a process of 'imbedding Catholic chapels, rituals and ornamentation in the sanctifying authority of the Holy Land' as a means of reasserting Catholic legitimacy among European audiences.⁸⁵ But the symbolism of these lavishly adorned Catholic spaces was not only refracted westwards. To local Christians in Jabal al-Quds, the material riches contained within Franciscan convents would have represented a startling display of wealth and power, suggesting the potential benefits of associating with European Catholicism.

The Franciscan convents in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ein Karem were situated in the heart of the urban (or village) community and performed multiple functions. They acted as parish churches, artisanal workshops and pilgrim guesthouses, as well as containing the more traditional monastic cloisters. As a result they were spaces into

⁸² A particularly detailed inventory of the Holy Land convents from the 1630s includes donations from the Patriarch of Venice and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. See SCPF, *Scrittura Riferite, Terra Santa*, vol. 1, 112-15.

⁸³ A point made in Silvia Evangelisti, 'Monastic poverty and material culture in early modern Italian convents', *The Historical Journal* 47, 2004, pp.1-20.

⁸⁴ See for example Helen Hills, 'The housing of institutional architecture: searching for a domestic holy in post-Tridentine Italian convents', in Sandra Cavallo and Silvia Evangelisti, eds., *Domestic Institutional Interiors in Early Modern Europe*, London: Ashgate, 2009, pp.119-50.

⁸⁵ Megan C. Armstrong, 'Journeying to an Antique Christian Past: Holy Land Pilgrimage Narratives in the era of the Reformation', in Jane Grogan, ed., *Reading the Ancient Near East in Early Modern Europe* (forthcoming Oxford University Press). My thanks to Megan for sharing this with me.

which local Christians frequently ventured in their various roles as parish members, guides, caretakers and artisans. Whenever the sources recount their presence within the convent walls, a sense of dazzlement prevails. Accustomed to more rudimentary standards of living, they looked at the Franciscan riches with a mixture of awe and envy. For their part, the Franciscans soon learned to conceal their most valuable possessions from the desirous eyes of local Christians. An inventory from St Catherine's convent in Bethlehem written in 1773 mentions the 'silverware and equipment hidden next to the curate's office' which included 'silver crucifixes set on an ebony cross' and a 'crown with 12 silver stars'.⁸⁶ Meanwhile at St. Saviour's in Jerusalem numerous gold and silver ceremonial items were locked safely out of reach in the convent warehouse.⁸⁷

But just as security measures increased, so too did the tenacity of the local population. It is impossible to know the full story behind many of the reported incidents of theft occurring in the Franciscan convents. The sources are fleeting and invariably told from the perspective of those seeking to protect Franciscan resources - either the Franciscans themselves or a local Ottoman administration tasked with upholding Ottoman treaties with Catholic powers. Whatever the finer details, the overriding impression is one of the convents coming under increasingly frequent attack. In 1720 the Franciscans in Bethlehem reported local residents had twice tried to use ladders to break into the upper floors of the convent.⁸⁸ Later that year, the residents of both Ein Karem and Bethlehem were said to have surrounded the two convents and opened fire with rifles in an attempt to 'smoke out' the friars.⁸⁹ In a particularly extreme case from 1773, the friars in Bethlehem were forced to abandon their convent for a week and subsequently accused locals of sacking the building.⁹⁰ These were some of the more dramatic moments in a steady stream of accusations, culminating in an imperial Ottoman decree being issued by Selim III in 1790 (under pressure from the French ambassador in Istanbul) demanding the cessation of attacks on the Franciscans and 'the silverware they possess'.⁹¹

The process by which local Christians could move between roles of servant and

⁸⁶ ASCTS, Betlemme: S. Caterina, Carteggio tematico 10/6, Nota delli argenti e apparati nascosti in Betteleme vicino la Stampa dei curati (1773).

⁸⁷ SCPF, SC, Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 1, 112-15.

