CHAPTER FIFTEEN

VICTORY BY DESIRE: CRUSADE AND MARTYRDOM IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Christopher MacEvitt

Beginning in 1219 and continuing into the early modern era, bands of Franciscans periodically left the cities and convents of Europe to cross over seas and mountains to Islamic lands. There they preached the salvific gospel of Jesus Christ in front of kings and *qadis*, and more significantly, condemned the Prophet Muhammad as a demoniac and liar, who led his followers to eternal suffering in hell. The narrators of such stories imagined that the result was as the friars had truly desired—not the conversion of their audience, but their own execution in accordance with Islamic law, which forbids insulting the Prophet or the faith. For a century, friars declaimed and died, and while their stories circulated in some form among Franciscans, nobody honored them with formal *passiones*. In the early fourteenth century, however, Franciscans suddenly found stories of martyrdom by Muslims compelling, and worthy of commemoration.

Why? There is of course not just one answer, but the accounts were a response to at least two crises of the early fourteenth century, one inside the Order, and the other outside. Most immediately, the *passiones* must be read in the context of the controversy over poverty among Conventual Franciscans, rigorist Spirituals, and a heavy-handed pope (John XXII), which led to Spirituals being burned at the stake for heresy, and the Conventual leadership of the Order fleeing Avignon in fear of meeting the same fate. For many friars, the stories were a demonstration of Franciscan spirituality that replaced poverty with martyrdom as the highest expression of *imitatio Christi* (*et Francisci*),[1] and provided the Order with a common set of heroes that both Spirituals and Conventuals could admire. Islam, in this context, became a synecdoche for the world itself and its temptations. But the *passiones* were also understood in the context of

[1] For Francis as a model of sanctity, in this case for Louis IX of France, see M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, *The Making of St. Louis: Kingship, Sanctity, and Crusade in Late Medieval France* (Ithaca, 2008), p. 159.

another crisis, this one ongoing and slow-burning: the failure of western Christendom in its struggle to overcome Islam militarily and spiritually. The Franciscan accounts gave western Christians a new set of stories in which conflict between Christians and Muslims could be played out, perhaps to a more satisfactory conclusion than contemporary efforts through crusade or mission.

The accounts were distinctive in two ways. They represent the first martyrological corpus written in the Latin West that prominently features Muslims as persecutors,[2] and they put aside some of the distinctive characteristics that had marked Latin martyr narratives since the third century. Martyr narratives have embraced many different ideologies, but one of the most important was the conviction that at the same time as the martyrs transcend the world through death, they (with God's help) transform it through miracle and conversion.[3] The martyrs participated in some way in the same victory over the devil and his earthly power as Jesus's death had.[4] In contrast, the Franciscan martyrologies rejected the hope for earthly transformation, and rendered Muslim participants as unworthy to view the glories of the martyrs or receive the benefit of their sacrifice.

Crusade and Mission … and Martyrdom

Christians had evoked martyrdom in conflict with Islam since the seventh century (as had Muslims in their conflicts with Christians). Eastern Christian stories of martyrdom helped to distinguish Christian from Muslim and discourage conversion to Islam; the example of the martyrs of Cordoba in the mid-ninth century is perhaps the best-known example.[5]

[2] There are of course a large number of such martyrdoms from other Christian communities, preserved in Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, and other languages. The *passiones* of the Cordoba martyrs, while in Latin, were written within Islamic Spain. See note 4 for further bibliography. Others do exist, such as the "Martyrdom of Pelagius," but as isolated examples, not as a defined group of accounts. See Celso Rodríguez Fernández, ed., *La Pasión de S. Pelayo: Edicíon crítica, con traducción y comentarios* (Santiago de Compostela, 1991); translated as Raguel, "The Martyrdom of St. Pelagius," trans. Jeffrey A. Bowman, in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (London, 2001), pp. 227–35.

[3] Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (London, 2006).

