

TRANSLATING THE SACRED: PIETY, POLITICS AND THE CHANGING IMAGE  
OF THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO

by

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A THESIS

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## An Abstract of the Thesis of

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Title: TRANSLATING THE SACRED: PIETY, POLITICS AND THE CHANGING  
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The Holy House of Loreto is steeped in centuries of pious legend and sacred ritual. Its identification as the house of the Virgin, and site of the Annunciation, makes it unique to the Catholic tradition as a spatial relic where earthly and celestial domains converge. Legend describes the relic's translation in the geographic sense, but the house also underwent a theoretical translation in the early modern period. While late-medieval iconography of the Holy House privileges its connection to local religious identity, later imagery reflects Papal appropriation of the site's jurisdiction. Through an ambitious building and artistic campaign, including the talents of Luca Signorelli and Donato Bramante, among others, Rome amplified the universality and renown of the site, stamping it as specifically Roman. Finally, pilgrimage souvenirs and architectural replicas of the house spread the cult of Loreto throughout Europe, making it a truly international symbol of Christianity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to pious legend, in 1291 the house in which the Virgin Mary was born and received the Annunciation was lifted from Nazareth and carried away by angels to prevent its destruction by Mamluk Turks who had conquered the Holy Land. Its final resting place was the modern-day town of Loreto in the Italian Marches, located near the shores of the Adriatic. Subsequently, devotion flourished around the house and the new Loretan appellation of the Virgin, and a sanctuary was constructed to accommodate the dramatic influx of pilgrimage activity. Drawn by reports of her miraculous powers of intercession, the faithful have continued for centuries to venerate both the Virgin of Loreto and the relic of the Holy House.

The classification and veneration of the relic as a house (identified in Italian as the *Santa Casa* or *sacello*), immediately suggests two essential elements of its efficacy. First, the terrestrial connotation of the word “house,” as an entity connected to the realm of human living, lends it a level of domestic accessibility; and in the context of sacred place, a “house of God” is where the liturgical rite transcends the division between the temporal and the divine. Thus, the relic of the *Santa Casa* venerated at Loreto, through its identification as the house of the Virgin Mary, becomes a tangible confluence of earthly and celestial domains, a unique devotional vehicle for those faithful who, stepping across its threshold, find spiritual shelter within its four walls, and by symbolic extension,

beneath the protective mantle of the Virgin herself. This idea of the relic as protective vehicle is underscored by the prevalent legend of its miraculous journey, when at the will of the Virgin, the angels made their transport across the Adriatic. Just as the Virgin had already assured protection of the relic itself, so too would she shield devoted pilgrims from ailment, calamity or enemy invasion. Popular devotional imagery often highlights her universal powers of protection, as demonstrated in one seventeenth-century print, for example, in which the Virgin eradicates allegorical depictions of Death, War and Plague (see figure 1). The spatial aspect of the relic, however, the ability to enter the very *sacello* in which Christ was conceived, suggests more than a simple protective function. Not only was the relic a tangible link to the origins of Christianity, it was a piece of Palestine itself, transferred to the territory of the Western Church. At a time when pilgrimage to the Holy Land was hindered by the increasing threat of the advancing Ottoman Empire, the *Santa Casa* afforded an appealing and accessible alternative. In entering the Holy House, pilgrims were transported to the *loca sancta* where the cycle of Christ's Passion began. Moreover, the relic reinforced liturgical practice as essential to human redemption, materializing the doctrine of the Incarnation, where "Verbum caro factum est." In these ways, the Holy House was a unique and indispensable relic, fulfilling both devotional and ecclesiastical concerns within a greater economy of sacred ritual.

Louis Richeome, in a late sixteenth-century pilgrimage guide to Loreto, emphasizes "that pilgrimages are pleasing to God" and that Loreto "is one of the most

notable and famous in Christendome.”<sup>1</sup> “In a pilgrimage wisely undertaken,” Richeome continues, “we must know the place whither we go, which is the end and mark we shoot for...The knowledge of the place, of the situation, of the qualities and conditions thereof, provoketh, encourageth, and strengtheneth a man to go and visit it.”<sup>2</sup> This thesis, though in a different way from Richeome’s narrative, intends to serve as a textual and investigational pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Loreto. Its primary aim is to guide readers on an academic journey, and to fulfill a scholarly vow of redemption on behalf of a current body of art historical inquiry that tends to under-emphasize the singularity and complexity of the Loretan shrine. Though Loreto is widely acknowledged as a major pilgrimage destination for Marian worship, its centrality to the ideological and theoretical fashioning of devotional and ecclesiastical concerns in early modern Europe is often a theme only partially developed in the literature.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, art historical investigation has most often favored historical analysis of the shrine, while iconographic interpretation has been limited to individual components of the sanctuary (for example, Luca Signorelli’s frescos for the Chapel of Saint John, or Andrea del Sansovino’s marble

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Richeome, *The Pilgrime of Loreto* (originally published in French in 1597). Translated into English by Edward Worsley (Great Britain: The Scolar Press, 1976), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Ferdinando Citterio and Luciano Vaccaro, eds., *Loreto: Crocevia religioso tra Italia, Europa ed Oriente*, a collection of essays that effectively addresses a variety of overarching social, historical and theological concerns related to the site at Loreto, the majority of the Loretan literature seems to consider such topics fleetingly or in isolation from their greater theological or devotional context. Floriano Grimaldi’s *La Historia della chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto* (Loreto: Tecnostampa di Loreto, 1993) is perhaps the most comprehensive study of the history and artistic legacy of the site. However, while it is an excellent compendium of central themes and images, it remains nonetheless superficial in its descriptions, lacking detailed analyses of imagery as well as potentially meaningful and unifying connections between principle ideas. Giuseppe Santarelli’s *L’arte a Loreto* (Ancona: Anibaldi Grafiche, 2001) presents a more extensive consideration of individual artistic features of the site, though it remains excessively faithful to stylistic description while lacking in meaningful thematic interpretation.

sculptures for the *rivestimento*) as if they were separate and unrelated entities; studies that simultaneously address the history and iconography of such works as they relate to overarching thematic concerns, such as the role of Loreto as a principal ecclesiastical center of devotional and theological dissemination, are too often limited to cursory descriptions.

This study proposes a more encompassing investigation; it seeks to define the salient political and religious factors that contributed to the formation of the Loretan legend and to the imported artistic production that, in turn, crystallized the devotional implications of that legend and distributed them throughout the Western world. In elucidating the complex devotional climate in which Loretan iconography emerged, it will be apparent how the celebrated frescoes of Luca Signorelli, the elaborate marble sculptures of Sansovino—as well as other devotional imagery—fit within a greater network of sacred identity at Loreto, Rome and beyond. Moreover, an examination of the subsequent exportation of Loretan ideals and artistic traditions to major European devotional centers will evidence the crucial role of the *Santa Casa* in the promotion and legitimization of the Catholic faith.

Pilgrims who visit the Holy House today will find that the basic iconography of the Virgin of Loreto as depicted in devotional prints and on souvenirs has actually changed very little since the sixteenth century. While the context of such imagery has varied widely according to the individual concerns of devotees, the Virgin herself most often appears seated or standing above the elevated house, while angels lovingly support it from below (as in figure 1). Such representation emerged as a result of the popular

legend of the translation of the relic from Nazareth to Loreto, which gained in popularity at the end of the fifteenth century. While devotional prints foreground the popular narrative of the translation, the political and theological concerns of the Papacy are more readily visible in the artistic and building campaigns that followed papal appropriation of the site's jurisdiction in the late fifteenth century. Specifically, the amplification and fortification of the sanctuary, along with the decoration of the transept chapels surrounding the relic itself, reveal an attempt to temper the popular devotional flavor of the relic within a theologically articulated framework. Additionally, in the early sixteenth century, the marble *rivestimento* further legitimized Papal claims to the relic, identifying its liturgical and redemptive function through an ambitious pictorial cycle dedicated to the life of the Virgin. As the centrality of the Loretan cult to both popular devotion and ecclesiastic authority spread throughout Europe, so did the house itself in the form of architectural replicas, which sought to duplicate the sacred (and political) associations of the site. In this way, Loreto was translated throughout the world as a major and lasting emblem of Christian doctrine and devotion.

To commence this textual pilgrimage, one does well to follow the example of Richeome, who prefaces his own guidebook with a foundational account of the Loretan narrative: "I will speak first of the first, and of the house of Loreto, which is the end and motive of all this action, and after [I will speak] of the means to go thither, and accomplish the voyage."<sup>4</sup> In order to better understand how the spiritual and political identity of Loreto is formed in Renaissance and Baroque devotional imagery, it will first

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.



be useful to consider the earliest textual and iconographic sources of the legend, which have continued to foster the popularity of the Loretan cult and to define its centrality to both sacred ritual and theological exegesis.



Figure 1. Illustration from *Iter Lauretanae domus*, 1661.



Figure 2. Devotional Print of the Virgin of Loreto, 1490.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO: HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEGEND AND EARLY ICONOGRAPHY

A documented history of the Holy House at Loreto begins not in 1291, when the small chamber of the Virgin is thought to have taken flight from Nazareth, nor in 1294 when it is supposed to have reached its final destination in the region of Recanati, but rather beginning in the late fifteenth century. While there are a few contradictory references to the existence of a church under the denomination of Santa Maria di Loreto prior to this time, there is no mention of either the relic or its miraculous transfer known until the 1470s.<sup>5</sup> The primary devotional focus of the quattrocento cult seems to have been a statue of the Virgin Mary, which pilgrims worshipped for its miraculous powers of intercession. Not until 1449 did the early cult gain ecclesiastical attention, when Pope Nicholas V, taking notice of the substantial deposit of ex-votos and devotional offerings that adorned the Marian shrine, felt compelled to intercede in the jurisdiction of the site. Concerned that a corrupt Recanati diocese was failing to utilize such offerings for the betterment of the dilapidated sanctuary, Nicholas V temporarily suspended local ecclesiastical custody of the church.<sup>6</sup> His successor, Paul II, similarly exercised papal

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<sup>5</sup> There is also a surviving reference to a Church of Santa Maria di Loreto in a document of 1194, which predates the actual transfer of the house. Early documentation is difficult to authenticate and thus only serves to complicate the history of the site. For a more detailed discussion of such fragmentary references to the early development of the church, see Giuseppe Santarelli, *La Santa Casa di Loreto: Un'esperienza di arte e di fede attraverso i secoli* (Loreto: Congregazione Universale, 1999), 252.

control over the administration of the site, stripping the local and regional powers of jurisdiction, and declaring instead the shrine's universal authority.<sup>7</sup> Given the steadily increasing flow of pilgrims, it is not surprising that the Papacy deemed it necessary to intervene in the gestation of the shrine, thus establishing an initial axis of connectivity between Rome and Loreto.<sup>8</sup> Underscoring this connection was the Pope's declaration that Loreto surpassed other Marian shrines not only for the "innumera et stupenda miracula" that occurred there, but particularly because it possessed, he claimed, an "ymago" of the Virgin that had been transported there by a court of angels.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as he relates, it is the image—of mysterious origins—that perpetuates the miracles performed at Loreto. Here, then, in 1460, is the first documented reference to a miraculous transfer by angels of a relic associated with the Virgin Mary; official mention of the Holy House itself remains surprisingly absent.

The Pope's assertion of a miracle-working image at Loreto indicates a nascent stage of the development of its legend and of the popular and enduring form of the narrative yet to emerge (and which would focus more completely on the house itself),

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<sup>6</sup> This document contains the earliest reference to interference in Loretan affairs by the Holy See. Discussed in Giorgio Cracco, "Alle origini dei santuari mariani: il caso di Loreto," eds. Ferdinando Citterio and Luciano Vaccaro, *Loreto: Crocevia religioso tra Italia, Europa e Oriente* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1997), 124.

<sup>7</sup> Lucetta Scaraffia, *Loreto* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Pius II also displayed an intense personal affinity for the Virgin of Loreto, attributing his recovery from an illness in his youth to her miraculous powers of intercession.

<sup>9</sup> The term "ymago" is somewhat elusive, being unclear whether it refers to a small painted picture (which seems to have been venerated until the fourteenth century in an early chapel dedicated to the Virgin at Loreto), or if it indicates rather the statue of the Virgin (which was considered to be of the school of Saint Luke), worshipped at Loreto until its disappearance during the Napoleonic siege. Pope Paul II's mention of the "ymago," as well as his pronouncement of the miracles performed at Loreto, are detailed in a letter of 1469 and are further discussed in Cracco, 127.

which is essential to understanding the early iconographic development of related Marian imagery. Fifteenth-century woodblock prints often privilege an iconic representation of the Virgin of Loreto, figuring her statuesque form beneath a raised tabernacle or baldachin, surrounded by a company of angels (see figure 2). Such imagery seeks to reproduce and exalt the statue itself, with minimal (if any) acknowledgment of the Holy House motif. Some scholars have identified a rudimentary or summary form of the Virgin's reliquary chamber in the columned architectural structure that surrounds her. Jaroslav Folda, for example, cites a thirteenth-century manuscript image of the Annunciation as stylistic evidence of an early artistic association between the form of the tabernacle or baldachin and the Virgin Mary's dwelling in Nazareth (see figure 3).<sup>10</sup> Given the Pope's focus on the miraculous image of the Virgin, however, as well as his failure to indicate any knowledge of or interest in the significance of the house itself, it is not surprising that early images of the Virgin would reflect a similar lack of references to the relic. There are countless images of the Virgin, for example, that rely on similar architectural devices, such as pillars or canopied columns, to physically delineate sacred space, framing the deity and thereby recreating a place of worship in the nature of an altar. A sixth-century ampulla from the Holy Sepulcher reflects a similar trend of demarcating holy space, as seen in the columned support framing the relic (see figure 4). Raffaele Riera's sixteenth-century description of the altar at Loreto includes a reference to the statue of the Virgin, which he describes as being displayed under a baldachin,

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<sup>10</sup> Jaroslav Folda, *The Nazareth Capitals of the Crusader Shrine* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986).



Figure 3. *Ricard de Montcroix* Manuscript, Paris, Bibliotheque nationale, Francais 2810, 1294.