⁸⁸ Firman of 1 Dec., 1720, Maiarelli, ed., *L'Archivio*, firman no. 818.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 819.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Firman of 17 Oct., 1773, no. 1067.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Firman of 12 Aug., 1790, no. 1127.

saboteur was complex and dependent on individual circumstance. Nor were incidents of theft and sabotage confined to the Christian population. Local Muslims were often implicated alongside Christians and it was common for the more violent attacks to be attributed to 'Arabs' – a byword in European terms for nomadic Bedouin communities. Furthermore, when charges were pressed at the Ottoman shari'a court in Jerusalem, the Franciscans relied on their local dragomans to represent them as plaintiffs. But such cases could involve a thorny web of accusation and counter-accusation in which Catholic converts, and even the Franciscans' inner circle of dragomans, were just as likely to feature among the accused. One of the earliest such cases occurred in 1620 when two local spokespersons for the Franciscan convent in Bethlehem, Sam'an bin al-Shamas and Nu'ma walad Zariq, pressed charges against Jirjis walad Yaqub – himself a curate (or priest's assistant – *qasis*) in the Bethlehem convent. The two plaintiffs stated that ten days previously a number of items in the convent had been found missing, including a medium-sized silver tray, a silver cooking pot [*tanjarah*], silver chains with silver pendants, a red silk communion cup cover and a white cotton shirt. When they had subsequently caught Jirjis trying to sell some of these items he had turned the blame onto a certain Elias walad Isa, another local Christian who eventually admitted entering the convent and stealing the items. The accused were ordered by the judge to repay the value of the goods and give back those not yet sold.⁹² Given Elias' status as a local Bethlehemite Christian and Jirjis' membership of the emerging local Catholic clergy, we can surmise this was an attempted insider job. As many other cases testify, the Catholic material riches were increasingly at risk of theft by the very people who had converted to the 'true faith'.⁹³

The souvenir trade was booming in Jabal al-Quds, but more so for some than for others. In 1674 a Jesuit priest visiting the area, Michel Nau, gave precise details of the prices pilgrims paid for some of the most popular items: 'the crosses cost three or four scudi each, he wrote, while the models of the Holy Sepulchre vary from 15 to 20 scudi.'⁹⁴ With an exchange rate into local piastres (or kurush) of roughly 1 scudo to 1.5 piastres, this means a single cross could fetch the equivalent of the annual per capita rate of jizya

⁹² Sijill 104, p.257, 1030 H/1620 CE.

⁹³ A strikingly similar case is recorded in Sijill 167, p.110, 1075 H/1664 CE.

⁹⁴ Michel Nau, *Voyage de Terre-Sainte*, p.397.

tax levied on non-Muslims (4.5 piastres in 1679).⁹⁵ But Nau was citing the prices Franciscans charged pilgrims for such objects, not what the Franciscans paid local producers.⁹⁶ Nor were the producers able to gain access to the even more profitable export routes the Franciscans had established to Catholic Europe. According to Hasselquist writing in the 1750s, there were 15,000 piastres-worth of devotional objects in the Jerusalem warehouse awaiting export to Europe.⁹⁷ In the same period, Giovanni Mariti provided details of some of the specific chains of supply: 'The European merchants of Acre are the ones who purchase the majority of those works which are packed into boxes and transported to Venice from where they are sent to Germany'.⁹⁸ By the seventeenth century, the trade in devotional objects had become an essential revenue stream for Franciscan operations in the Holy Land, which were entirely dependent upon external revenues to survive. Propaganda Fide correspondence indicates a complex distribution network in which Franciscan convents all over the Italian peninsula acted as sorting houses for these goods, with the convent of San Bonaventura in Rome serving as an important regional depot.⁹⁹

The mobility of these devotional objects and the European actors who distributed them contrasted strongly with the stasis of the people who made them. This is not to claim Ottoman artisans lived in complete fixity; recent scholarship is emphasising the circulation of artisans and their goods around and beyond the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period, as well as the impact of these circulations on intellectual and religious culture.¹⁰⁰ But in the specific context of Catholic mobility in the Mediterranean,

⁹⁵ For the annual jizya rate see Sijill 181, p.100. The conversion rate to the scudo is based on the assumption that a scudo was equivalent in value to a Venetian ducat whose conversion rate of 1.5 Ottoman kurush is cited in Dror Ze'evi, *An Ottoman century: the district of Jerusalem in the 1600s*, Albany N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996, p.144.