[4] Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford, 2010).

[5] Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge, 1988); Jessica A. Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba: Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion*

0001829939.INDD 224 12/4/2012 8:41:40 PM

In the apocalyptic context of the First Crusade, those who died on crusade were believed by participants to have been crowned as martyrs, whether or not they died in battle. While Alfonso VIII of Castile was delighted at his crusading victory over the Almohads at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, he mourned that "so few in such a vast army went to Christ as martyrs."[6]

The rhetoric of mission also became important to explanations of crusading; only once Muslim princes were defeated would their subjects freely be able to convert. A number of different sources fed this expectation. Mendicants were called to convert the world to sincere faith in Christ both within Christendom as well as to infidels, and joined in preaching campaigns to encourage participation in crusades. The Franciscan rule even included a chapter on missions to Muslims,[7] although, as Robin Vose has argued, the mendicants invested little direct effort in such missions.[8] Interest in converting Muslims also gained strength from a general sense of Christian confidence in the thirteenth century. Many believed that Christian doctrine and philosophy had matured to the point that it could sway Muslim intellectuals and populations to convert. Furthermore, the divine plan for the world mandated that before the return of Jesus, the pagans and Jews of the world would convert—and for many, it seemed the world was in its eleventh hour.[9]

Another source that suggested the approaching mass conversion of Muslims was the writings of Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), a Calabrian abbot and Biblical exegete, whose interpretation of providential history suggested that Jews, pagans, and Muslims would soon convert as the world entered a new "era of the Spirit." In the crisis marking that transition, Christendom would come under attack. Victory would come, not through force of arms, but through successful preaching led by new "spiritual men,"

(Lincoln, 1995). The parallels between the Franciscans and the Cordobans have been noted by Allan Cutler, "The Ninth-Century Spanish Martyrs' Movement and the Origins of Western Christian missions to the Muslims," *Muslim World* 55 (1969): 321–39.

[6] Julio González, *El Reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, vol. 3 (Madrid, 1960), p. 897.

[7] Carlo Paolazzi, "La Regula non bullata dei frati Minori (1221), dallo 'stemma codicum' al testo critico," *AFH* 100 (2007): 136–8.

[8] Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge, 2009).

[9] Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches towards the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984); Jessalynn Bird, "Crusade and Conversion after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): Oliver of Paderborn's and James of Vitry's Missions to Muslims Reconsidered," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2004): 23–48.

0001829939.INDD 225 12/4/2012 8:41:40 PM

leaders of a revitalized Church. The subsequent emergence of the two mendicant orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who were sometimes identified as the *viri spirituales* of Joachite prophecy, further raised hopes that a new Christian age was about to begin.[10] Thirteenth-century Latin Christendom directed enormous resources towards crusades against Muslims, which were increasingly justified by linking them to conversion. Louis IX's crusade to Egypt in 1248 inspired one poet to proclaim that the king "will be able to conquer Romania easily, baptize the sultan of Turkey, and thereby free the world."[11] Ramon de Penyafort, the Dominican master-general (1238–40), wrote to his successor, Johannes von Wildeshausen (1241–1252) concerning the conversion of Muslims that "at the time of the present writing the gate is now open to nearly inestimable fruits, provided the harvesters do not abandon their task; and even now many of them, especially in Murica, have been converted to the faith both secretly and openly."[12] William of Tripoli, a Dominican preacher in the Latin East writing a treatise on Islam around 1271, envisioned that after an Islamic victory over the Franks, the Muslims themselves would in turn be wiped out by the Christians. This victory would mark the end of the "age of the Saracens," a third of all Muslims would become Christian, and the remainder would die in the battle itself or soon after in the desert.[13]

The trifecta of crusade, martyrdom, and mission reached its apogee in the mid-thirteenth century, as Louis IX of France launched his crusades, and the preaching orders proclaimed the importance of preaching to the infidels.[14] Geoffrey of Beaulieu, Louis IX's confessor, recorded in his life of the saint that Louis had told envoys from the sultan of Tunis: "I long so earnestly for the salvation of his soul that I would choose to spend all my life in a Saracen dungeon, and there never again see the clear light of the sun, provided your king and his people became Christian in good faith!"[15]

---

[10] Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York, 1977), pp. 29–58; for the conversion of Jews specifically, see Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham* (Philadelphia, 2001). See also Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 154–5; E. Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission* (Lexington, 1975; repr. New York, 1992), pp. 14–22.