Figure 4. Ampulla from the Holy Sepulcher, Sixth Century.

surrounded by small columns.<sup>11</sup> As Floriano Grimaldi has suggested, this arrangement could have been in place a century prior, when a similar artistic motif was prevalent in Loretan devotional imagery.<sup>12</sup> This connection could, in part, explain the insistence in fifteenth-century designs of the Virgin of Loreto on the tabernacle/baldachin theme. Regardless of its origin, however, the motif remains a prominent one in the earliest images representing her. Indeed, the devotional spotlight of such imagery remains focused on the miraculous properties of the statue, rather than on any explicit reference to the house motif yet to emerge.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the development of the Loretan legend accelerated and a modified image of the Virgin subsequently emerged to supplant the more conventional iconography of the previous decades. After the death of Pope Paul II, who had favored Loreto so particularly above other Marian shrines, the success and importance of the site as a pilgrimage destination threatened to diminish. This was primarily due to the successive Pope Sixtus IV's more tempered appraisal of the singularity of the site, an attitude he betrayed by granting equal ecclesiastical privileges (such as indulgences) to a rival cult of the Virgin emerging in the nearby port town of Ancona. His motive was likely strategic, stemming from a desire to avoid the marginalization of a city that maintained a geographically crucial position at the edge of the Adriatic: Ancona was a ripe political opportunity to establish a symbolic "bridge

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Floriano Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria di Loreto* (Loreto: Tecnostampa, 1993), 300.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

between East and West.”<sup>13</sup> This would have seemed particularly important after the fall of Constantinople just a decade earlier, as well as after Pius II’s failed attempt at a crusade in 1463. In Pope Sixtus IV’s lukewarm sanction of their cult, the administrative authorities at Loreto must have recognized an imminent need to crystallize the shrine’s position as the spiritual heart of Marian worship, to defend its singularity and thereby justify its centrality to pilgrimage ritual.

Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei, often referred to as Teramano, was Rector of Loreto at this critical moment of identity formation.<sup>14</sup> His position as custodian of the building made him “testimone” to the oral and written accounts of the “innumera et stupenda miracula” which Pope Paul II had cited as evidence of Loreto’s heightened importance among Marian sanctuaries. A miracle-working icon, however, lacked distinctiveness in a period heavily saturated by devotional imagery; one miraculous image among many was not likely to sustain Loreto’s reputation above the flourishing multitude of competing shrines dedicated to the Virgin. Teramano’s published account of the *Translatio Miraculosa Ecclesie Beate Marie Virginis de Loreto*, which traces the relic of the Holy House on its voyage from Nazareth to the province of Recanati, is the first documented narrative referencing the now celebrated flight of the Virgin’s *sacello*. This account, which dates to the early 1470s, forges a critical realignment of the history of Loretan religiosity; it is a salient moment in which a narrative condensing generations of popular piety gives rise to an intriguing and enduring legend. Teramano’s text effectively

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<sup>13</sup> M. Caravale and A. Caracciolo, *Lo Stato pontificio da Martino V a Pio IX* (Torino, 1978), 115; 368.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed biographical description of Teramano, see Giuseppe Santarelli, *La Santa Casa di Loreto*, 375.



fashioned a new historical and spiritual framework in which to situate the significance of the site at Loreto, permanently solidifying its unexampled importance among Marian monuments.

The account of the *Translatio* begins with a triumphant pronouncement of the origin of the chapel at Loreto: “Nota che la chiesa di Sancta Maria delloreto fu chamera della chasa della vergine Maria madre del nostro signore Giesu Christo: la qual chasa fu nelle parti di Hierusalem di Giudea nella ciptà di Galilea chiamata Nazaret [sic].”<sup>15</sup> Teramano specifies that it was in this very room that the Virgin was born, received the Annunciation and subsequently raised (“nutri”) her son until the age of 12. Shortly before her own death, the *camera* was consecrated as a church in Nazareth, converting the earthly dwelling of the Virgin into a house of God, where Christ’s disciples administered “i divini officii”.<sup>16</sup> According to Teramano, when the Christian population in Nazareth succumbed to Turkish rule, angels rescued the relic from imminent violation, carrying it safely to Fiume in the territory of Sclavonia on the Dalmatian coast of modern day Croatia.<sup>17</sup> This stop was merely temporary, however, as the Virgin judged the level of local devotion to be inadequate and thus charged the angels once again with their holy transfer, now directed toward the territory of Recanati in the Italian Marches. Twice more, attempted locations for the Holy House in Recanati proved undesirable. The first was in a forest (“selva”) in the custody of a noblewoman named Loreta, who could not

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<sup>15</sup> The 1495 Italian translation of Teramano’s original Latin text is reproduced in Floriano Grimaldi, *La Chiesa di S. Maria di Loreto nei documenti dei secoli XII-XV* (Ancona: Archivio di Stato, 1984), 161-164.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

prevent the perpetration of violence against pilgrims traveling to the site, and the second was in the care of two brothers, who fought over the cache of riches left in offering to the Virgin. A host of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century images illustrate the hesitant itinerary of the relic, highlighting the various sojourns relayed in Teramano's text. One example, dating to 1492-93, spatially condenses the entire narrative cycle into one visual frame, synchronously unifying the extended travel sequence within a single landscape (see figure 5). This stylistic approach privileges a cohesive reading of the narrative, suggesting the continuity of time and space and therefore the inextricability of beginning and end—the latter as the inevitable trajectory of the former. A later image betrays an amplified interest in the geographical terrain of the legend, plotting chronologically the extended course of the angels on a detailed topographical map (see figure 6). The iconographic diachrony that distinguishes these two works is likely a result of divergent influences: the earlier example bespeaks residual medieval hagiographic trends, while the later reflects the emerging interest in cartography and geographical expansion that captivated the sixteenth-century imagination (and that had, inevitably, certain claims to “truth value”).

As depicted in both images of the translation, the Virgin's final destination was a small hill overlooking the Recanati countryside, an elevated position on a “via comune” providing sweeping views of the Adriatic. According to Teramano, this relic of inestimable sacred value no longer defined the Palestinian landscape, but represented rather the thriving Eastern legacy—a microcosm of the Holy Land—made manifest in Italy, a region that claimed to be the new spiritual capital of the world. The Loretan hill,



in the district of Recanati, had appealed to the Virgin Mary above all other possible locations as the proper and worthy home—a new Nazareth—for her own earthly dwelling. Having fled the terrain of Loreta and the two brothers, the relic rightly belonged to the entire community of Recanati, whose merit, demonstrated through “gran divotione a questa chiesa,”<sup>18</sup> justified the Virgin’s decision to remain there.

As Giorgio Cracco aptly notes in his discussion of the *Translatio*, there is an essential mechanism of “localismo” inherent in Teramo’s foregrounding of Recanati in his development of the legend.<sup>19</sup> Not only did the *Santa Casa* ensure an “*unicum assoluto*” for the territory of Recanati, elevating its spiritual importance above that of neighboring Ancona, it also privileged the local community as custodian of its legend and authenticity. It is significant that more than half of Teramo’s narrative is dedicated to events occurring after the arrival of the *Santa Casa* in Recanati, beginning with the apparition of the Virgin to a holy man (“*sancto huomo*”), to whom she reveals the origin of the relic and the details of its translation. A second appearance to a reclusive friar identified as Paolo, confirms the Virgin’s miraculous presence in conjunction with the little house. The inclusion of the apparition motif within an otherwise unconventional narrative lends it a universal credibility, situating the legend within a standard hagiographic framework, while not infringing on its distinctiveness. Additionally, that the Virgin chooses to disclose the details of her account to local devotees, both in a position of religious authority, suggests not only a level of authenticity through “witness”

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>19</sup> Cracco, 135.

testimony, but also reinforces her allegiance to the community of Recanati. Late fifteenth-century images dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto often allude to this “veridical” aspect of the legend by including the apparition scene in devotional prints picturing the shrine (as in figure 5).

In addition to emphasizing a local current within the Loretan legend, Teramano reinforces the connection between Recanati and the Holy Land by including an episode aimed at suspending disbelief regarding the transfer of the house from Nazareth. To verify the authenticity of the relic, a retinue of sixteen “notabili,” having taken careful measurements of the structure at Loreto, set out for Palestine where their calculations could be compared against the remaining, original foundation of the house of the Virgin. Their findings: the measurements corresponded “ad unguem,” an irrefutable affirmation that the little church of Recanati truly was the *Santa Casa* of Nazareth. This confirmation solidified Loreto’s special position as host to this important relic, while also affirming an explicit connection between the territory of Recanati and the Eastern cradle of Christianity. It is a unique narrative moment in the hagiographic tradition, and one that translates well in visual terms, particularly as part of a continuous narrative cycle dedicated to the events of the legend. A seventeenth-century French example is one of surprisingly few images that depict this specific moment of expedition and verification (see figure 7). Relying on a “before and after” representation of the chapel, the image produces a binary visual anchor between Loreto and Nazareth, substantiating their essential relatedness. In depicting the last vestiges of the foundation in Palestine, the

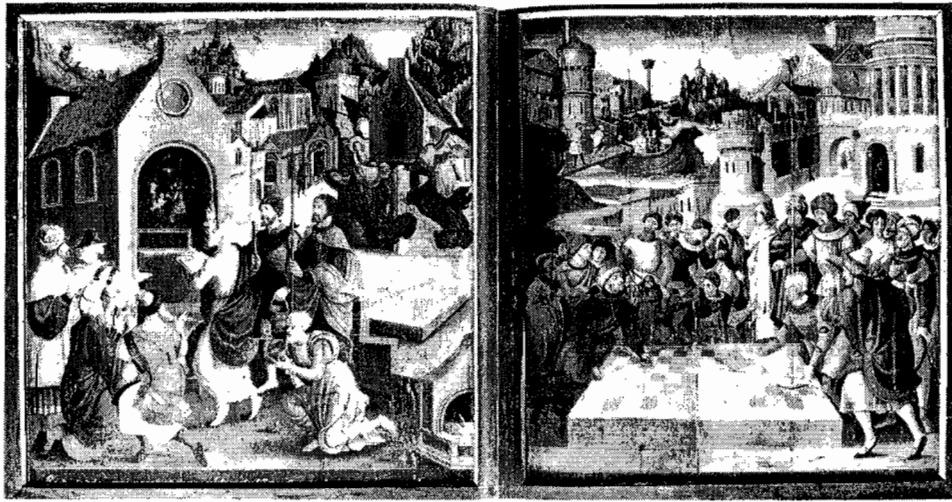


Figure 7. Panel Paintings Depicting Scenes from the *Translation*, Musées de Troyes, Seventeenth Century.

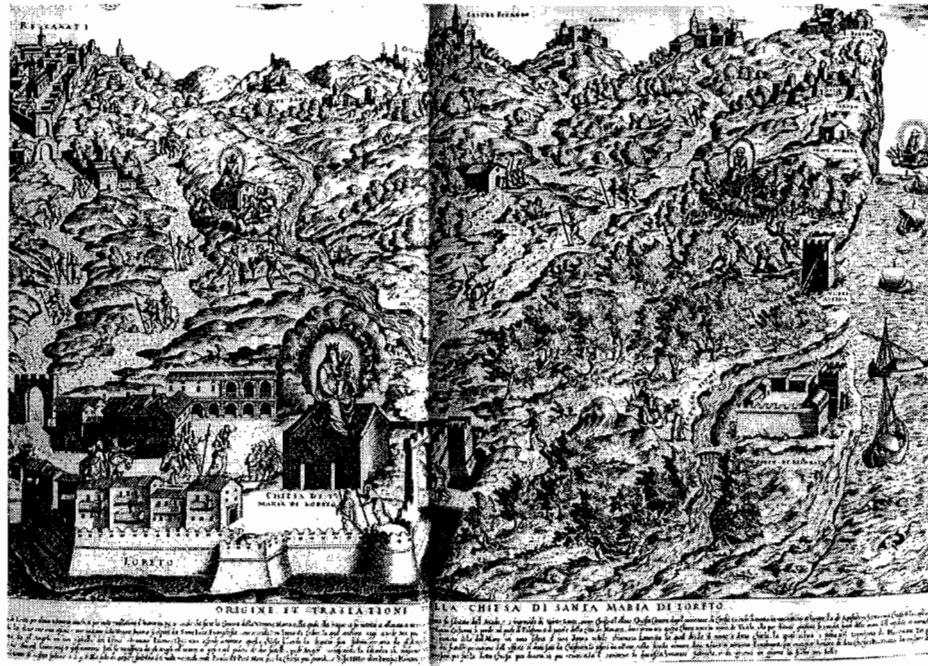


Figure 8. Devotional Print Depicting the *Translation*, Late Sixteenth Century.

painter reminds (or convinces) the viewer of the true origins of the relic, but also of the Virgin's abandonment of those origins in favor of a more worthy land and people. It is somewhat perplexing that so few images depicting this aspect of the legend have been cited in the Loretan literature; there is, perhaps, more art historical work to be done in unearthing additional examples of this unique episode, which could help to further contextualize its literary and artistic significance within the broader development of the Loretan legend.<sup>20</sup>

The conclusion of Teramano's *Translatio* once again draws on oral testimony to reinforce the validity of the legend. As confirmation of the events relayed in the first three quarters of the narrative, Teramano cites how "l'avo dell'avo" (l'avo dell'avo) of two local residents beheld firsthand the appearance of angels carrying the church initially into the forest of Recanati and later to the hill owned by the two brothers described in the narrative.<sup>21</sup> The author thus furnishes witness testimony to the extraordinary flight that is the nucleus of his hagiographic text. More than an attempt to authenticate a prodigious event, however, the reliance on oral tradition further reiterates the local undercurrent, asserting a certain claim to proprietorship by right of generations of local history and interaction.

Popular devotional imagery from Loreto—produced after the publication of Teramano's narrative—often engenders a similar pride in localism, encasing iconic representations of the Virgin within panoramic views of the sacred topography of

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief discussion of the French panels, see Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, 297.

<sup>21</sup> Teramano, translated in Grimaldi, *La chiesa di S. Maria di Loreto*, 164.

Recanati. In one example, the translation unfolds amidst an array of geographical and architectural features that define the Marchegian terrain: rivers, ports, towers, castles and hills are all identified through accompanying textual indicators (see figure 8). In this way, the drama of the miraculous translation unfolds not in a spatial vacuum in which an iconographic sign (the Virgin with her house) appears as a dislodged, isolated entity, but rather within a contextualized and individualized space: that is, against the backdrop of Recanati itself. In terms of geographical context, the region of Recanati lends a structure or physicality to Teramano's account, while the narrative inversely effects the history, or memory, of Recanati. Philip Sheldrake, in a theoretical study of sacred place and the construction of identity, discusses how "the hermeneutic of place progressively reveals new meanings in a kind of conversation between topography [and] memory...every encounter of the sacred is rooted in a place, a socio-spatial context that is rich in myth and symbol."<sup>22</sup> In displacing the relic at Loreto from its original landscape, there is a certain loss of "lineage and memory associated with physical place,"<sup>23</sup> and thus Teramano's narrative serves to (re) contextualize that lineage within the memory and situation of Recanati, forming a new association between place, memory and apperception. While the identity of the *Santa Casa* undoubtedly retains traces of its Eastern origins—indeed, they are emphasized in Teramano's text as central to the sacredness of the relic and as an impetus for the Translation legend—it is necessarily refashioned as an expression of local memory, and therefore of local identity. There is,

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



then, a crucial link in Teramano's account, as well as in popular devotional imagery, between physical geography and the geography of memory in constructing continuity, sacred history, meaning and identity formation.