⁹⁶ Most local artisans sold the devotional objects they made via the Franciscans who undoubtedly marked up the prices.

⁹⁷ Hasselquist, *Voyages*, p.217.

⁹⁸ Mariti, *Viaggi*, tomo 4, p.29.

⁹⁹ The San Bonaventura church in Rome appears a number of times in Propaganda Fide documents describing the circulation of such objects (usually referred to as 'santuarii'). See for example SCPF, SC, Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 5, 313-364. A letter from 1688 indicates that the Franciscan Convento della Pace in Genoa also served such a purpose. See *ibid.*, vol 3, 142. Mariti's emphasis on routes to Germany via Venice, meanwhile, are also supported in Propaganda Fide correspondence. In one example from 1695 a German priest carrying 'santuarii' from the Holy Land is reported to have been robbed in Cyprus en route to Venice. See *ibid.*, vol 3, 256-8.

¹⁰⁰ For examples see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Travel and artisans in the Ottoman Empire: employment and mobility in the early modern era*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2014; and Nir Shafir, 'The road from Damascus: circulation and the redefinition of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, 1620-1720', PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2016.

the *immobility* of local merchants and artisans from Jabal al-Quds remains striking. As we have seen, when aspiring local traders such as Murqus ibn Butrus and his brother Bulus attempted to travel to Europe to sell the devotional objects they produced, they were quickly halted. Unable to obtain travel permits from a local Ottoman administration with a vested interest in keeping its subjects in situ as sources of tax revenue, local Catholics turned instead to the Franciscans to facilitate their journeys.¹⁰¹ But they quickly discovered the Franciscan appellation of ‘dragoman’ did not carry the same privilege of European consular protection afforded by the official Ottoman definition of the term. As Murqus’ letter makes clear, the Franciscan leadership in fact actively intervened against his family’s efforts to obtain travel documents from the French consul in Jerusalem. ‘I want to believe we would find some of them [the Franciscans] in our favour,’ he wrote, ‘if the superiors didn’t persuade their subjects to prevent our journey to Christendom and if they didn’t employ the secular arm of the consuls of the country to prevent our journey.’¹⁰²

If Murqus’ assessment is correct, the Franciscan leadership in Jerusalem was engaged in a concerted effort to exclude local Christians from the flows of people and religious goods between Catholic Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Murqus’ frustration is palpable as he professes himself ‘dumbfounded and mortified’ in a letter otherwise marked by its gushing praise for Catholic benevolence. The letter concludes by mentioning other family members who have attempted similar journeys and encountered equally virulent opposition from the Franciscans. The only explicit explanation the Franciscans provide for their opposition, he writes, is that ‘it is not necessary while we know the Italian language’.¹⁰³ In other words he and his brother were deemed to have reached their highest possible station within the Catholic family: that of local interpreters and artisans who could serve incoming Europeans, but never themselves move in the opposite direction.

While Murqus’ sense of injustice is understandable, he had nevertheless progressed beyond the expectations of most local Christians in Jabal al-Quds. His family had been one of the first to embrace Catholicism, allowing them an elevated status within the dragoman community in Bethlehem. Their understanding of Catholic doctrine, their

¹⁰¹ Murqus’ letter makes reference to the Ottoman administration’s reluctance to grant travel permits. For a wider discussion on the difficulties of obtaining such permits see Faroqhi, *Travel and artisans*, p.208.

¹⁰² SCPF, SC Terra Santa e Cipro, vol. 3, 158.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

fluent Italian, and their specialism in Catholic styles of artisanship allowed them to contemplate a journey that would have been unthinkable in both economic and cultural terms for most local Christians. A more common concern for this community was receiving payment for the devotional objects they crafted. Reports of the warehouse at St. Saviour's convent in Jerusalem stacked high with such goods suggest the Franciscans erred on the side of over-production to ensure maximum levels of overseas demand could be met. This led to frequent episodes of friction with local producers when sales abroad were temporarily saturated. European chroniclers tended to depict local artisans during such times as aggressively exploiting the benevolence of the Franciscan friars. As Frederik Hasselquist wrote about Bethlehem:

None suffer more from these wicked Bethlehemites than the Monks, their neighbours...they surprise the Monks, either to obtain provisions, which like most other robbers they want continually, or attack and force them to buy a quantity of Paternosters, models of the grave of Christ, crosses, and other ware of this kind.¹⁰⁴

It seems to have eluded Hasselquist that the Franciscans were largely responsible for the local population's reliance on this trade for their livelihood. From the perspective of local artisans, the Franciscans had cultivated a sense of expectation that a steady stream of Catholic buyers was available. Some of them had taken out loans or bought property based on an assumed income from the souvenir trade – commitments they could no longer maintain when the Franciscans cut off the supply chain.¹⁰⁵ Others complained of the harsh physical conditions they endured to maintain the flow of goods during times of high demand. One local Christian named Elias, for example, brought a legal case to the shari'a court against the Franciscans in 1743 after his pregnant wife had miscarried while carrying boxes of souvenirs from Bethlehem to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁶ Elias lost the case, but the accusation is indicative of a mutual suspicion that could easily spill over into open hostility.

One of the most tragic incidents occurred in the 1760s at a time when the Franciscans had ceased buying devotional objects from local producers. When a local artisan presented himself at St. Saviour's convent in Jerusalem demanding payment for

¹⁰⁴ Hasselquist, *Voyages*, pp.148-9.

¹⁰⁵ See for example Hogget-Attestato 27 Oct., 1733, Maiarelli, ed., *L'Archivio*, no. 895.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Hogget-Attestato 7 Jan., 1743, no. 934.

his stock of crosses and rosaries, he was told the storehouse was already full of unsold goods, hence no more items could be purchased. According to Franciscan reports, as well as an account provided by the visiting Italian writer Giovanni Mariti, the man responded by throwing his own son into a well where he promptly drowned. Mariti describes how he then blamed the incident on the Franciscans: 'After this dreadful deed, the father began to scream and despair, spreading the rumour that it had been the friars who had drowned his son.'¹⁰⁷ In the resulting legal case, the Ottoman governor ordered the Franciscans to pay 3,000 zecchini (Venetian gold coins), although Mariti reports the decision was later overturned.¹⁰⁸ With only the highly partisan accounts of Mariti and the Franciscans to go by, it is difficult to know exactly what happened at St. Saviour's that day, but we can be sure it was not the product of a harmonious patron-client relationship.

Conclusion

The case of the drowned boy reminds us of the brittleness that characterised relations between European Catholics and local Christians in Jabal al-Quds. These were the very people the Franciscans had been charged with 'rescuing' from a 'schismatic' Orthodox Church. But from the perspective of local Christians, Catholic salvation came to signify a route to economic betterment rather than a theological transformation. Most Europeans who travelled to Jabal al-Quds in the 17th and 18th centuries encountered local Christians within structures of economic exchange which the Franciscans themselves had established. Staying in Franciscan guesthouses, they came across dragoman communities serving the convents, and they bartered with the wider population on the streets of Bethlehem and Jerusalem for souvenirs and guided tours. Such visitors frequently expressed their distaste at the local population's readiness to exploit holy shrines for profit'¹⁰⁹ But this was a situation of the Franciscans' own making. In their drive to affirm Catholic ownership over the Holy Land they had imported a lavish array of material riches from Catholic Europe, dazzling the local population in the process. Their approach to conversion was equally based on material premises, signified by their willingness to pay local Christians to convert and remain Catholic. Most noticeably, they had cultivated an industry in devotional objects that locked many of their converts into an inherently

¹⁰⁷ Mariti, *Viaggi tomo 4*, pp.31-3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Pococke, *A description of the East*, p.40.

economic, yet unequal relationship with Catholicism. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that local Christians approached their relations with Catholic Europe on economic terms. They kept their own religiosity at arm's length from the Franciscan friars and visiting pilgrims, rarely conforming to a strictly Roman interpretation of liturgy.¹¹⁰