[11] Joseph Bédier and Pierre Aubry, *Les Chansons de croisade et leur mélodies* (1909; repr., Geneva, 1974), p. 253; translation in Kedar, *Crusade and Mission,* p. 161.

[12] Quoted in Vose*, Dominicans,* p. 138.

[13] Wilhelm von Tripolis, *Notitia de Machometo,* ed. Peter Engels (Würzburg, 1992), p. 260.

[14] William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade* (Princeton, 1979).

[15] Geoffrey de Beaulieu, "Vita Ludovici Noni," in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France,* ed. Pierre Daunou and Joseph Naudet, vol. 20 (Paris, 1840), p. 22; translation in *Before Saint Louis: The Lives of Louis IX by Geoffrey of Beaulieu and William of Chartres*, trans. Larry F. Field, ed. M. Cecilia Gaposchkin and Sean L. Field (Ithaca, forthcoming).

0001829939.INDD 226 12/4/2012 8:41:40 PM

Matthew Paris recorded a similar conversation between Louis and the sultan of Egypt during the king's captivity in 1250, in which Louis made clear that the ultimate goal of the crusade was the conversion of the sultan, not the conquest of Egypt.[16] While the papacy considered Louis's death at Tunis from dysentery that of a confessor's, Jean de Joinville considered him a martyr because Louis so faithfully followed in the footsteps of Christ himself.[17] Geoffrey presented the king as willing to suffer for the Muslims he sought to convert, and the Franciscan liturgical office for Louis IX, *Francorum rex,* similarly praised the king as a "martyr by desire."[18] Like the ideology of crusading itself, martyrdom, mission, and holy warfare were thoroughly entangled in the perception of Louis's sanctity.[19]

Confrontation and Failure

Louis's crusade to Tunis in 1270 was one of the last military expressions of the belief in the rapid conversion of the Muslims; by the later thirteenth century the "dream of conversion," as Robert I. Burns so memorably called it, was beginning to fade.[20] While Humbert of Romans, the master-general of the Dominican Order (1254–63), unusually placed conversion of Muslims at the forefront of his order's mission when he first began his generalate,[21] by the time he wrote his *Opus tripartitum* for the Council of Lyons (1274), he was far more pessimistic about the possibility of conversion. When advising the council on future crusades and missions, he noted

[16] Nevertheless, it is clear in reality that Louis' crusade was not about conversion, but conquest. Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora,* ed. Henry Richards Luard, vol. 5 (London, 1880), pp. 309–10; Kedar, *Crusade and Mission,* p. 165.

[17] Caroline Smith, *Crusading in the Age of Joinville* (Burlington, VT, 2006), pp. 98–108, 139–49.

[18] Gaposchkin, *St. Louis,* p. 173.

[19] Michael Lower has shown the ways in which Louis IX's last crusade to Tunis was motivated by the king's desire to convert the sultan of the city, Muhammad al-Mustanṣir. See Michael Lower, "Conversion and St. Louis's Last Crusade," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007): 211–31. Robin Vose agrees with Lower's argument that conversion was the primary motivation for the crusade, though he suggests that Lower falls prey to the "maximalist" interpretation that sees Dominicans as extensively engaged in missionary activities. Vose, *Dominicans,* p. 231, n. 31. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission,* pp. 167–8, also sees conversion as an important part of the motivation for the diversion to Tunis.