The reference to generations of oral testimony as part of the miraculous translation of the *Santa Casa* establishes a dialogic connection between place, memory and identity (made manifest when local experience syncretically intertwines with sacred history). As the relic passed from one part of the region to another, it left an indelible impression on the social, historical and religious topography of the area, forever altering local connections to tradition and experience of the divine. According to Teramano, it was also the "infiniti miracoli," which the Virgin "ha facto et fa...per mezzo di questa chiesa" that confirmed her predilection for local wellbeing.<sup>24</sup> In general, this statement was a simple reiteration of Pope Paul II's previous affirmation that the spiritual importance of the shrine was rooted in the experience of the "innumera et stupenda miracula"<sup>25</sup> that had been performed there. However, Teramano's narrative directly and inseparably linked that local experience to the presence of the house itself, with the Virgin acting "per mezzo di questa chiesa."<sup>26</sup> A demonstrated history of miracle working is essential to the localization of any cult, for it allows devotees to weave their individual concerns and stories into a larger web of spiritual meaning. The *Santa Casa* becomes in

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<sup>24</sup> Teramano, translated in Grimaldi, 162.

<sup>25</sup> See note 9 above.

<sup>26</sup> Teramano, 162.

this way a central protagonist, a mediator of such meaning, within the local framework of religious identity and identification.

Popular religiosity, as expressed in certain prints and ex-votos, reveals an interest in “documenting” the collective memory of such miraculous interventions. In one seventeenth-century example, a series of vignettes encircles the statue of the Virgin of Loreto, relaying the various circumstances in which the Madonna’s favor was granted to those in need (see figure 9). Among the afflictions pictured are shipwreck, demonic possession, plague, tsunami (“onde del mare”) and a Turkish assault on the house itself. Images of Mary as mediator against plague and Turks are widespread in the Late Medieval and Renaissance periods, and the Virgin of Loreto is often associated with these particular dangers. In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, registers of votive offerings left at the shrine record countless such miracles performed at the behest of the faithful.<sup>27</sup> Details of such narratives, recorded in the inscriptions that accompany images of the miracles, range from generic indicators of identity (“un uomo”) to the naming of specific individuals (“Antonio Facino, chierico, nativo di Macerata”). There are also examples of “public” miracles, granted to entire communities in need of intercession, generally as a result of plague or natural disaster. Ex-votos, which are similarly dedicated by both individuals and communities in gratitude for divine favor, are often accompanied by brief texts detailing the narrative circumstances of the miraculous event portrayed (see figure 10). Many images also illustrate the practice of adorning the shrine

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<sup>27</sup> Various manuscripts detailing accounts of the miraculous intercessions of the Virgin of Loreto are housed in the *Archivio Storico della Santa Casa* in Loreto and are partially reproduced in Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, 349-410.



Figure 9. Devotional Print with Miracle Cycle, Seventeenth Century.



Figure 10. Ex-voto with the Virgin of Loreto, Museo Pinacoteca di Loreto, Sixteenth Century.



Figure 11. Devotional Print with Votives, Sixteenth Century.



Figure 12. Illustration from *Le pèlerin de Lorette*, Louis Richeome, 1604.

with wax votives in the shape of hands, legs, arms or even breasts, alluding to specific ailments against which the afflicted appealed for divine healing. A few of these, standing for the many, are visible in several devotional prints depicting the shrine (see figure 11). One can imagine the spiritual impact of beholding thousands of such stories literally appended to the walls of the *Santa Casa*, functioning as collective testimony to a shared experience of the divine.

After the publication of Teramano's *Translatio*, a pamphlet detailing the events of the narrative was affixed to the exterior of the house so that, like an ex-voto, it served as a physical testament to the miraculous powers of the Virgin, and to the Eastern origins of the relic.<sup>28</sup> In addition, this text would have reinforced, in the minds of locals as well as pilgrims, Recanati's role in the sacred history of the relic. As pilgrimage activity increased, and ex-votos began to reflect an identity that surpassed Recanati's borders, it would have become increasingly difficult to separate local from universal concerns. In subsequently "translating" Teramano's legend across the Italian peninsula and throughout the Western world, pilgrims essentially appropriated and extended its significance: the miracles occurring at Loreto were clear manifestations of God's divine favor not just toward Recanati, but rather toward all of Christendom. More than this, though, the relic at Loreto reinforced such favor at an essential moment of political and spiritual tension, when the West had lost its spiritual core in the Holy Land and thus needed to (re)

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<sup>28</sup> At least by 1478, there was a version of the translation legend "appesa a un pilastro del tempio di Santa Maria," as Nicola di Manopello describes in his transcription of that text. Additionally, in 1489, there was a "tabella" of the legend, which Giovanni Battista Spagnoli records having seen amidst numerous other "tabelle" (presumably ex-votos). See Floriano Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, 79; 174.

establish a lateral station of spiritual (and political) dissemination. It is not surprising, then, that rather than condemn Teramano's folkloric account of the *Translatio* as a superstitious product of local storytelling, the Papacy sought to cultivate, and simultaneously "rationalize," the essential narrative elements of the legend. What followed was the *Historia* of the *Santa Casa* of Loreto, written by the humanist ecclesiastic Giacomo Ricci sometime between 1473 and 1477.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Teramano's text, written in Italian and following broad hagiographic conventions, Ricci's Latin interpretation purports to be "la verità della storia" of the Loretan legend and quotes liberally from classical sources, including Virgil and Cicero.<sup>30</sup> In dedicating his text to the Camerlengo Latino Orsini, the author pronounces his papal affiliation, thereby further establishing a spiritual and symbolic connection between Rome and Loreto.

Giorgio Cracco, in a well-developed examination of Ricci's *Historia*, has defined the work as a "counter-legend" to Teramano's earlier, and primarily localist, version.<sup>31</sup> A major difference between the texts is Ricci's self-conscious insistence on the incredibility of the story: he specifically addresses the improbability of the flight of an inanimate structure:

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<sup>29</sup> The manuscript is not dated, though as Giuseppe Santarelli notes, Ricci, in his Preamble to the *Historia*, identifies himself as Canon of the Cathedral of Brescia, a rank he attained in 1473. In addition, Latino Orsini, to whom the work is dedicated, died in 1477, placing the publication of the text as most likely between these definitive dates. See Giacomo Ricci, *Virginis Mariae Loretae Historia*. Edited and translated into Italian by Giuseppe Santarelli (Loreto: Congregazione Universale della Santa Casa, 1987), 19.

<sup>30</sup> All quotations from Giacomo Ricci's *Virginis Mariae Loretae Historia* are taken from Giuseppe Santarelli's translation, which includes the original Latin text as well as the Italian version used here. The present citation is from page 107 of this edition.

<sup>31</sup> Cracco, especially 144-57.

Ma perché dico «fosse trasportato»? Infatti, una cosa non movibile non può essere trasportata. Perché, dunque, riferisco cose incredibili? Parlo o taccio? Ma è bene rivelare le opere di Dio. Sappiamo anche che tutto è possibile a Dio. È cosa più meravigliosa, infatti, pensare in che modo, percossa la roccia, ne siano scaturite acque gradevoli per il popolo assetato; oppure in che modo il mare poté dividersi perché gli ebrei potessero passare a piedi asciutti.<sup>32</sup>

Ricci's solution to this dilemma reveals his knowledge of biblical exegesis in that he likens the mystery of the translation to such Old Testament miracles as the parting of the Red Sea. The illustrations of certain pilgrimage texts pictorially employ a similar comparison between Old Testament symbols and the translation of the Holy House. In an illustration from an early seventeenth-century edition of Louis Richeome's guide, for example, the Virgin and her relic are visually equated with the Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant and Jacob's ladder, all of which are narrative treatments of the flight from turpitude (see figure 12).<sup>33</sup> The reference to the Ark of the Covenant is particularly significant in this context as it was also considered a literary metaphor for the Virgin herself as the *Templum Dei* of the Christian faith.<sup>34</sup> Ricci additionally eliminates all traces of Teramano's localism, transferring the geographical emphasis of the legend from Recanati to the entire Italian peninsula. The Virgin leaves Dalmatia, Ricci writes, because she feels like "una estranea" and desires instead to be with her own people, "miei italiani".<sup>35</sup> In this way, the Papacy—through Ricci's account—successfully circumvents

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<sup>32</sup> Ricci, translated in Santarelli, 117.

<sup>33</sup> Regarding Louis Richeome, see note 1 above.

<sup>34</sup> William Barcham, "Giambattista Tiepolo's Ceiling for S. Maria da Nazareth in Venice: Legend, Traditions, and Devotions," *The Art Bulletin* 61, no. 3 (Sep 1979): 442.

<sup>35</sup> Ricci, translated in Santarelli, 119.

the local claim to proprietorship that had been a principal motive of Teramano's narrative, confirming instead the universal importance of the Christian shrine. According to Ricci, the Virgin had chosen not Recanati as her new Nazareth, but rather Italy, the seat of Christ's vicarage on Earth and where all sacred things are at home ("le cose sacre abiano nelle regioni italiane una naturale sede").<sup>36</sup> Just as the *Santa Casa* signified the incarnation of Christ, and hence the rebirth of humankind, so did its presence in Italy signal a rebirth of the origins of Christianity within the Western world. Such a treasure could certainly not be left to local religious authorities; the *camera* was a symbol of Christianity itself, and must therefore pertain directly to the universal authority of the Pope himself.

Even within the edifying and exegetical structure of Ricci's text, there does remain an underlying emphasis on popular devotional practice. In the preamble, the author defines the act of writing as itself an ex-voto, his fulfillment of a promise made to the Virgin of Loreto in exchange for divine favor:

Fate voti al Signore Dio vostro e adempiteli. Poiché la precedente estate, al sorgere di Sirio, a causa di un'eccessiva equitazione fui colpito da una non lieve malattia che mi assalì con dolori estremi, al punto che mi sembrava di aver perso i sensi e la conoscenza, dal momento che la medicina non era stata in grado di eliminare tali e tanti improvvisi dolori, e poiché le membra indebolite erano acerbissimamente tormentate per lungo tempo, ero costretto a emettere continuamente alte grida fino al cielo. Ma mentre un giorno restavo così, gridando mi venne da pensare: se facessi voto alla Vergine Maria, denominata Loreta, potrebbe capitare che io ne esca salvo. Per la qual cosa, se mi fosse stata concessa la salute, proposi di scrivere esattamente e distesamente, secondo le forze, la verità della storia della stessa, la quale per certo (come ritengo) è nota a pochi in questa nostra provincia. Molti infatti vanno dicendo molte cose in proposito, ma pochi sanno come effettivamente sta la realtà. Dopo che espressi con parole il mio proposito, subito percepii la presenza della potenza divina, il

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 143.



cui aiuto avevo invocato: ecco la malattia farsi debole, le forze che avevo del tutto perso a cause dell'eccessiva spossatezza delle membra, ritornano, e poco dopo cominciai a riavermi.<sup>37</sup>

Ricci introduces his history, then, by emphasizing that (1) it is important both to make and keep votive promises to God; (2) urgent appeals for mercy will not go unanswered; (3) the history of the Virgin of Loreto is largely unknown or misunderstood; (4) Ricci's history promises to be a "truthful history"; (5) the Virgin herself desired to have her story known and therefore restored the author's health to enable him to write it; and (6) the Virgin sanctions Ricci's history as truthful. This votive framework not only encourages pilgrimage and devotion to the Virgin of Loreto, but it also masterfully establishes the veracity of the account to follow. Instead of relying solely on local oral testimony to legitimize the truth of his text, as does Teramano, Ricci claims direct endorsement from the Virgin herself. Moreover, he suggests the universal accessibility of the Virgin of Loreto by confirming that her favor extends to all who seek it—even those yet unfamiliar with her history. To conclude this discourse on the importance of the votive act, Ricci repeats the line with which he began: "Fate voti al Signore Dio vostro e adempiteli," an Old Testament citation from Psalm 75, and follows with a citation from Saint Augustine on the importance of fulfilling votive promises.<sup>38</sup> In this way, Ricci reaffirms the scriptural and patristic basis of his text and appropriates the pious legend of Teramano under the auspices of doctrinal authority.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 104.

The respective texts of Teramano and Ricci evince the dialectical nature of the Loretan problem: an ongoing tension between legend or popular devotion on the one hand and doctrinal substantiation on the other permeates the literary and artistic identity of the shrine. While this conflict is certainly not unique to Loreto within the Catholic tradition, there seems to emerge a particularly successful fusion of legend and history within the Loretan iconography. Beginning in the last decades of the fifteenth century—that is, after the publication of Teramano and Ricci’s narrative accounts—there is a perceptible shift in both the style and subject of imagery related to the shrine. The iconic function of earlier works (which principally depict the Virgin of Loreto) is now secondary to a didactic one (which foregrounds the translation of the house as an essential component of Loretan religiosity). One sixteenth-century print describes the translation both visually and textually, dedicating the entire lower register of the composition to a detailed description of the events first relayed by Teramano (see figure 13). At the lower right of the print, an instructive key identifies the various stages of the translation, which correspond to accompanying indicators in the image above. Each entry simultaneously identifies both a visual representation and a textual description of one stage of the translation itinerary. Images like this one force the viewer to read through a didactic lens, sustaining the veracity of the origins of the relic as well as of its extended narrative. Just as Ricci presents his own account as a “history” of the translation, sixteenth-century artists deploy visual and textual signifiers within a historicizing structure. In addition, the text accompanying the painting begins, as Ricci’s narrative does, with a description of the Annunciation, intertwining sanctioned biblical

history with the popular legend of the *Santa Casa*; both thus establish a specific theological climate within which to interpret the miraculous nature of the event. In this way, moreover, the legend of the translation becomes a visual and literary extension of a canonical biblical narrative.