By searching across the copious writings of European Catholics and matching them against fragments of textual and material sources left behind by local Christians, we can begin to tease out the historical agency of these elusive characters. It is clear they played an important role in redefining an image of the Holy Land in European Catholic minds that would have important consequences for the wider Counter-Reformation. Whether as dragomans facilitating pilgrimages that would later be written up and read in France or Italy, as tattooists imprinting the arms of Catholic pilgrims to be displayed upon their return, or as artisans producing thousands of small crosses, rosaries and replica church models for use all over Europe, their contribution to global Catholic culture was palpable, as long as we look hard enough.¹¹¹ In the recent historiographical shift, particularly pronounced in early modern history, towards writing 'the global lives of things'¹¹², it can be easy to lose sight of the people who produced the commodities that reshaped global cultures. If, as several scholars of the Counter-Reformation have insisted, the spread of devotional objects served as a vital tool 'to establish and reproduce new Catholic societies outside Europe',¹¹³ we must also consider the people who made those objects to have exerted an important influence on the global Counter-Reformation.

But equally important is an appreciation of local Christians' own experience of these encounters, and the extent to which they diverge from the type of cross-cultural exchange most commonly found in the current historiography on early modern

¹¹⁰ As discussed in James Grehan, *Twilight of the saints: everyday religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹¹¹ To take the example of replica church models carved by artisans in Jabal al-Quds, Michele Piccirillo has provided a detailed inventory of their circulation around museums and stately homes all over Europe. See Michele Piccirillo, *La nuova Gerusalemme: artigianato Palestinese al servizio dei luoghi santi*, Bergamo: Edizioni Custodia di Terra Santa, 2007.

La nuova Gerusalemme: artigianato Palestinese al servizio dei luoghi santi, Bergamo: Edizioni Custodia di Terra Santa, 2007, p.36.

¹¹² Summarised in Anne Gerritsen, 'From long-distance trade to the global lives of things: writing the history of early modern trade and material culture', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20, 6, 2016, pp.526-44.

¹¹³ See Silvia Evangelisti, 'Material culture', in Alexandra Bamji, Geert H Janssen and Mary Laven, eds., *The Ashgate research companion to the Counter-Reformation*, London: Ashgate, 2013, p.404.

encounters. Christians in Jabal al-Quds were inextricably bound up in the Catholic networks of trade and piety that spanned the early modern Mediterranean. But they were simultaneously immobilised within these networks, fixed in a role of servitude from which they constantly struggled to wriggle free. By the 19th century this Catholic community was forging its own mobility, creating new global migratory networks that would play an important role in the advent of mass migration away from the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁴ The links between these later circulations and the encounters with Catholicism in the 17th and 18th centuries are salient, not least because the migrations of the 19th century were facilitated by the export of Holy Land devotional objects to predominantly Catholic countries in Latin America. But we should not lose sight of the differences between the two epochs; the one characterised by mass migration in the age of modern steam travel, the other by a more exclusive form of mobility that largely kept the Christians of Jabal al-Quds in a state of fixity.

Jeremy Adelman has recently urged global historians to ‘dispense with the idea that global integration was like an electric circuit, bringing light to the connected.’¹¹⁵ If we are to take this seriously we need to make difficult methodological choices that require us to search out historical actors who exist only in the shadows of the more illustrious travellers that traversed transnational and trans-regional spaces. In his exhaustive study of the replica models of religious shrines produced by artisans from Jabal al-Quds in the early modern era, Michele Piccirillo found only one named reference to a local artisan: a brief note of attribution written by the Franciscans in 1638 to ‘Giorgio nostro turcimanno’ (our dragoman Jiryes).¹¹⁶ Who was ‘Giorgio’ and what did it mean to be a dragoman for the Franciscans in 17th century Jerusalem or Bethlehem? Digging deeper into these stories is inherently frustrating, allowing only fleeting glimpses of the local perspective. But it can at least give us a sense of the highly uneven ways that global integration was experienced in this corner of the Ottoman Empire.

¹¹⁴ Norris, ‘Exporting the Holy Land’.

¹¹⁵ Adelman, ‘What is global history now?’.

¹¹⁶ Piccirillo, *La nuova Gerusalemme*, p.36.