[20] Robert I. Burns, S.J., "Christian-Islamic Confrontation in the West: The Thirteenth-Century Dream of Conversion," *AHR* 76 (1971): 1386–434.

[21] Vose, *Dominicans,* p. 44.

that Muslims did not seem at all interested in converting to Christianity; rather, conversion generally went in the other direction.[22]

The Mamluk conquest of Acre in 1291 was yet another sign for many that the Muslims could not be overcome through spiritual or military means. Ricoldo da Montecroce, a Dominican living in Mongol-ruled Baghdad, wrote angry letters to God after Acre's destruction, bitterly noting that neither Saint Francis or Saint Dominic, nor Louis IX of France and all the crusading warriors had been unable to destroy "the beast," as he called Islam.[23] Likewise, Thadeus of Naples, writing just months after the city's fall, mourned that Palestine under Islamic rule had become a cruel stepmother to her Christian offspring.[24] Crusading and missionizing, nevertheless, continued to have appeal, and expeditions of both sorts were often planned and sometimes even carried out. Preachers, rulers, theologians, and popes continued to believe that a crusade, led by righteous men and fought with pious intention, would defeat Muslim armies, and that Christian preachers, filled with the Holy Spirit, could convert the Muslim masses, if given the chance. But for many, Islam remained a conundrum, both religiously and politically. Martyrdom remained the only element of the trifecta that still fulfilled the promise of victory: crusade and mission were tarnished by a century of failure, but martyrdom, in some sense, was a story in which the hero cannot fail.

Franciscans and Martyrdom

Franciscan interest in martyrdom began with Francis himself. His first hagiographer, Thomas of Celano devoted an entire chapter to the saint's "desire to undergo martyrdom," which culminated in Francis's famous confrontation with the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. While Francis was eventually allowed to preach before the sultan, God did not fulfill his desire for martyrdom, but was "reserving for him the prerogative of a unique grace"—the stigmata.[25] The dramatic tableau of the saint before

[22] Humbert of Romans, "Opusculum tripartitum," in *Fasciculum rerum expetendarum et fugiendarum*, vol. 2 (London, 1690), p. 188.

[23] Ricoldo da Monte Croce, "Epistolae V commentatorie de perditione Acconis 1291," in *Archives de L'Orient latin*, ed. R. Röhricht (Paris, 1884), pp. 258–96.

[24] Magister Thadeus, "Ystoria de desolatione et conculcatione civitatis Acconensis et tocius terre sancte," ed. R.B.C. Huygens, CCCM 202 (Turnhout, 2004), p. 157.

[25] Thomas de Celano, "Vita Prima Sancti Francisci," *Analecta Franciscana* 10 (Claras Aquas, 1928), p. 44; translation from Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," in *Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents,* ed. Regis Armstrong, et al., vol. 1 (New York, 1999), p. 231.

the sultan became a crucial venue where generations of Franciscans could reconsider the relationship between mission, martyrdom, and sanctity.[26]

The Desire for Martyrdom

Franciscan literature during the remainder of the thirteenth century emphasized the desire for martyrdom over its achievement. Bonaventure, the minister-general of the Order (1257–74), presented the desire for martyrdom as part of a mystical ascent to God. The desire to die was not the rejection of the world, but a willingness to die for it, combining a love of God and a love of humanity. Nor was it necessarily about death; the desire for martyrdom was also the desire to be free of sin and full of grace. For Bonaventure, a missionary's willingness to die could only be meaningful within a mystical process, which led not to death but to mystical ascent.[27]

The desire for martyrdom became powerful as a symbol of Franciscan identity and values in two ways: it signaled desire for union with God, and humility before the slings and arrows of a carnal and lucre-obsessed world. More specifically, it seemed to be the most complete way in which a Christian could follow Christ; martyrdom was the closest kin to crucifixion. Francis himself exemplified both aspects of martyrdom—he desired martyrdom, yet lived and received the stigmata. For many Franciscans, then, the ultimate call of the Christian to conform himself to Christ was not achievable through the literal self-sacrifice of martyrdom, but through mystical ascent and union with the crucified Christ. Death became irrelevant to thirteenth-century Franciscan notions of martyrdom, replaced by desire. Franciscan saints of the thirteenth century all desired martyrdom, but none actually died for the faith.