The circulation of such documentary-style prints reinforced the legend as historical, instructing viewers both on the events of the translation and on its place within ongoing Christian history. Perhaps Teramano's story of the *notabili*, who traveled to Nazareth to verify the dimensions of the relic, enjoyed such short-lived popularity within the Loretan iconographical tradition because there was no longer any need to "verify" the relic's provenance: by the last two decades of the fifteenth century its identity as the Holy House of Nazareth was solidified and successfully transferred to the protection of Christ's vicar in Rome. If the first translation occurred in 1291, the legendary date that both Teramano and Ricci uphold as the initial moment of the relic's departure from Nazareth, the narratives of the 1470s can be described as representing a second, theoretical, translation. That is, in consolidating the importance of the relic as the house of the Virgin Mary, Teramano and Ricci successfully "translated" the relic, Teramano in terms of local and Ricci in terms of universal, identity. It is perhaps not surprising that no written accounts of the translation surface prior to the 1470s, given the intensity of the historical moment in which they did emerge: when the religious and political foothold of the Papacy in the Holy Land was lost. In identifying the nature of the church at Loreto as part of this same Eastern landscape, the translation narratives compensate this loss,

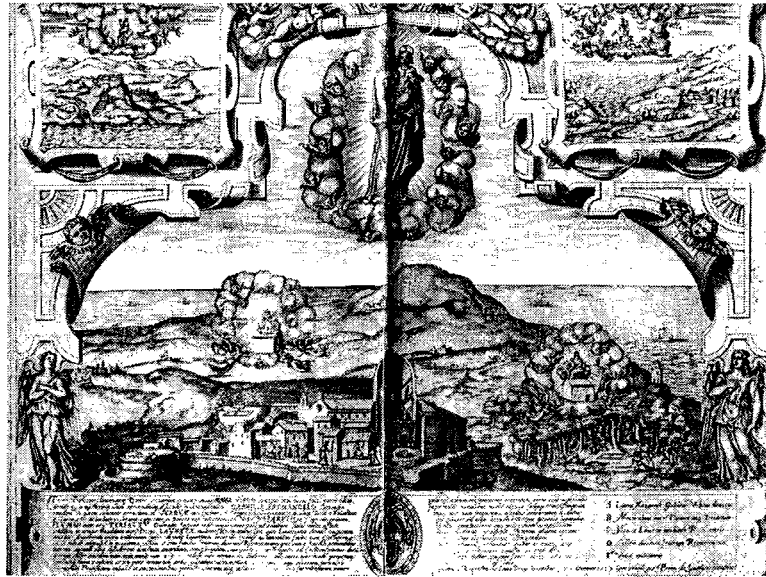


Figure 13. Devotional Print Depicting the *Translation*, 1570.

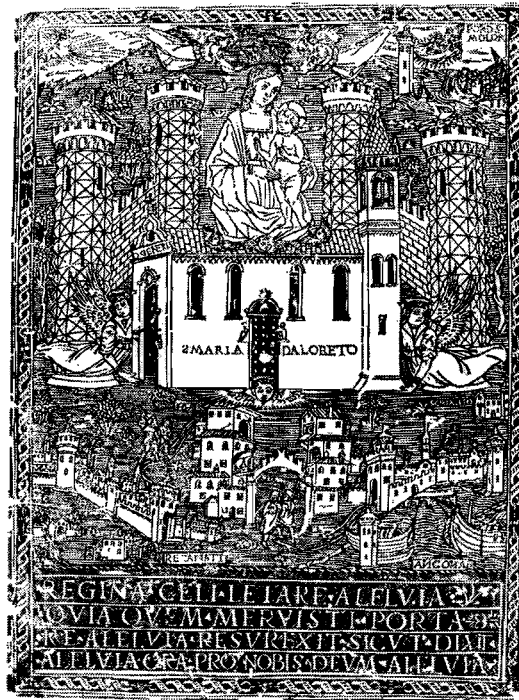


Figure 14. Devotional Print with Fortifications, Late Fifteenth Century.

simultaneously assuring a continued and tangible connection to the origins of Christianity.

CHAPTER III  
 THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO:  
 IMPORTATION OF SACRED SPACE AND IDENTITY IN THE EARLY  
 RENAISSANCE CHAPEL

The symbolic shifting of power from Recanati to Rome, achieved in part through Ricci's fashioning of the translation story, was administratively reinforced in 1476 when Pope Sixtus IV elected his cardinal nephew Girolamo Basso della Rovere to the bishopric of Recanati. This strategic papal move subverted the power of the local diocese, allowing the Pope to further reinforce the spiritual and political connection between Rome and its Loretan outpost.<sup>39</sup> Basso della Rovere, through his building and artistic campaign, would prove a critical figure in the establishment of curial authority at Loreto, as well as in the identification of the shrine as a new Nazareth and "capitale mistica" of Christianity.<sup>40</sup>

Robert Ousterhout, in a study on the replication of sacred architecture within a civic context, describes the medieval phenomenon of traveling objects—such as ampullae, flasks, relics, images or even narrative descriptions—in terms of "topographical transfer," by which "the myriad spiritual associations of one location could be made mystically present in a new setting."<sup>41</sup> Pilgrimage paraphernalia allowed the memory of place and ritual to be extended into the everyday realm, functioning as portable signifiers of sacred identity and experience. The tangibility of such objects, as

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<sup>39</sup> Scaraffia, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Grimaldi, *La Chiesa di Santa Maria di Loreto*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Ousterhout, "Flexible Geography and Transportable Topography," *Jewish Art* 23-24 (1997-98): 402.

well as their association with the memory of sacred place, allowed them to function as a kind of portal, collapsing the temporal and spatial divide between holy and mundane. Such items were an essential part of the ritual experience of Holy Land pilgrimage, as much as the architectural settings built to house and glorify the sacred spaces and objects of the Palestinian landscape. It is not uncommon, in fact, to find anachronistic pairings of object and architecture on pilgrimage tokens, as visible on the ampulla from the Holy Sepulcher cited above, in which a scriptural reference to the Resurrection of Christ is conflated with contemporary architectural details of the shrine.<sup>42</sup> In the economy of sacred ritual, it would seem that historical accuracy is significantly less meaningful than the memory of lived experience. That which defined meaning for pilgrims was rather the tangible nature of place, the ability to “see and touch the places where Christ was present in the body.”<sup>43</sup>

Several medieval pilgrimage narratives foreground a similar connection between ritual, memory and sacred place. The so-called Bordeaux Pilgrim, for example, in a sixth-century pilgrimage journal, describes the Palestinian landscape as a physical projection of scriptural narrative:

Inside Sion, within the wall, you can see where David had his palace...As you leave and pass through the wall of Sion, towards the Gate of Neapolis, down in the valley on your right you have some walls where Pontius Pilate had his house...On your left is the hillock Golgotha where the Lord was crucified, and

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<sup>42</sup> For a study on architecture of the Holy Land as it appears on pilgrimage tokens, see Robert Ousterhout, “Architecture as Relic and the Construction of Sanctity: The Stones of the Holy Sepulchre,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (2003): 4-23.

<sup>43</sup> From Paulinus of Nola in *Epistles* 49: 402; quoted in Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16.

about a stone's throw from it the vault where they laid his body, and he rose again on the third day.<sup>44</sup>

In this account, the Bordeaux Pilgrim perceives the topographical features of place as testimony of the events relayed in scripture, thereby mapping biblical history onto the surrounding landscape. Moreover, the act of witnessing the holy places described in the Christological narratives empirically reinforces their historical and theological truth. Certainly, the hope of beholding the places of Christ also led to the fabrication of holy sites, a result of projecting scriptural references onto existing topography, regardless of authenticity.<sup>45</sup> As pilgrimage to the Holy Land escalated in the Middle Ages, so did the number of architectural monuments celebrating the life of Christ, including shrines or churches built both to house sacred relics and to accommodate the increasing number of visitors. Soon the historical events and settings were synonymous with their contemporary recreations and the shifting architecture of the Holy Land became part and parcel of the experience—and memory—of the spiritual journey.

By the 1470s, the idea that architecture could both validate place and shape ritual experience was well established through the Holy Land model. Whether any pope truly believed that the little chapel in Loreto was actually the Holy House of the Virgin Mary, or that it had been miraculously transferred there by angels, is irrelevant to the scope of this investigation; what the Curia did know was that the relic provided a spiritual and symbolical transfer of sacrality precisely when “the Holy Land has been so utterly

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<sup>44</sup> From *The Journal of the Bordeaux Pilgrim* (592-94), quoted in Coleman and Elsner, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



lost...that now no one so much thinks about recovering it, and there is no longer any way to recover it, unless it should please God.”<sup>46</sup> With the holy places slipping out of reach, the relic at Loreto—quickly gaining fame as the chamber of the Virgin—legitimized the Western Church as rightful custodian of a representative portion of the Holy Land, transferred from Palestine to Italy. The translation of the relic, then, also assured a transfer of sacred memory: the places of Christ would not be lost to the collective consciousness but rather reborn to a new generation of devotees in the West. It is significant that in 1489 Cardinal Basso della Rovere called the Carmelite Order to Loreto, charging them with the maintenance of the shrine. According to several fifteenth- and sixteenth-century legends, the Carmelites had also been guardians of the relic previously, when it still occupied the Holy Land in the time of Christ.<sup>47</sup> Whatever his motive in bringing them to Loreto, by doing so Basso della Rovere further solidified the image of Loreto as a new Nazareth.

Cardinal Basso della Rovere, who gained administrative custody of the shrine at the heightened moment of political tension in the East, must have recognized a need to assimilate the relic more permanently into its surroundings, as he immediately began to accelerate the building program for the new basilica, which had begun in 1470.<sup>48</sup> A decade later, the imminent threat of Turkish assault—a fear fueled by the Ottoman

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<sup>46</sup> From the memoirs of Friar Felix Fabri, who journeyed twice to Jerusalem in the early 1480s; quoted in Bernard Hamilton, “The Ottomans, the Humanists and the Holy House of Loreto,” *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 17: 11.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, Orazio Torsellino, *The History of our Blessed Lady of Loreto*, translated into English in 1608. Edited by D.M. Rogers, (London: Scolar Press, 1976), 140.

<sup>48</sup> Arnaldo Bruschi, “Loreto: città santuario e cantiere artistico,” in Citterio and Vaccaro, eds. *Loreto: Crocevia religioso tra Italia, Europa e Oriente*, 455.

occupation of Otranto in 1480—led to fortification of the basilica and its precious relic. Several images from this period reflect the construction of four lateral towers, which surrounded the sanctuary as part of a fortified enceinte and would have conveyed an imposing sense of impenetrability to approaching ships (see figure 14). The *Santa Casa* had already escaped once from the hands of infidels; now Basso della Rovere feared that Ottoman armies would target the Marches, “especially to attack Santa Maria di Loreto.”<sup>49</sup> In several popular prints depicting the apotropaic powers of the Virgin of Loreto, her ability to “allontanare i Turchi” is a salient and recurring theme (as in figure 9). As Bernard Hamilton notes, the Turkish threat spurred a fierce defensiveness on the part of the Curia, whose failed crusade campaign could now be directed toward protecting the Holy House.<sup>50</sup> If the Christian West could not claim the recovery of the Holy Land, it could at least boast of defending a symbolic microcosm of the East in the form of the Virgin’s relic. A printed image from a late sixteenth-century history of the site depicts a group of pilgrims approaching the basilica and waving the standards of the holy crusaders (see figure 15). Such imagery reaffirms the role of the *Santa Casa* as a newfound emblem of crusade and pilgrimage activity after the fall of Constantinople.

Not only the exterior fortification of the site occupied Cardinal Basso della Rovere in the 1480s, but also the interior decoration of the basilica. A true humanist, he directed his energies toward safeguarding the aesthetic wealth of the sanctuary in addition

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<sup>49</sup> Girolamo Basso della Rovere in a letter dated March 28, 1485 to Domenico dell’Anguillara, his representative at Loreto, expresses his ongoing concern for a Turkish threat at Loreto, and orders that all efforts should be made to resist an attack; quoted in Eva Renzulli, “Loreto, Leo X and the Fortifications on the Adriatic Coast,” *Italy and the European Powers: The Impact of War, 1500-1530* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 64.

<sup>50</sup> Hamilton, 17: 11.

to defending its financial and spiritual prosperity. His major concern was the decoration of the four small transept chapels surrounding the *Santa Casa*, which he commissioned sometime between 1479 and 1489.<sup>51</sup> When considered independently of the political history of the site, as is so often the case, the pictorial cycle of the transept chapels seems perplexingly digressive in a church dedicated to the most important relic of the Virgin Mary. There is, after all, no reference to either the Virgin or the *Santa Casa*. However, viewed in the political context of the late fifteenth century, when the Church was concerned first with confirming its administrative authority at Loreto as well as abroad, second with affirming the sacred provenance of the relic, and finally, with transferring the memory and experience of Holy Land pilgrimage to the West, Basso della Rovere's iconographic aspirations seem an apt and timely initiative.

Positioned at the crossing angles of the transept, the four chapels encircle the main altar where the relic of the Holy House is located (see figure 16). The space around the altar accommodated pilgrims as they circumambulated the house while also providing access to the surrounding chapels. In close proximity to the relic itself, the chapels were an essential feature of the ritual experience at Loreto. However, those of Saints Mark and John were the only two to receive their projected artistic treatments in the 1480s. Whether for lack of financial resources or otherwise, the chapels reserved for Saints Luke and Matthew remained undecorated at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The work of

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<sup>51</sup> For more information concerning the difficulty in dating the activity of Melozzo da Forlì and Luca Signorelli at Loreto, see Giuseppe Santarelli, *L'Arte a Loreto* (Ancona: Anibaldi Grafiche, 2001), 120; 132.



Figure 15. Illustration from *Sancta Maria de Loreto*, 1589.

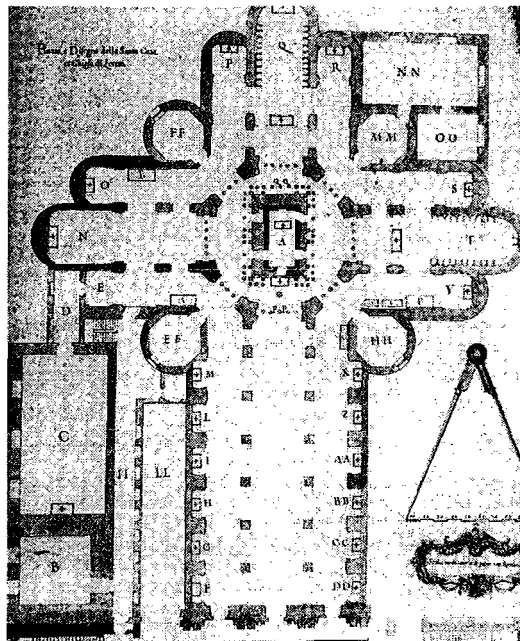


Figure 16. Plan of the Basilica of Santa Maria di Loreto, Archivio Storico della Santa Casa.



Figure 17. Melozzo da Forlì, Chapel of Saint Mark, 1479-89 ca.



Figure 18. Melozzo da Forlì, *Entry into Jerusalem*, Chapel of Saint Mark, 1479-89 ca.

