

## **The Greek Orthodox Aegean World in the archives of the Propaganda Fide in Rome**

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a renewal of interest in the Greek Orthodox faith took place in the Christian West. Compared to what fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanists and reformed theologians might have known from their medieval sources, the new Greek-related knowledge reaching the West concerned the latest changes within the history of the faith, was mostly empirical and was carried by people and objects circulating throughout the Mediterranean Sea and Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> This knowledge was integrated into the mainly Protestant *studia orientalia*<sup>2</sup> although there was a comparable Catholic interest in Spain, France, and Rome.<sup>3</sup> Especially the Roman union policy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries opened new ‘paths’ for knowledge transfer and exchange with the broader Eastern Christian world. While Catholic missionaries travelled to the Eastern Christian communities of the Venetian *Stato da mar* and the Ottoman Empire, academic works were increasingly consulted to better define the Eastern ‘rites’. It was Rome’s intention to verify the latter’s conformity to or deviation from Tridentine orthodoxy and to eventually persuade the communities to ‘re-unite’ with the Holy See.<sup>4</sup>

Most studies on the interaction between the Catholic and the Greek Orthodox world have focused on practices of cohabitation, identity formation, and hybridization by looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cornel ZWIERLEIN, *Imperial Unknowns: The French and British in the Mediterranean, 1650-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 117-134.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Martin MULSOW, ‘Global Intellectual History and the Dynamics of Religion’, in Christoph BOCHINGER and Jörg RÜPKE (eds), *Dynamics of Religion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 251-272, at 254-256; Stefano SARACINO, ‘Griechisch-orthodoxe Almosenfahrer im Heiligen Römischen Reich und ihre wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung (1650-1750)’, in Markus FRIEDRICH and Jacob SCHILLING (eds), *Praktiken frühneuzeitlicher Historiographie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 141-173, at 144-143.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SARACINO, ‘Almosenfahrer’, 143; ZWIERLEIN, *Imperial Unknowns*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Cesare SANTUS, *Trasgressioni necessarie: Communicatio in sacris, coesistenza e conflitti tra le comunità cristiane orientali (Levante e Impero ottomano, XVII-XVIII secolo)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2019), 7.

Ionian and Aegean regions.<sup>5</sup> The groups most commonly emerging from such inquiries are Venetians and ‘Venetian’ or ‘Ottoman’ Greeks, sometimes Frenchmen, Genoese, and Maltese. Those historians who, like Bernard Heyberger, Cesare Santus, and Aurélien Girard investigated the encounter between Catholic missionaries and the Eastern Churches as well as unitary Eastern Christian life in early modern Rome have almost exclusively focused on the Syrian, Byzantine-Melkite, and Armenian Churches.<sup>6</sup> Although they have drawn extensively on the Roman archives of the *Propaganda Fide*,<sup>7</sup> the 54 volumes of letters sent by missionaries from the Aegean Archipelago, Candia, Athens, and ‘Greece’ between 1644 and 1892, also preserved in the Congregation’s archives, did not find resonance in their studies.<sup>8</sup> It is my impression that scholars on Catholic missions in the Ottoman Empire have neglected the presence of missionaries in the (mostly) Ottoman Aegean Sea and their encounters with the Greek Orthodox communities under the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Hence my research project is aimed at tracking some of the ‘paths’ of knowledge and ideas connecting the ‘schismatic’ Orthodox Greek Aegean world and early modern late-humanist Rome using the above-mentioned archival sources from the *Propaganda Fide*. What

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Molly GREENE, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); EADEM, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768: The Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 139-144; Sally MCKEE, *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Diane NEWALL, ‘Cultural Interaction in Candia: Case Studies in a Developing Early Modern Multi-Ethnic Community’, in Angeliki LYMBEROPOULOU (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West, 1204-1669: Whose Mediterranean is it Anyway* (London: Routledge, 2018), 21-29.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Aurélien GIRARD, ‘Impossible Independence or Necessary Dependency? Missionaries in the Near East, the “Protection” of the Catholic States and the Roman arbitrator (first Half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century)’, in Massimo Carlo GIANNINI (ed.), *Papacy, Religious Orders and International Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2013), 67-94; GIRARD and Bernard HEYBERGER, ‘Chrétiens au Proche-Orient: Les nouvelles conditions d’une présence’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 171 (2015), 11-35; IDEM, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994); SANTUS, *Trasgressioni necessarie*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. HEYBERGER, 1994, 14.