The Franciscans who *did* die as martyrs in the thirteenth century were ignored. No thirteenth-century narratives describing the deaths of martyrs survive; all that remains are scattered references to those who died. The first were the five friars who died in Morocco in 1220; according to the hagiographer of Anthony of Padua (1232), the story of the martyrs inspired the saint to become a Franciscan.[28] Clare of Assisi desired to go to Morocco

---

[26] See in particular, John V. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford, 2009).

[27] E. Randolph Daniel, "The Desire for Martyrdom: A *Leitmotiv* of St. Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* 32 (1972): 74–87.

[28] Léon de Kerval, ed., *Sancti Antonii de Padua: Vitae duae quarum altera hucusque inedita* (Paris, 1904), pp. 29–30. Anthony himself desired to travel to Saracen lands and to be

0001829939.INDD 229 12/4/2012 8:41:41 PM

too, inspired by the stories she had heard of the martyrs.[29] No thirteenth-century account, however, gave the circumstances of the martyrs' deaths, or even their names.

Martyrdom in the Early Fourteenth Century

Franciscan attitudes towards martyrdom and death shifted dramatically in the early fourteenth century. The first full description of any Franciscan martyrdom is preserved in the British Library manuscript Cotton Nero A IX, probably written in the 1320s, and preserved in the Franciscan convent of Hereford. This anonymous account presented a new form of martyrdom for western Christians, arising from the urgent need to reformulate fundamental Franciscan values. The martyrs' literal embrace of death fit poorly with the thirteenth-century desire to combine a love of the world with a love for God. But for fourteenth-century Franciscans, these passions no longer overlapped. 'Achieved' martyrdom suddenly appealed because it offered a rejection of the world, rather than an overwhelming love for it. In part, this pessimism towards the world expressed despair about the ability to live an authentic life of Franciscan poverty in the world.[30]

Beginning in the 1270s, Franciscans argued over the place and meaning of poverty in the Order. Pope John XXII (1316–34) intervened decisively with two bulls, *Ad conditorem canonem* (1322) and *Cum inter nonnullos* (1323), which denounced the belief in the utter poverty of Jesus and his apostles as heresy, and forced the Franciscans to take possession of the goods that they used. Those who believed that possessions were irreconcilable with their Franciscan vows and with the Gospel were persecuted even before the bulls were issued; four friars were burned at the stake in 1318 for refusing to obey their superiors concerning the practice of poverty.

---

martyred, but as with Francis, God had other plans. For more on the Moroccan martyrs, see Isabelle Heullant-Donat, "La perception des premiers martyrs franciscains à l'intéreur de l'Ordre au XIIIe siècle," in *Religion et mentalités au moyen âge: mélanges en l'honneur d'Hervé Martin,* ed. Sophie Cassagnes-Broquet, et al. (Rennes, 2003), pp. 211–20; James Ryan, "Missionary Saints of the High Middle Ages: Martyrdom, Popular Veneration, and Canonization," *Catholic Historical Review* 90 (2004): 1–28.

[29] P. Zeffirino Lazzeri, "Il processo di canonizzazione di S. Chiara d'Assisi," *AFH* 13 (1920), p. 465.

[30] For the ways in which martyrdom could be deployed as part of a fraternal "lachrymose history," see G. Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism: Polemic, Violence, Deviance, and Remembrance* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 103–29.