Melozzo da Forlì in the chapel of Saint Mark is distinguished by a breathtaking manipulation of jewel-toned color and architectonic harmony. The artist evokes, across the eight-sided interior of the chapel, a panoramic illusion of landscape and architectural detail; through a series of fictitious colonnades, the viewer was intended to gaze at naturalistic vignettes of the Holy Land beyond (see figure 17). The apex of the cupola bears the arms of Cardinal Basso della Rovere while the base is inscribed with eight Old Testament prophets, who are in turn surmounted by angels bearing the instruments of Christ's Passion; the lower register of the chapel remains incomplete.<sup>53</sup> Each of the eight bays was to represent a narrative from the cycle of Christ's Passion—as corresponding to the *arma Christi* represented above—though only the *Entry into Jerusalem* was fully realized (see figure 18). Here, the illusory base of the architrave recedes into the painted landscape, projecting the viewer across time and space to witness the last days of Christ's life on Earth. The Apostles in the foreground gaze directly outward, an act that denies the limitations of the painted surface and invites the viewer to transcend the division between real and illusionary space. In the background, the architectural skyline of Jerusalem delineates the horizon. Here, then, is the same opportunity afforded the Bordeaux pilgrim on his journey to the Holy Land: to visualize scriptural narrative set against the topographical features of the Eastern landscape. Just as the *Santa Casa* acted

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<sup>52</sup> A few theories have emerged regarding the intended pictorial cycles for the unfinished chapels. The most widely acknowledged is that of Gloria Kury, who suggests that the Saint Luke chapel would have illustrated episodes from the infancy of Christ while that of Saint Matthew would have focused on scenes from His ministry. See Gloria Kury, *The Early Work of Luca Signorelli 1465-1490* (New York and London: Garland, 1978), 127-64.

<sup>53</sup> It is uncertain why the lower register of the chapel of Saint Mark was never completed; speculation is complicated by the difficulty in identifying the exact years in which Melozzo da Forlì was employed at Loreto.

as a vehicle of sacred memory, transporting the faithful to the very origins of Christianity, the chapel of Saint Mark similarly performed a ritual transfer. With its panoramic *vedute* of the end of Christ's life, Melozzo da Forlì's pictorial cycle appropriately complements the theme of the Incarnation, as symbolized by the relic of the Holy House. In moving from the relic itself to the chapel of Saint Mark, pilgrims were continuously "translated" to the origins of Christianity to witness the beginning and end of Christ's mortality and to meditate on their own role within Salvation history.

While the Saint Mark chapel recreates the sacred topography of the Holy Land in tandem with the relic, the chapel of Saint John reaffirms the authority of the Western Church in Christian history. Specifically, the frescoes of Luca Signorelli are dedicated to the defense and propagation of the faith after the Resurrection of Christ. Emerging amidst swirling folds of elegant drapery, a chorus of angels lyrically crowns the cupola of the chapel (see figure 19). Just below, the four Evangelists are pictured in contemplative study, interspersed with the early Church Fathers, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory and Ambrose, who are equally engaged in reading and writing. The lower register is composed of seven pictorial sections, which include five pairs of Apostles who animatedly discuss scriptural passages, and two narrative scenes dedicated to *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* and *The Conversion of Saul* (see figures 20 and 21). By the early Renaissance, the "doubting Thomas" motif was a well-established allegory of the importance of faith in the mysteries of Christ, and its inclusion seems particularly appropriate in a basilica dedicated to a relic of miraculous origins. The adjacent composition expertly mimics the scene of the *Incredulity*: one Apostle looks on

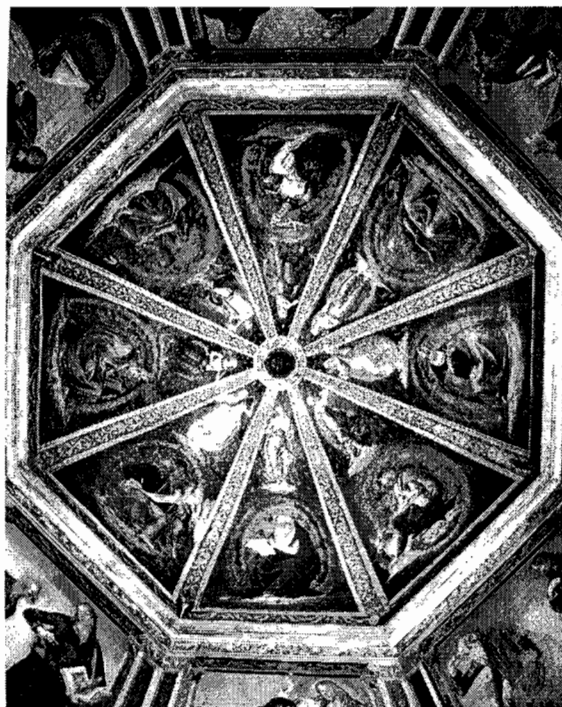


Figure 19. Melozzo da Forlì, Chapel of Saint John, 1479-89 ca.



Figure 20. Luca Signorelli, *Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, Chapel of Saint John, 1479-89 ca.





Figure 21. Luca Signorelli, *The Conversion of Saul*, Chapel of Saint John, 1479-89 ca.



Figure 22. Luca Signorelli, *Two Apostles*, Chapel of Saint John, 1479-89 ca.

thoughtfully as another points his attention toward an open book (see figure 22). In the same way that Christ's wound provides proof of His Resurrection for Thomas, the Holy Scriptures act as a tangible witness to the presence of God, as well as to the role of the Church in disseminating the Christian faith. The Bible, then, can be seen as the signifier, or physical manifestation, of Christ, whereas the signified, the act of Redemption, is visually reinforced in *The Conversion of Saul*. Moreover the message of having faith in the "incredulity" of the divine mysteries would have extended to the miraculous legend of the site's main relic.

Located above the doorway to the chapel, the *Conversion* is the only scene that interrupts the compositional similitude—that is, of two figures set within an architecturally delineated space—of the lower register, lending it a stylistic as well as spatial distinction. Saul of Tarsus, who became known as the apostle Paul after his conversion, had been a zealous persecutor of Christians, oppressing the church of Jerusalem and its followers "to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison."<sup>54</sup> One day, on the road to Damascus, Saul perceived a great, blinding light and a divine voice ordering that he redeem his sinful life in the service of the Lord. Theologically, his conversion to Christianity bespeaks the possibility of redemption through faith and service to God. In the context of the late fifteenth century, Saul would have served a diametrical function: both as the archetypal infidel (he who seeks to eradicate Christianity), and as the faithful pilgrim who, (like those who journey to Loreto), seeks absolution for his sins. In the niche opposite the entrance to the chapel,

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<sup>54</sup> Paul recounts his conversion story in *Acts* 22:3-12.

a small window casts natural light both on the conversion scene, materially furnishing the divine light described in the narrative, and on the viewer who stands just below. In this way, there is a consolidation of past and present, “real” and mimetic, as the viewer simultaneously perceives the light of Christ. Moreover, the scene of the *Conversion*, like that of the *Incredulity*, becomes a visual manifestation of the scriptural narratives, which the Apostles consult and discuss throughout the lower register. There is, then, as in the chapel of Saint Mark, a condensing of time and space—as well as of word and image—by which the present moment is transposed into early Christian history: it is a numinous moment, possible only upon entering the enclosed space of the chapel. In this way, the chapel performs a thaumaturgic function similar to that of the Holy House, as an architectural space in which the word is materialized as flesh. In the chapel of Saint John, the miracle of the *Santa Casa*—that is, the ability to recreate the mystery of the Incarnation—is ideologically framed by biblical exegesis. Read vertically, moreover, the Church Fathers and Evangelists of the central register should be construed as compositionally mediating the empyrean and terrestrial realms, thereby facilitating the sacred encounter. Less than a decade after Teramano and Ricci’s accounts of the translation, it would have been impractical to memorialize the still inchoate legend on the new walls of the basilica. Instead, Basso della Rovere aimed to provide an authoritative scriptural and theological context in which to view and interpret the mystery of the *Santa Casa* at Loreto.

Surrounding the relic at its four corners, the chapels are an essential part of the sacred landscape that defines the experience of the divine at Loreto. As an architectural

extension of the house itself, they necessarily reinforce the experience of being “translated” to the origins of Christianity, as in the chapel of Saint Mark. The four Evangelists stand, moreover, as “witnesses” to the divine mysteries; in circumscribing the relic of the Holy House, they attest to its authenticity as well as to its predestined role in symbolizing the Catholic faith. A sixteenth-century pilgrimage souvenir print seems to reinforce a similar theological concept (see figure 23). Moreover, the longstanding debate between local and curial authorities over the proper jurisdiction of the *Santa Casa* prompted the need for a decorative program that would reinforce the universal authority of the Church, not only at Loreto but also in the East, where Saul-like enemies threatened the foundational sites of the Christian faith. Alternating images of the Evangelists and Church Fathers in the chapel of Saint John succinctly affirm the essential role of the Church in both East and West, past and present, straddling the geographical and historical divide between the two main poles of Christianity. Just as the Bordeaux Pilgrim affirms that “witnessing” the scriptural topography lends spiritual and historical accuracy to the biblical narratives, Basso della Rovere effects a similar contextualization of the relic of the Holy House within the geography of sacred and curial authority.



Figure 23. Devotional Image of the Holy House with the Four Evangelists, Sixteenth Century.

CHAPTER IV  
 THE REFORMATION AND THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO:  
 ARTISTIC IMPORTATION AND DEVOTIONAL EXPORTATION IN THE  
 RENAISSANCE RIVESTIMENTO

The seemingly indomitable force of the Ottoman Empire was of course not the only threat that menaced Catholicism in the early sixteenth century. A much closer peril, one that endangered the ecumenical soundness of the Western world, threatening to divide Christendom and its united forces from within, emerged in the Protestant movement, which was intent on doctrinal and practical reform. Among their many critiques of Church practice, Lutheran reformists identified the flourishing cult of Mary as a particularly dangerous theological abuse in need of eradication. The devotional shift of the role of the Virgin Mary in the late Middle Ages from the more passive *Theotokos* to that of beloved divine *Mediatrix* was largely due to the perception of the Mother of God as a merciful and compassionate champion of the cause of human salvation. As Queen of Heaven, Mary is afforded the privilege of direct intercession with her son, thus cooperating in a shared responsibility of salvation, in which her own *miser cordia* often palliates the harsh retribution of Christ's justice. For devotees, the Virgin Mary embodied "*fiducia* and hope of the world, [for] she represents love and pity."<sup>55</sup> As Beth Kreitzer observes, the singing of the Marian hymn *Salve Regina*, which identifies the Virgin as the "life, sweetness, and comfort" of her followers, had become a regular

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<sup>55</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, quoted in Beth Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary: Changing Images of the Virgin Mary in Lutheran Sermons of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 15.

liturgical as well as popular devotional practice by the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>56</sup> Hymns were an essential component of popular Marian devotion, as reflected in the rise of the *Ave Maria*, which cited the words of the angelic salutation from the biblical account of the Annunciation. The connection between popular piety and the theme of the *Ave Maria* had particular resonance at Loreto, where the *Santa Casa* provided access to the physical site of the mystery of the Incarnation. A fifteenth-century iron pilgrimage badge from Loreto underscores the importance of this relationship in early Renaissance pilgrimage culture (see figure 24). The peripheral script, which reads “Ave Maria gratia plena,” circumscribes a central figural group dominated by the image of the Virgin of Loreto under a baldachin and flanked by two angels. It is interesting to note the iconographic development in later pilgrimage badges, which after the texts of Teramano and Ricci, favor an image of the Virgin together with her *sacello* (see figure 25). Moreover, the controversial use of “gratia plena” is later changed to “ora pro nobis,” reflecting Post-Tridentine doctrine that privileged the Virgin as intercessor.

Lutherans were particularly severe in their condemnation of the Pope and other clergy, accusing them of idolatrous exaltation of the Mother of God. As certain reformist sermons argued, the primary Catholic justification for Mary worship stems from the interpretation of the meaning of the angel’s salutation in the Annunciation text. Lutheran reformist Johannes Heune, in a sermon on the theme of the Annunciation, laments the fate of those who have decided that “[since] Mary is full of grace...they ought to call upon her justly for help, but Mary is not full of Grace...[and] cursed be all those who

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<sup>56</sup> Kreitzer, 33.

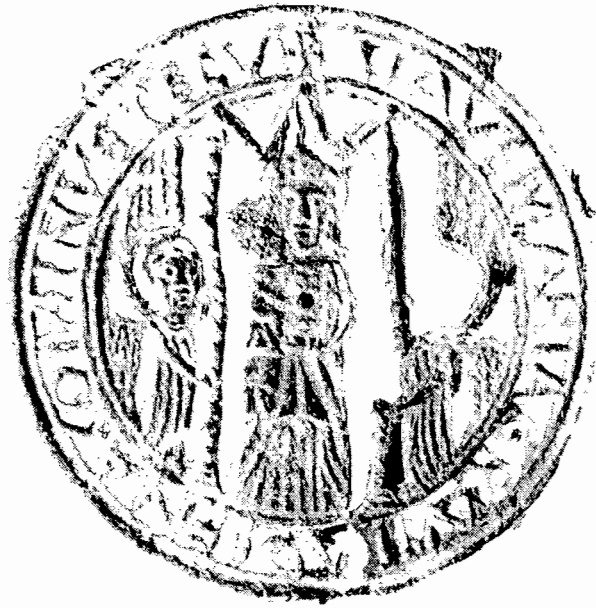


Figure 24. Loreto Pilgrimage Badge, Fifteenth Century.

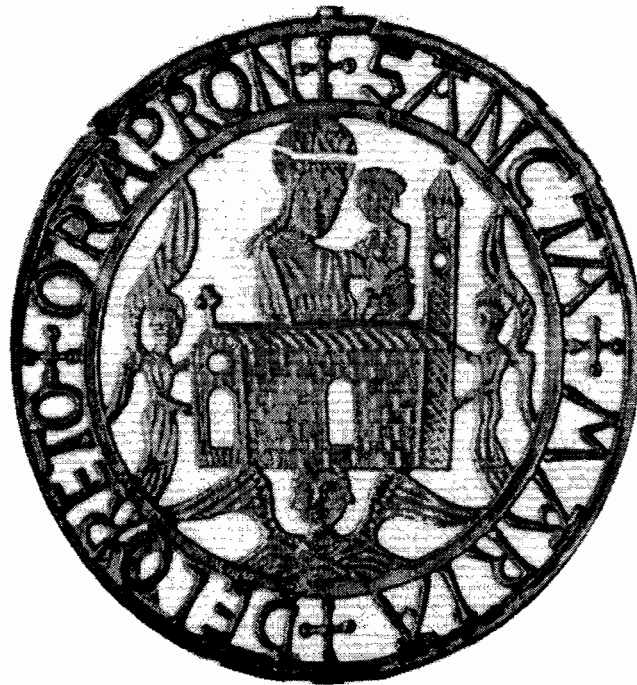


Figure 25. Loreto Pilgrimage Badge, Sixteenth Century.



invoke creatures and falsely interpret the word of God in order to confirm their abominable idolatry, with high contempt for the Son of God, with great insult to the all-holy Virgin Mary, and with certain ruin for their souls' salvation."<sup>57</sup> As the Catholic theological justification for the cult of the Virgin Mary hinged primarily on Gabriel's address, the Annunciation text became a primary theme of contention in the ideological restructuring of religious doctrine during the Reformation.<sup>58</sup> Visual and textual emphasis on the scene of the Annunciation encouraged the commandment-breaking tendency to aggrandize the importance of the Virgin Mary, an error that reformists condemned as detracting from the centrality of Christ in the act of redemption.