<sup>8</sup> APF: SC, Arcipelago, Atene, Balcani, Candia, Grecia. Cf. Bernard HEYBERGER, ‘Chrétiens orientaux dans l’Europe catholique (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)’, in IDEM and Chantal VERDEIL (eds), *Homme de l’entre-deux: Parcours individuels et portraits de groupes sur la frontière de la Méditerranée (XVIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2009), 61-93.

information about the region, its people, and its religious beliefs and practices was reported to Rome and how was the resulting knowledge used for the purposes of the Catholic mission? Missionaries' letters were just one of the many material and visual carriers of knowledge that contributed to the construction of ideas about the 'Greeks' in early modern Rome. Yet it is not my aim to write an exclusively *Roman* intellectual history, but rather to shed light on the modes of knowledge construction and knowledge flows between the Propaganda Fide and the Aegean world. For instance, it should be possible to fruitfully investigate the exchanges between missionaries and the Roman polyglot press of the Propaganda Fide through the missionaries' requests for theological literature translated into modern Greek, the 'empirical' and theological motivation of such requests, and the circulation of these works throughout the Mediterranean. In doing so, the insularity of the Aegean world will be regarded as a factor of connectivity and not of isolation. In a short dissertation the focus might be placed on 1669, the year of the Ottoman conquest of Venetian Candia, as the increasing Ottoman presence in the Aegean suggests an incrementation of missionaries' correspondence with Rome and re-organisation of missionary strategies.

The inspiration for this study arises from the post-Braudelian historiography of the Mediterranean as well as the history of knowledge, its circulation, and functionality for the means of a trans-maritime administration.<sup>9</sup> Girard has shown, for instance, that, in Rome, the *Propaganda Fide* encouraged the teaching of Middle Eastern languages, as well as translation and printing activities in order to support the missions in the East. Thus, the promotion of oriental studies in Rome was part of the measures of knowledge acquisition and management

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Arndt BRENDENCKE, *Imperium und Empirie: Funktionen des Wissens in der spanischen Kolonialherrschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009); ZWIERLEIN, *Imperial Unknowns*.

for the purposes of the missions. This suggests that similar efforts might be found to collect knowledge about the Greek Orthodox world.<sup>10</sup>

I intend to look at the Mediterranean as a complex and connected space<sup>11</sup> of entangled histories, multiple identities, and overlapping belongings,<sup>12</sup> in which people circulated from shore to shore, becoming carriers of knowledge and ideas.<sup>13</sup> Neither the ‘Catholic missionaries’ nor the ‘Orthodox Greeks’, the ‘Latin West’, nor the ‘Greek/Ottoman East’ will be considered as monolithic entities, but rather as spaces of intersection and exchange. Throughout the early modern period, the ‘Greeks’, for example, were a trading nation with communities in Livorno and Venice to accommodate the demand for maritime labour in Italian port cities and built trading networks reaching from Istanbul to the New World. During what Molly Greene labelled the ‘Greek Moment’ of the sixteenth century, Cretans and Cypriots crossed the Mediterranean Sea as merchants, humanists, and artists.<sup>14</sup> This circulation of people probably informed missionaries’ (background) knowledge and therefore needs to be taken into account.

Another important factor affecting the construction of knowledge is the interaction between different ideas and discourses circulating in the Mediterranean. It is likely that Western European representations of the Greek and the Ottoman East were entangled and

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aurélien GIRARD, ‘Teaching and Learning Arabic in Early Modern Rome: Shaping a Missionary Language’, in Charles BURNETT, Alastair HAMILTON and Jan LOOP (eds), *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 189-212; Adina RUIU, ‘Conflicting Visions of the Jesuit Missions to the Ottoman Empire, 1609-1628’, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1 (2014), 260-280, at 269-271.

<sup>11</sup> Peregrine HORDEN and Nicholas PURCELL, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Peter BURKE, ‘Civilization and Frontiers: Anthropology of the Early Modern Mediterranean’, in John A. MARINO (ed.), *Early Modern History and the Social Sciences: Testing the Limits of Braudel’s Mediterranean* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002), 123-141, at 136-141; Eric R. DURSTELER, ‘On Bazaars and Battlefields: Recent Scholarship on Mediterranean Cultural Contacts’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011), 413-434; IDEM, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Nancy BISAHA, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Margaret MESERVE, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Molly GREENE, ‘Trading Identities: The Sixteenth-Century Greek Moment’, in Adnan A. HUSAIN and K.E. FLEMING (eds), *A Faithful Sea: The Religious Cultures of the Mediterranean, 1200-1700* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 121-148.



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