0001829939.INDD 230 12/4/2012 8:41:41 PM

Evangelical poverty had once allowed Franciscans to follow a path of utter humility that reconciled love of God and love of the world. Poor no longer in fact or belief, Franciscans needed another way to understand themselves as following in Christ's footsteps. Martyrdom was one answer. The martyr, however, was no longer oriented towards the transformation of the world, as the early martyrs had been. Instead of rejecting the material temptations of the world through voluntary poverty, the friar as martyr rejected the world itself. Depending on the reader, the world was either Saracen or a corrupt conventual world. In either case, it was a lost cause.

The first *passio* in the Nero manuscript was entitled "The Martyrdom of the Five Lesser Brothers in Morocco, who were in the *vita* of the blessed Antony," suggesting that to the copyist in England at least, the martyrs were best known through their connection with Saint Anthony of Padua; he did not presume widespread knowledge of the martyrs on their own merits. The goal of the friars was both conversion and martyrdom. They were at the outset "inflamed by the fire of loving-kindness; so that they soon panted for martyrdom with all their hearts."[31] Reviled after preaching in the mosque of Seville, they were brought before the king, whom they told: "we come to announce to you the faith of our lord Jesus Christ, so that you might believe in the Lord God, forsaking the mostvile slave of the devil, Machomet."[32] Although conversion and martyrdom might seem to be two different goals, in fact they were complements. Preaching was the means by which martyrdom could be achieved, particularly when preaching included vituperative insults directed at the Prophet. When the king sentenced them to be beheaded, the friars said to themselves: "this is what we have desired: we were constant in the Lord."[33] To their frustration, the king's son intervened, arguing that execution in this case was not just, and as a result the friars were sent to the caliph in Marrakesh. He asked them: "Who are you, who insult and mistreat our faith?" To which the friars replied: "Nothing is faith, unless it is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,

[31] "Hii tempore domini Innocenci pape tercii sub doctrina beati Francisci ordinis fratrum minorum fundatoris ad imitanda saluatoris nostri vestigia eruditi, tanto caritatis incendio sic in brevi sunt inflammati, ut totis proximo visceribus ad martirium anhelarent." London, British Library, Nero A IX, fol. 94v.

[32] "Venimus annunciare tibi fidem domini nostri Jesu Christi, ut relicto vilissimo servo diaboli Machometo credas domino Deo, creatori tuo, et tandem nobiscum habeas vitam sempiternam." Ibid.

[33] "Eya fratres, hoc est quod desideravimus; constantes simus in domino." Ibid., fols. 94v-95r.

whom we preach."[34] With that reply, the caliph had all the information he needed; he beheaded them himself.

At first glance, the account has the qualities of a traditional *passio:* stalwart Christians, fuming tyrants, torture, and death. But crucial elements were missing. The martyrs performed no miracles that might have convinced wavering Muslims to become Christians. Nor did God intervene to protect them during torture, or to express divine approbation of their deeds through celestial signs: no thunder or lightning, no miraculous cures at the site of their death. Even the Muslims who expressed sympathy for the friars, like the son of the king of Seville, had no interest in conversion. Instead, he was moved "by piety" to urge the friars to become Muslims.[35] Similarly, the group of "poor women" who had been helping the friars and were killed alongside them were never even identified as Christians or Muslims.[36] Nor did the narrative acknowledge the well-known miracle-working cult the martyrs' relics enjoyed in Coimbra.[37]

What then was the appeal of the account? Given that it was copied (and probably composed) in the 1320s, the Franciscan author must have had the contemporary struggles of the Order in mind. The friars who died were not identified as members of either faction, but the account evoked concerns dear to the Spiritualist movement. When offered worldly wealth to convert to Islam, the friars did not just reject the offer, as Francis had done before the sultan (and saints had done since late antiquity). They told the Muslim: "Your money will damn you."[38] More strikingly, they walked to Seville "barefoot and following a form of dress different (*habitus dissimilis*) from others."[39] One of the central ways in which Spiritual Franciscans expressed their poverty was through their distinctive habit; Bertrand de la Tour complained about the Spirituals' *habitus difformis*.[40] To a Franciscan reading the *passio* in the aftermath of the execution of the Spiritual friars for their insistence on absolute poverty, the clothing of the friars would signal their fidelity to early Franciscan virtue, a virtue defined through

---

34 "Nullus est fides, nisi fides domini nostri Jesu Christi, quam tibi predicamus." Ibid., fol. 95v.