Given this intensified climate around the mystery of the Annunciation, it is not surprising that the Holy House of Loreto would enter prominently in the debate, serving the ideological armory of Catholics and Protestants alike. In what was perhaps the most widely read sixteenth-century polemical treatise on the relic of the *Santa Casa*, reformist Pietro Paolo Vergerio il Giovane condemns the popular Mariolatry around the shrine at Loreto.<sup>59</sup> Such idolatry, Vergerio maintains, detracts from the pure evangelical truth that reformists championed as the authentic agent of redemption. He further contests the prodigious origins of the Marian chapel, decrying the lack of historicity that characterizes the account of Teramano's transportation legend. Vergerio further admonishes his

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<sup>57</sup> Kreitzer, 32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-32.

<sup>59</sup> Pietro Paolo Vergerio il Giovane, *Della camera, et statua della Madonna chiamata di Loreto, la quale è stata nuovamente difesa da Fra leandro Alberti Bolognese, e da Papa Giulio III con un solenne privilegio approvata*, first published in 1544.

Catholic contemporaries who propagate such unsubstantiated miracle stories, including Fra Leandro Bolognese who

in un suo libro stampato in Bologna nell'anno 1550 ha tolto a celebrare per cose verissime, catholice [sic] e sante il concorso de popoli alla staoa e a i muri di Loreto, il sangue uscito fuor dall'hostia di Bolsena, gli altari fatti e consecrati per mano di S. Michele Arcangelo sul Monte Gargano e altre simili facende. Et papa Iulio terzo ha tutto ciò approvato e confermato onde ogn'huom potrà far giudicio lui et la sua chiesa Roma esser risoluta di volersi mantenere in tutte le consuete sue superstitioni, buggie, idolatrie, e errori in disprezzo degli huomini e di Dio.<sup>60</sup>

The Pope himself does not escape Vergerio's tirade against the propagation of popular "superstitions" and "lies" that justify and breed Mariolatry at Loreto. Vergerio visually reiterates his textual condemnation of the Loretan cult through the inclusion of imagery that corrects the Catholic iconography associated with the site. One of the illustrations to Vergerio's text displays the *Santa Casa* carried by angels, but with the Virgin removed altogether from the image (see figure 26). In this way, Vergerio echoes Luther's mandate that, due to the myriad dangers associated with the adoration and invocation of the Virgin Mary, "it would be better to leave her out altogether, and concentrate on believing in God."<sup>61</sup> The inclusion of this illustration challenges idolatry by eliminating the idolatrous constituent, but moreover willfully undermines the devotional legend of the translation by ousting Mary at the apogee of the miraculous act piously attributed to her will.

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<sup>60</sup> Grimaldi, *Il libro lauretano: Secoli XV-XVIII* (Loreto: Tecnostampa di Loreto, 1994), 93.

<sup>61</sup> Kreitzer, 30.



Figure 26. Illustration from *De Idolo Lauretano*, Pietro Paolo Vergerio il Giovane, 1554.

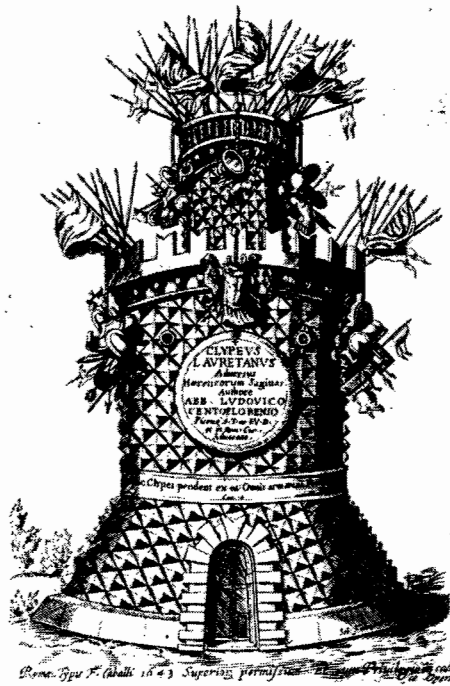


Figure 27. Illustration from *Clipeus Lauretanus*, Ludovico Centofiorini, 1643.

While Luther and his followers focused on anathematizing the idolatrous nature of the cult at Loreto, targeting both the Holy House and the Virgin herself, the Papacy began to reestablish and reinforce the miraculous properties and divine origins of the relic, propagating with renewed vehemence the *Santa Casa's* centrality to both devotion and redemption. The frontispiece of a seventeenth-century apologist treatise illustrates how Catholic reformers continued to privilege the authenticity of the *sacello* as a shield against heretical accusations of idolatry (see figure 27). Here, the relic is physically transformed into a bulwark of Catholic faith, resisting the heretical arrows launched from the Lutheran arsenal. As the attacks increased in advance of the Reformation, in 1507 the *Santa Casa* was officially appropriated directly into the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome, finally transferring its custody entirely from the local Recanatense diocese to the Pope himself.<sup>62</sup> Along with the mandate for custodial reassignment, Pope Julius II issued a bull entitled *In sublimia*, which affirmed—though in cautious terms—the pious belief of the miraculous origins of the relic: “ut pie creditur et fama est.”<sup>63</sup> While the Pope does not explicitly confirm the historical veracity of the legend, his words are a direct reference to Ricci’s *Historia*, the late fifteenth-century text purporting to reveal the true history of the translation legend. In the bull, concessions were also made for papal indulgences to be issued to those visiting the shrine in pilgrimage.

At the time these new classifications were issued, Pope Julius II had already begun to visualize the construction of a much grander Loretan complex, one that would

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<sup>62</sup> Gualtiero da Servigliano, *Loreto nel Cinquecento: Sviluppo del centro sociale* (Loreto: Archivio Storico e Biblioteca della Santa Casa, 1970), 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

befit a Papal Chapel and represent adequately the splendid resources and talents at the disposal of the Church of Rome. In a letter dated November 9, 1507, the pontifical commissary elaborates on the Pope's vision for Loreto: "Le cose di S. Maria sono ad core molto ad N(ostro) S(ignore) et hami detto vole fare li cose magne et presto manderà Bramante per disegnare molte opere che vole fare et resarcire quello bisogna."<sup>64</sup> In 1507 and again in 1509 Bramante went to Loreto by order of the Pope, where he contributed to the continued architectural amplification of the sanctuary; he also conceived the "disegno e ordine"<sup>65</sup> of the *rivestimento*, a decorative marble encasing intended to both preserve and adorn the relic. A papal medal issued in 1509 celebrates Bramante's proposed design for the church's façade, though the project was never fully realized (see figure 28). In 1513, Bramante's design was entrusted to Andrea Sansovino for execution under the patronage of the newly appointed Pope Leo X; in the same year the marble was quarried from Carrara and the *opus divinum* was officially underway.<sup>66</sup> With the contributions of such celebrated artistic minds as Bramante, Sansovino and Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane, who took over the project during its final phase of construction from 1531 to 1538, the *rivestimento* of the *Santa Casa* became a transmute amalgamation of the genius of Papal Rome, exported from the religious and cultural capital of Italy to this geographically peripheral yet theologically central outpost. In tandem with the sculptural

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6; Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, 191.

<sup>65</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite*, IV: 160.

<sup>66</sup> Santarelli notes that this title for the project appears in documentation from the period. See Santarelli, *L'arte a Loreto*, 49.



Figure 28. Papal Medal with Bramante's Design for the Basilica of Santa Maria di Loreto, 1509.



Figure 29. Central Nave of the Basilica of Santa Maria di Loreto.

project of the marble investiture, Rome lent the painterly talents of Luca Signorelli, Melozzo da Forlì and Lorenzo Lotto to the completion of the comprehensive pictorial program of the sanctuary. The overall effect was one in which the singular achievements of master artists were eclipsed by a greater sense of artistic importance, a fused ornamental program that stood in aesthetic tribute to the prominent connection between Loreto and the papal splendor and triumph of Rome. The centripetal force of Rome's activity at Loreto, then, solidified the shrine as one of the most important pilgrimage centers in the Western world at a time when European religious reform threatened to undermine Catholic authority.

When Martin Luther's theses finally exploded the theological safety net of the Catholic Church a mere decade after the *Santa Casa* had been newly elevated to the status of Papal Chapel, Rome did not halt its current building program. Despite the pressure of Reformist denunciation regarding the cult of the Virgin Mary, Pope Leo X countered Reformist attacks in 1520 by escalating the spiritual significance of the shrine, declaring pilgrimage vows fulfilled at Loreto as equal to those fulfilled at the holy sites of Palestine, Rome and Compostela.<sup>67</sup> From this papal decree emerged a new tripartite European pilgrimage itinerary (Loreto-Rome-Compostela), which dominated the devotional and penitential itinerary of the sixteenth-century pilgrim. Along with the Apostles Peter and Paul celebrated in Rome, and Saint James venerated at Compostela, the Virgin of Loreto assumed a new and heightened significance in the role of redemption and salvation. The new marble investiture, then, as the decorative casing of the principle

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<sup>67</sup> Floriano Grimaldi and Katy Sordi, *L'Ornamento Marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto* (Loreto: Tecnostampa di Loreto, 1999), 14.

monument at Loreto, needed to visually and theologically reiterate Mary's essential place in salvation history, to celebrate and heighten her mediatory function in the ritual of pilgrimage and in the redemption of mankind. It needed to theatrically present both the relic and its history of translation, thus inspiring devotion to the Mother of God. As the principal focus of pilgrimage, the *Santa Casa* warranted a magnificent presentation, which according to Vasari's description, the *rivestimento* successfully achieved:

Quel santissimo luogo, che fu proprio casa ed abitazione della Madre del Figliuolo di Dio, non poteva, quanto al mondo, ricevere maggiore né più ricco ornamento di quello che egli ebbe dall'architettura del Bramante e dalle sculture di Andrea Sansovino, come che, se tutto fosse delle più preziose gemme orientali, non sarebbe se non poco più che nulla a tanti meriti.<sup>68</sup>

The view of the *sacello* upon entering the Church of Loreto is undoubtedly an impressive one. Carefully angled so that the western wall aligns to face the central nave, the marble decor hails those who enter the sacred space, appropriately mimicking Gabriel's salutation in the scene of the *Annunciation* depicted there (see figure 29). Legend maintained that it was through the window of the west wall that Gabriel entered Mary's chamber and through which God realized the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>69</sup> Hence the architectural tangibility of the house dictates the design of the decorative cycle and underscores the miraculous event that took place there. The positioning of the *Annunciation* scene directly above the window conflates the real and the mimetic, materializing pictorial illusion; it was here, after all, that "Verbum caro factum est" (see

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<sup>68</sup> Vasari, IV: 519.

<sup>69</sup> Grimaldi, *La Historia della Chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, 147.



figure 30). Moreover, it is the moment of the Incarnation that represents the possibility of human redemption through Christ; featuring the scene of the Annunciation above the high altar is thus highly significant not only to the liturgical rite of the Eucharist, but also as a herald to pilgrims. The image of the *Annunciation* at the Holy House of Loreto was a reminder to the faithful that salvation was not only possible through Christ thanks to the miracle of the Incarnation that occurred there, but that they were closer to atonement as a result of the devotional rite of pilgrimage. Their journey had, in a sense, been Christ's own in reverse, a symbolic washing away of one's sins fully realized at the site of His inception. Moreover, Sansovino focuses the scene of the *Annunciation* on the narrative moment just before the light of the Holy Spirit enters the Virgin's chamber, that is, immediately prior to the Incarnation of Christ. As Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt has noted, this artistic decision harnesses the dramatic tension of the scene, maintaining a perennial dynamism, whereby each viewer—in entering the house of the Virgin—newly experiences the moment of human salvation.<sup>70</sup> This sense of prolonging the moment of the Incarnation is a central tenet of the Eucharist itself and, beginning in the early seventeenth century, the Host administered as part of the liturgical rite at Loreto was actually imprinted with the traditional iconography of the Virgin and her house (see figure 31).<sup>71</sup>

At the opposite end of the *sacello* from the *Annunciation*, the *Dormition*, or the Assumption of the Virgin, concludes the cycle of Mary's life (figure 32). Thus, the two

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<sup>70</sup> Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "I marmi del sacello: oltre settant'anni per il rivestimento," *Il Santuario di Loreto: sette secoli di storia arte devozione*, ed. Grimaldi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1994), 47.

<sup>71</sup> Grimaldi, *Il sacello della Santa Casa*, 282.



Figure 30. Andrea Sansovino, *Annunciation*, Holy House of Loreto, 1518-1522.

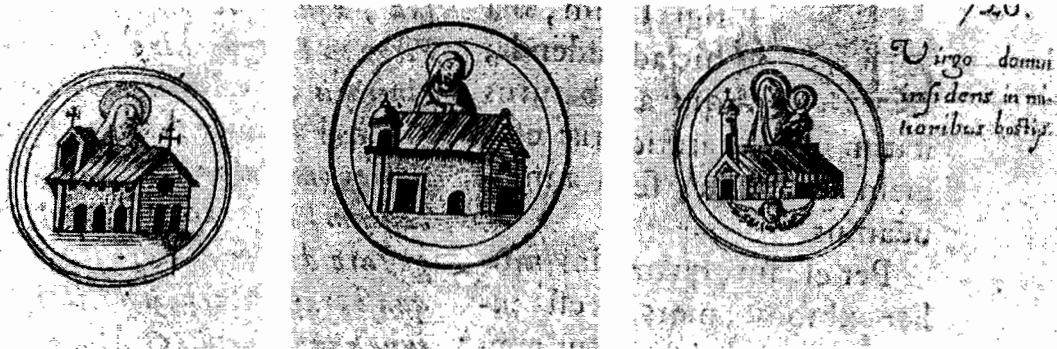


Figure 31. Printed Design for the Impression of the Sacramental Host, Seventeenth Century.

scenes act as theological bookends (the *Annunciation* as a beginning and the *Dormition* as an end) in the story of human hope for redemption. Through her faith in God, Mary, from the moment of the Incarnation, is awarded a place alongside her son in Heaven. Not only does the birth of Christ make redemption possible, it is specifically Mary's example of purity and faithfulness that allow her to triumph over sin and death. It is significant that the *Dormition* of the Virgin concludes the pictorial cycle of her life on the marble investiture, not only as the last moment of Mary's mortal life, but also as a symbolic reminder of the spiritual objective of following her human example. Mary's ultimate reward of immortality is exactly that which devotees seek through pilgrimage. At a cataclysmic moment for Catholicism, Mary's example of unwavering faithfulness to God through the mystery of the Incarnation was an ideal message for mass communication. In addition, the medieval doctrine of the Assumption posited that Mary's corporeal form left no earthly vestige. Medieval pilgrims, longing for sacred Marian objects, venerated secondary relics in aim of establishing a tangible connection to the Virgin herself.<sup>72</sup> The scene of the *Dormition*, depicted on one of the few sacred monuments identified as connected to Mary's terrestrial life, would have reinforced the devotional significance and singularity of the *Santa Casa*. Moreover, in order to emphasize the relic status of the Virgin's *sacello*, the form of the marble investiture succinctly recalls certain architectural forms of the medieval reliquary (see figure 33).