35 Ibid., fol. 95r.

36 Ibid., fol. 96r.

37 Ryan, "Missionary Saints," pp. 9–13.

38 "Pecunia, inquiunt, tua tecum sit in perdicionem." BL, Nero A IX, fol. 95r.

39 "Ibant autem discalciati et secundum formam habitus aliis dissimiles." Ibid., fol. 94v.

40 Betrandus de Turre, "Processus contra spirituales Aquitaniae (1315)," ed. Livarius Oliger, *AFH* 16 (1923): 342.

self-sacrifice, denial of the world, and physical expressions of extreme poverty, which culminated in martyrdom.

The Martyrs of Armenia

Following the account of Moroccan martyrs in the Nero manuscript was another *passio*: that of three friars who died in the Armenian city of Arzenga (probably Erzinjan) in 1314. Unlike the previous account, this story relied on pre-existing accounts; it was in fact a letter written by the guardian of the Franciscan convent in Trebizond. Here too, the Nero manuscript preserves the earliest surviving account. In both accounts, mission and martyrdom were two sides of the same coin. In front of the *qadi* and a group of Muslims, the three friars fired up their audience with a rhetorical question: "Who," they asked, "is this Macomet who deceives you, asserting himself to be a prophet? What writings, what miracles, what *vita* bear witness to him?"[41] Mohammad's lack of corroborating evidence was of course in contrast to the abundance of Biblical evidence verifying Christian doctrine. But the friars were not content to evoke the testimony of the patriarchs and prophets, as their confreres in Morocco also had. The Muslims of Arzenga would have a demonstration all of their own: the friars told them, "All is witnessed in the Christian faith, and we are prepared for this faith to offer ourselves freely and willingly to martyrdom and death."[42] Having already insulted Mohammad, the friars were condemned to die—but in dying, they would demonstrate the very truth they had just preached.

The *qadi* understood this well, and held back those who sought to kill the friars, at the same time telling the Franciscans to leave, "because here these are words that cannot be said."[43] When the friars returned to preach a second time, the *qadi* could no longer hold the angry Muslims back. The friars were condemned, and executed in the public square of the city. As the friars had hoped, the signs and miracles they had spoken of accompanied their death—but not according to the testimony of any Muslims. "It was said commonly and publicly from all the Armenians of Arzenga," the letter enthused, "that from the very night in which they buried the

[41] "Et quis, inquiunt, fuit iste Macometus qui vos decepit, asserens se esse prophetam? Que scripta, que miracula, que vita, attestantur eius?" BL, Nero IX A, fols. 96v-97r.

[42] "Et nos per ista fide preparati sumus mori et offerrimus nos sponte et voluntarios ad martirium et mortem." Ibid., fol. 97r.

[43] "Recedatis quam citius potestis et eatis pro factis vestris, quia non sunt hic talia verba recitanda." Ibid.

aforesaid relics and limbs [of the martyrs], they could see everything who wished to see by the light and splendors of the sky above the place where the holy relics were placed."[44] Even while alive, the friars performed miracles: the *qadi* had challenged them to heal a blind man. After "making the sign of the cross and the word over his eyes, immediately water began to flow from his eyes, then blood."[45] The blind could see, but the watching Saracens were only enraged by the miracle.

The letter presented the martyrdom as a triumph, and unlike the Moroccan account, it included dramatic miracles. Nevertheless, the guardian commented in his letter, "the infidels learned nothing." At best, they were "confused."[46] The martyrdom, however, had impressed the indigenous Christian population; the Greeks of Trebizond venerated the martyrs' relics, and the Armenians of Arzenga testified to the miracles that followed the martyrs' execution. They, however, were not the schismatic Greeks and heretical Armenians who were also the targets of missions dedicated to their conversion. Their devotion was not the miraculous conversion of former heretics and schismatics, but the honest devotion of true Christians, and was thus affirmation, not transformation.

The two accounts differ dramatically. The martyrs of Morocco performed no miracles, nor did God intervene with celestial signs or miraculous events. In contrast, the martyrs of Armenia had the honor of both, healing the blind while alive and celebrated by the heavens when they died. While the Moroccan account hinted at Spiritualist sympathies, the Armenian narrative gave no suggestion whether the friars were Spirituals or Conventuals. Yet if we read the two martyrdoms together, we see a shared set of characteristics developed. Muslims listen and dispute, but do not convert, even when miracles make the truth of Christianity apparent. They exhibit striking patience with the friars, holding back and giving them time to make their arguments, and to reconsider their desire for death. But once that patience is exhausted, they become the very model of the infidel persecutor: they torture and kill, and then abuse the friars' corpses with the enthusiasm of a Nero. Both accounts shared a

[44] "Dicitur communiter et manifeste ab omnibus Armenis de Arziga quod ea nocte qua sepelierunt predictas reliquias et membra, visa sunt omnibus qui voluerunt videre luminaria et splendores de celo super locum ubi sacre reliquie condebantur." Ibid, fol. 98r.

[45] "Et illi responderunt, "Potens est Christus, filius Dei, si voleruit cecum hunc illuminare," et facta oratione et signo crucis super oculos eius. Statim cepit fluere aquam ab oculis eius deinde sanguis." Ibid.

[46] "Infidelibus autem confusion augebatur. Et nullusque infideles inventus est qui sic non poterat ita nec auderet dicere malum." BL, Nero A IX, fol. 98v.

0001829939.INDD 234 12/4/2012 8:41:42 PM

belief in the intransigence of Muslims and the subsequent failure of preaching missions, but nevertheless understand the friars' death as a victory over Islam.

The ideological significance of the martyrdoms is sharpened by the other texts in the Nero manuscript. The miscellany begins with Thomas of Eccleston's "Tractatus de adventus fratrum Minorum in Angliam," followed (in another hand) by "De beato Francisco et impressione sacrorum stigmatorum," and the two martyrdom accounts. Another, later hand has added three more texts: two letters concerning the martyrs of Tana (1321), and a list of Dominican and Franciscan convents in Tartaria.

The text, while a compilation, has a clear focus. Thomas of Eccleston's tract explains how the Franciscans were established in England, and the account of the stigmata and the martyrdoms define a particular sense of Franciscan identity, one focused on suffering and martyrdom. The collection, if read by a friar in Hereford, explained how his forefathers in faith had come to England, and expounded on the stigmata as the highest form of *imitatio Christi*. The *passiones* that followed were a non-miraculous parallel to the stigmata, and encouraged the reader to believe that despite division within the Order, the virtues of Francis and the early brethren still abided among the friars.

Conclusion

The Nero manuscript offered a new Franciscan ideal: a friar could follow in the footsteps of Christ and Francis, not through living amidst the world in humility and poverty, but through abandoning the world, a world dominated by the vice-ridden and demonically-inspired followers of Muhammad—or by men and women consumed by pleasures and possessions. The collection could be read as a vindication of Spiritual convictions, but it could also be read as an affirmation of a Conventual viewpoint. In either case, Islam was identified with the world itself. Neither Islam nor the world could be transformed through the work of the friars, and Christians could only look forward to the time when infidels would convert as the world prepared for the return of Christ and its final transformation into an eternal realm of Christian virtue.

0001829939.INDD 236 12/4/2012 8:41:42 PM