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<sup>72</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 82.



Figure 32. Domenico D'Aima, *Dormition*, Holy House of Loreto, 1518-24.

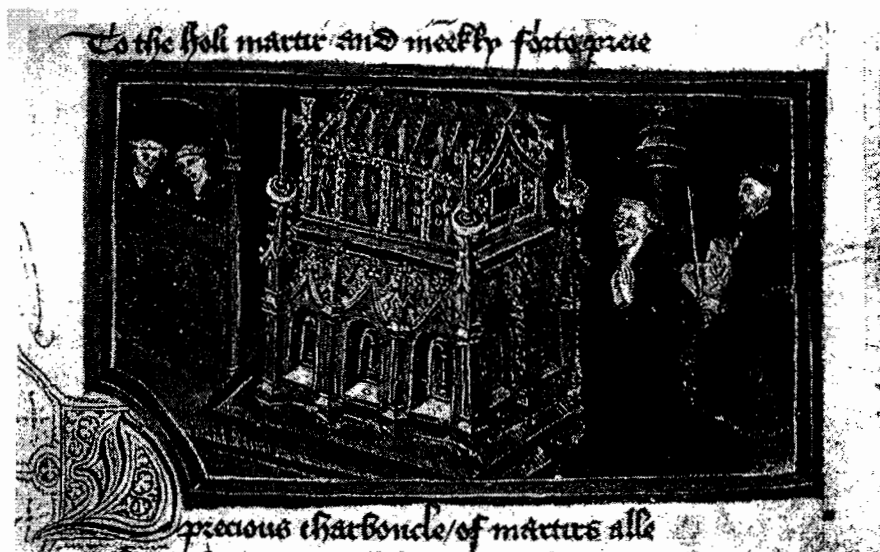


Figure 33. Illustration from *The Lives of St. Edmund and Fremund*, John Lydgate, 1433-34.

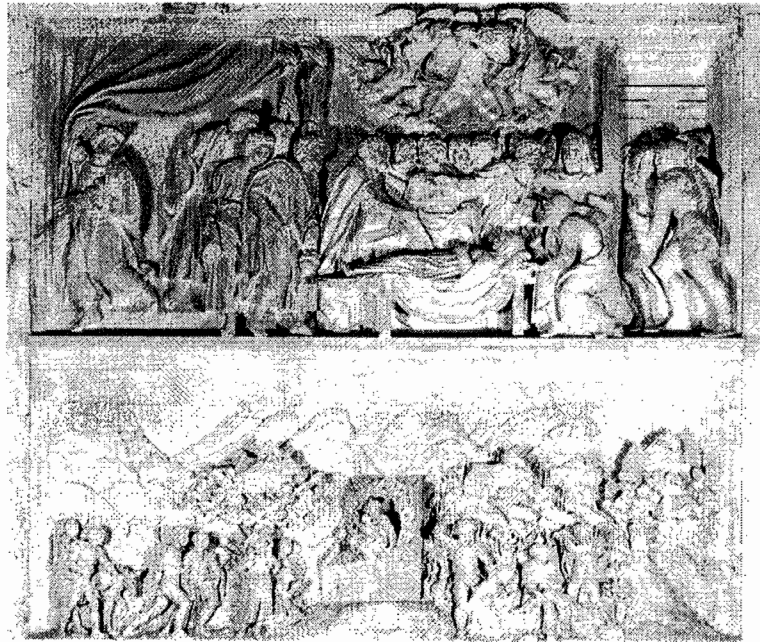


Figure 34. Domenico D'Aima, *Dormition and Translation*, Holy House of Loreto, 1518-24.



Figure 35. Girolamo Lombardo and Tommaso Della Porta, *Prophets and Sibyls*, 1560-78.

Positioned just beneath the scene of the *Dormition* on the *sacello*, the pictorial legend of the translation of the Holy House performs a tandem visual and devotional function (see figure 34). As the concluding image of the entire Marian cycle, the *Translation* of the Loretan relic becomes an apocryphal addition to her story. Its inclusion among the canonical scenes, including the birth and marriage of the Virgin, as well as the *Annunciation* and *Nativity*, systematically integrates the specific legend of the *Santa Casa* into a more universal narrative of Marian doctrine. In the context of pilgrimage, the *Translation* cycle suggests the Virgin's capacity for miraculous intercession: just as she gave birth to Christ the Redeemer, so too will she grant new life to pilgrims who beseech her at Loreto. While the *Dormition* reminds viewers of the triumph of faith over death, the *Translation* demonstrates the Virgin's will to assist that triumph by performing miracles and promulgating faith via the holy relic transported to Italy. Therefore, the undocumented (as Vergerio emphasized) legend of the *Santa Casa* becomes an incontrovertible metaphysical truth, like the mysteries of the Annunciation and the Assumption, integrated into the hagiography of the Virgin Mary. Additionally, the monumental sculptural figures of the Sibyls and Old Testament Prophets that flank the narrative panels of the marble *sacello* iconographically reinforce the Catholic doctrine of predetermination, recalling pre-Christian prophecies of the coming of Christ by way of a Virgin conception (see figure 35).<sup>73</sup> The legend of the translation as pictured on the

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<sup>73</sup> There are a few texts citing which Christological prophecies, associated with the individual Prophets and Sibyls, specifically interested the sculptors at Loreto when planning the decorative program of the marble investiture. See for example, Silvio Serragli, *La Santa Casa abbellita* (1633), Valerio Martorelli, *Teatro storico della Santa Casa* (1732), and Alonso de Villegas, *Nuovo leggendario della vita di Maria Vergine* (1614), partially reproduced in Floriano Grimaldi and Katy Sordi, *L'Ornamento marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto*, 400.

investiture, therefore, not only confirms and celebrates Mary's miraculous powers of intercession, but also suggests the predetermined role that the *Santa Casa* plays in salvation theology. This idea is reinforced in at least one seventeenth-century apologist treatise on the relic at Loreto, in which an image of the translation of the Holy House is pictured proleptically above the Annunciation, suggesting that from the moment of Christ's inception, the peregrinate fate of the Virgin's chamber was already determined (see figure 36). The image moreover underscores the tangible nature of the Marian shrine, verifying the relic at Loreto as the physical site of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Other episodes from the Virgin's life, including the apocryphal narratives of her birth and marriage as well as the scriptural account of the Nativity of the infant Jesus, adorn the length of the marble *sacello* on its north and south facing walls. The entire sculptural cycle of the life of Mary is presented chronologically, but also astutely organizes thematic and compositional connections between pictorial units. Just as the scene of the *Annunciation*, presiding over the main liturgical altar, is balanced by the *Dormition* and *Translation* scenes on the opposite wall, Mary's own birth is mirrored by the nativity of her son, again suggesting divine cause (the barren Anne's miraculous conception of Mary) and effect (the birth of the Savior). Moreover, the accounts of the *Visitation* and *Census*, figured in smaller panels just below that of the *Annunciation*, suggest how Mary's conception prompted her subsequent travel, first to Jerusalem to greet Elizabeth and then to Bethlehem with Joseph to register with the census, as mandated by the emperor. This relationship on the west wall mirrors a similar connection to its eastern counterpart: the Virgin's miraculous Assumption, represented in

the top panel of the east wall, has encouraged pilgrimage to Loreto, as depicted in the lower register. Finally, just as Joseph and Mary's voyage to Bethlehem precedes their flight into Egypt to escape Herod's massacre in Jerusalem, so does the Turkish invasion of the Holy Land similarly occasion the Virgin's flight into foreign lands to prevent desecration of her sacred chapel.

The representation of the *Nativity* on the *rivestimento* of the Holy House occupies two registers on the southern wall. The first relays the biblical episode of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* while the second illustrates that of the *Adoration of the Magi* (see figure 37). Frequently in depictions of the *Nativity*, the two Adoration motifs are spatially and thematically condensed into one scene, while at Loreto each is given commensurate attention. The prominence of this motif within the decorative program of the *sacello* is likely a result of the specific concerns of pilgrimage ritual that define the primary function of the relic. The shepherds, representative of a humble class of pilgrim, journey to Bethlehem to rejoice in the coming of the Savior after receiving the herald of His birth. Their identification as pilgrims is further emphasized by the traveling cloaks in which they are dressed, as well as by the reverent postures with which they salute the child (the position of the foremost shepherd mimics Gabriel's pose in the Annunciation panel, promoting compositional unity<sup>74</sup>). At the far right of the scene, Joseph's walking-stick reinforces the thematic concept of travel that dominates the narrative. The

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<sup>74</sup> Santarelli also notes that the flowering grape vine at the far right of the marble panel of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* is an iconographical counterpart to a similar vine pictured in the scene of the Annunciation; see Santarelli, *L'Ornamento marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto*, 407. This could be a thematic, as well as compositional, anchor, meant to reinforce the divine cause (the Incarnation) and effect (the birth of Jesus).





Figure 36. Illustration, *Prediche Miscellanee per l'avvento di Nostro Signore*, Bartoli Baldassare, 1673.

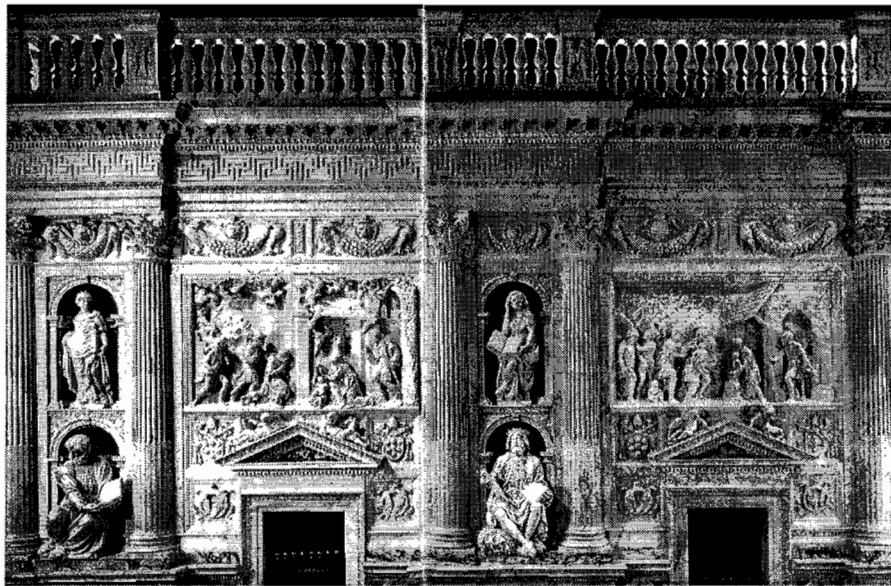


Figure 37. Sansovino and Raffaele da Montelupo, *Nativity*, Holy House of Loreto, 1518-34.

complementary representation of the *Adoration of the Magi* continues the motif of pilgrimage, though on a more elevated register. Here it is the Kings of Eastern lands rather than humble shepherds who have come to behold the prophesied Savior, to regale the holy child with lavish and exotic gifts in acknowledgement of their devotion. In addition, the Virgin and Child assume a statuesque pose reminiscent of devotional altarpieces, suggesting the ritual interconnectivity of the first Christian pilgrimage at Bethlehem and its pious continuation at Loreto. Moreover, the thatched roof sheltering mother and son recalls the baldachin iconography so typically employed in the Virgin and Child motif at Loreto. Pilgrims of varying economic and social status would have recognized amidst the marble figures a collective sense of piety toward the common Savior of humankind. Those who visited the sanctuary at Loreto found both visual and scriptural verification of the divine sanction and devotional efficacy of pilgrimage. In this way, the promotion of Catholic atonement through pilgrimage—a primary theological concern of the early sixteenth-century Church—is conspicuously reinforced in the pictorial program of the marble investiture at Loreto.

## CHAPTER V

THE COUNTER-REFORMATION AND THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO:  
EXPORTATION OF SACRED SPACE AND IDENTITY IN THE  
RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE REPLICA

In 1507, the same year that the Papacy officially assumed full administrative custody of the shrine at Loreto, a baker's guild commissioned a church on the site of the Forum of Trajan in Rome. A Roman guidebook, published three years later, describes the church as "Ecclesia S. Maria de Loreto Urbis," differentiating it from the Pope's contemporary project in the Marches.<sup>75</sup> Designed by Bramante, constructed in part by Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane, and decorated with interior sculpture by Andrea Sansovino, the little church demonstrates how quickly the devotional climate of Rome responded to the growing popularity of the Loretan cult. Indeed, the construction of a "city church" dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto demonstrates an early inclination to replicate the spiritual associations of the popular pilgrimage site within the fabric of everyday ritual. Moreover, that the same artists were contemporaneously involved in both projects suggests a desire to duplicate in Rome a model of the sacred and artistic prototype developing in Loreto. In the last decades of the fifteenth century, the texts of Teramano and Ricci had effected a vast circulation of the translation legend, while the continued amplification and decoration of the basilica under Basso della Rovere further strengthened the site's devotional importance. Loreto had already developed a reputation

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Sandro Benedetti, *S. Maria di Loreto* (Rome: Marietti, 1968), 21. Benedetti's study also provides a detailed architectural history of the site, including its various renovations throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

for the miracles performed there, but now the numinous quality of the house, coupled with the Papacy's artistic and theological strengthening of its sacred role, further amplified the relic's thaumaturgic appeal. In turn, the increasing multitude of pilgrims who visited the site subsequently exported both the legend and the image of the Virgin's house throughout the Western world. It is this ebb and flow of sacred identity that largely defines the religious, social and artistic history of the site, as well as its role within the greater context of European Christianity.

The centrifugal devotional force of the shrine is perhaps most evident in the number of churches, chapels and architectural monuments dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto throughout Europe. It is not uncommon that a favorite saint or appellation of the Virgin Mary should inspire the building of a monument in his or her honor. Perhaps more unique to the Loretan tradition, however, is the replication of the relic itself, not merely in imagery or pilgrimage tokens conveyed from the site, but rather as an architectural space in its own right, a duplicate or simulacrum of the Virgin's house.<sup>76</sup> This type of spiritual transference is particularly applicable in the case of Loreto, as the Holy House already represented a similar translation of sacred identity from Palestine to Italy.

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<sup>76</sup> The tradition of replicating sacred architecture was, in the Middle Ages, primarily connected with the Holy Land sites and most specifically with the Holy Sepulcher. Literary criticism on the Renaissance replica and its changing artistic and symbolic function is somewhat sparse. For an introduction to the problem as it develops in medieval architecture, see Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1-33. In the Renaissance, holy sites were replicated as part of the *sacri monti*, or devotional complexes in which visitors meditated on didactic scenes of the life of Christ. The first *sacro monte*, constructed in Varallo in the late fifteenth century, recalls the Holy Land through a series of figural and architectural replications. See Luciano Vaccaio and Francesca Riccardi, eds., *Sacri monti: devozione, arte e cultura della Controriforma* (Milan: Jaca, 1992).

The divarication of relics and souvenirs reflects the devotional afterlife of pilgrimage: that is, the return from foreign lands was just as important in confirming the Christian faith as the journey to them. In other words, pilgrims reconstruct and extend sacred experience for themselves and others through the tangible nature of objects, which are “a physical manifestation of the charisma of a sacred centre.”<sup>77</sup> In conveying such objects beyond the threshold of the sacred space, the memory of that sacred landscape is diffused throughout the world and ultimately reconstructed within the everyday realm. Relics and pilgrimage paraphernalia are, then, inherently characterized by an economy of movement, or exportation, in that pilgrims transmit them—as a record of the nature of sacred place—to a broad audience of spiritual “consumers.” In the legend of the initial arrival of the Holy House at Loreto, it was the Virgin herself who wished to diffuse the memory of the *loca sancta* to the Italian populace. Because of the architectural character of the relic, however, the translation represents a transfer not only of memory and experience, but also of the holy place itself. Unlike most relics, which act as tangible embodiments of Christ and the Holy Land but are not themselves defined as places, the *Santa Casa* is a relocated piece of the *loca sancta*, originally embedded within the very topographical fabric of Palestine. Sixteenth-century iconography of the Holy House often foregrounds the authentic nature of the relic’s origin by emphasizing the rustic simplicity of its construction. Indeed, popular devotional prints continue to depict the house as a humble brick dwelling, gabled with a sloping roof, even after the marble *rivestimento* was complete (see figure 38).

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<sup>77</sup> Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7.



Figure 38. Illustration from *La Oratione di Santa Maria Dell'oreto*, Angelita Girolamo, 1598.

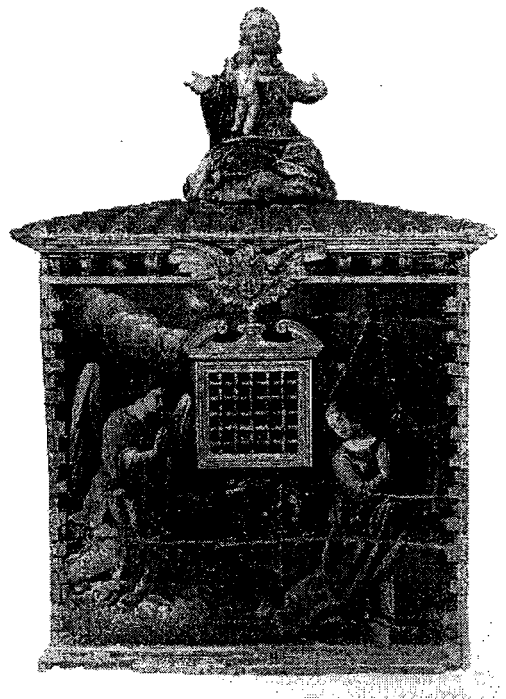


Figure 39. Wooden Model of the Santa Casa di Loreto, Museo Diocesano in Urbania, 1636 ca.

Because the *Santa Casa* is defined as a place relic, and because its legend operates in terms of sacral transfer, it is not surprising that replicas began to appear in the last decades of the sixteenth century, reflecting a desire to reproduce through architecture the memory and experience of visiting the Virgin's house. While such replicas could not replace the original theologically or devotionally, they served to invoke the memory of Loreto (and by extension the Holy Land), as well as to inspire pilgrimage. Just as the *Santa Casa* had been translated from faraway lands, so too could the devotional experience be transported one step further to a pilgrim's territory of origin. In this way, architectural replicas—though on a greater scale—functioned much like the imagery and objects that served as pilgrimage “souvenirs,” broadening accessibility to the divine encounter. In some cases, miniature reproductions of the house were created specifically for processional purposes, theatrically recreating the “flight” of the Virgin's *sacello* as part of Marian festivities (see figure 39). However, while devotional prints and ritual objects foreground the sacred nature and origin of the relic by depicting the house as a modest brick chamber, full-scale architectural replicas more often demonstrate a preference for the form and function of the elaborate marble screen that, from the 1520s, enveloped the exterior of the house.

While pilgrims favored the form of the humble dwelling for its connection to popular Marian devotion, religious authorities privileged the *rivestimento* for its potential political and cultural implications. Besides evident associations with the reliquary or tabernacle, as discussed in the previous section, the *rivestimento* betrays a self-conscious recollection of the architecture *all'antica* of imperial Rome. Weil-Garris Brandt has

demonstrated, for example, the iconographic similarities between the architectonic scheme of the *rivestimento* and the Roman triumphal arch, both of which “announce” the victory and sovereignty of the leading spiritual or political power.<sup>78</sup> The festooned perimeter of the *sacello* also recalls the festive motif of such classical monuments as the *Ara Pacis*, built to commemorate the peace and prosperity of the Roman Empire under the military leadership of the emperor Augustus.<sup>79</sup> At Loreto, there is a similar evocation of a Renaissance “golden age,” both in terms of artistic innovation and spiritual prosperity. The former is represented by the myriad artistic talents employed in the construction of the marble investiture and is made possible by papal patronage; the latter is assured by the Virgin’s demonstrated protection of devotees and by the possibility of salvation through Christian devotion. In recalling at Loreto such architectural testaments to the glory and power of ancient Rome, the Papacy sought to affirm and legitimate its authority as spiritual and political heir to the Holy Roman Empire.

One of the earliest replicas of the *rivestimento*, dating to the second decade of the sixteenth century, is that at Varallo, which formed part of the Nazareth complex of the *Sacro Monte* in Piedmont. While the entire project is a mimetic representation of the Palestinian landscape, the chapel of the Annunciation is directly inspired not by the form of the grotto at Nazareth but rather by the *sacello* at Loreto.<sup>80</sup> That the design of the

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<sup>78</sup> Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, “I marmi del sacello: Oltre settant’anni per il rivestimento,” *Il Santuario di Loreto*, ed. Grimaldi, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Bramante would have known the *Ara Pacis* only through sculptural fragments and documentary evidence, as the monument was not entirely excavated until the early twentieth century. Its principal iconographic and stylistic motifs, however, are indicative of the overarching propagandistic aims regulating much of the imperial architecture of early Rome.



Nazareth chapel at Varallo (envisioned as a “New Jerusalem”) would be based on the Loretan model attests to the rapid spread of the translation legend, as well as to the popularity of the cult. In 1514, when the design for the chapel was executed, the marble investiture at Loreto was still in an initial phase of construction. The Varallo design, however, clearly reflects an interest in the classical architectural features that characterize the underlying form of the *rivestimento*, particularly visible in the columned partitioning of the walls and in the pronounced tympanum above the door (see figure 40). The changing architectural setting of the house, then, seems to have influenced the perception and memory of the relic itself. The Virgin’s house had once again been “translated,” but now with an evolving identity prompted by the development of its new architectural and ecclesiastical surroundings at Loreto. This is significant at Varallo where religious authorities hoped to redirect Holy Land pilgrimage; the accurate reproduction of the existing Palestinian topography, except in the case of the Virgin’s house, reaffirms the translation legend and emphasizes the relic’s recent appropriation under Roman jurisdiction.

Beginning at the end of the sixteenth century, copies of the Holy House began to appear throughout Italy, varying in both size and faithfulness to the architectural details of the *rivestimento*. A smaller-scale version exists, for example at the Church of San Paolo in Naples, while at the Oratorio dei Rossi in Parma, there is a copy decorated with *trompe l’oeil* frescoes mimicking the sculptural scenes of the *rivestimento* at Loreto (see

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<sup>80</sup> See Santino Langé, “Iconografia della Santa Casa di Loreto nell’area alpina,” in *Crocevia religioso*, 365.

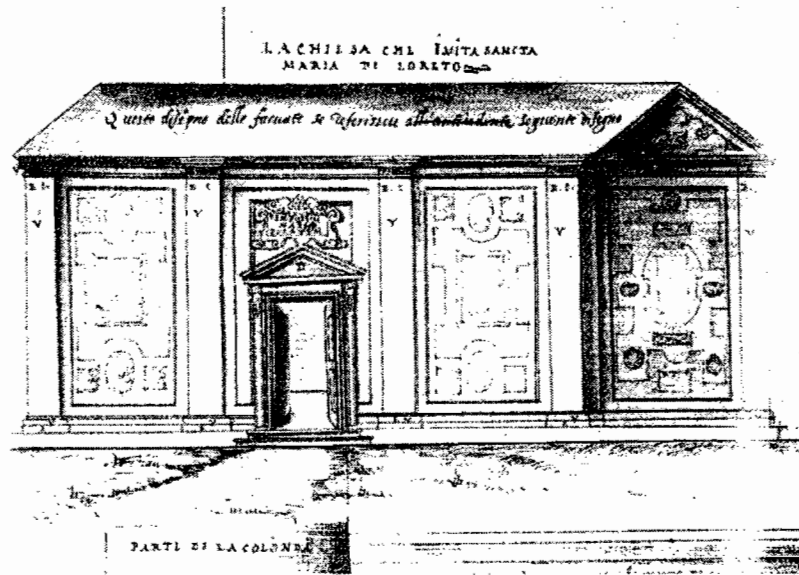


Figure 40. Design for the Holy House Replica at the Sacro Monte of Varallo, 1514.



Figure 41. Holy House Replica at the Oratorio dei Rossi in Parma, Seventeenth Century.

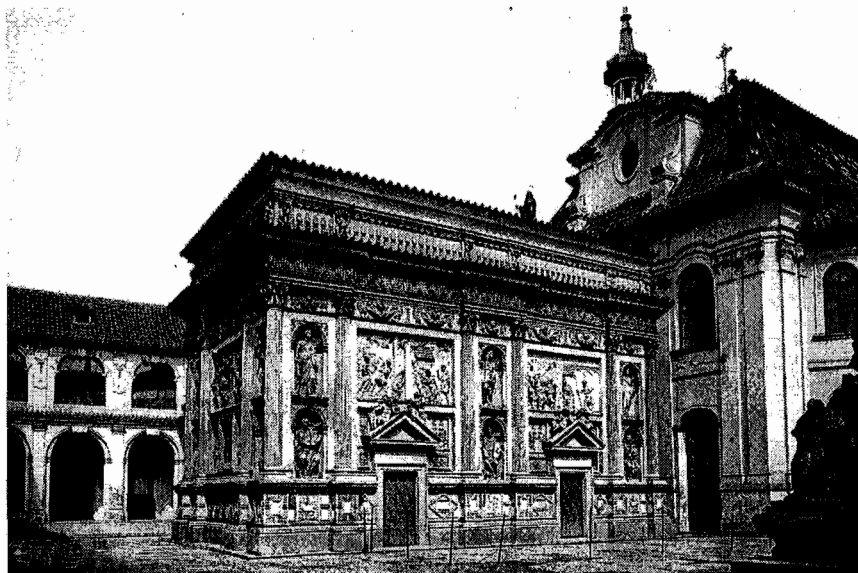


Figure 42. Holy House Replica at Hradcany in Prague, 1626 ca.

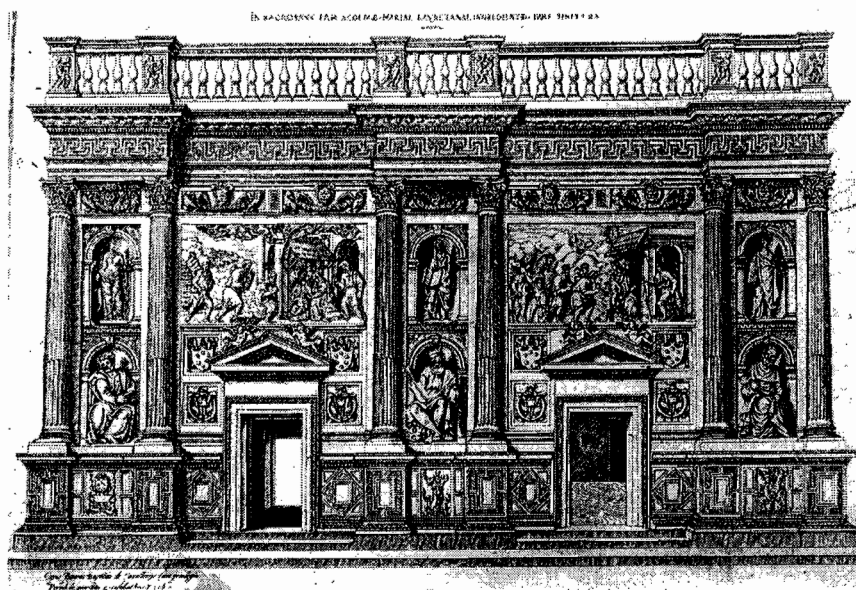


Figure 43. Tourist Print Depicting the North Wall of the Holy House of Loreto, 1567.

figure 41).<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the most famous copy of the Holy House, however, is located outside of Italy, at the sanctuary of Hradcany in Prague (see figure 42). Indeed, a number of replica shrines cropped up throughout the northern and central regions of Europe in the Post-Tridentine period, including Switzerland, Bavaria, Austria and Bohemia. It is significant that the majority of replica shrines exist in areas that lacked confessional unity, when the Holy Roman Empire was politically and religiously divided by wars between Catholic and Protestant leaders. As Antje Stannek has demonstrated, from the end of the sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries, there were at least 117 replicas of the *Santa Casa* in these regions.<sup>82</sup> The number of replicas attests not only to the continued spread of Loretan devotion throughout Europe, but also to a particular desire to reproduce the political and ecclesiastical associations that define the relic—and the marble program specifically—at Loreto. The shrine at Prague serves as a particularly illustrative example of how the propagandistic aims of the Papacy, inherent in the affirmation of curial authority in the aesthetic program of the *rivestimento*, were appropriated to serve the propagandistic aims of political and religious leaders in Bohemia.

The political situation in Bohemia in the first decades of the seventeenth century was fraught with religious tension. This atmosphere was particularly heightened after the Protestant Frederick I gained control of the Bohemian kingship in 1619, ousting the

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<sup>81</sup> For an introductory description of the architectural programs of six Holy House replicas, located in Naples, Parma, Catania, Venice and Padua, see Mara Ranucci and Massimo Tenenti, *Sei riproduzioni della Santa Casa di Loreto in Italia* (Loreto: Congregazione Universale della Santa Casa, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> Antje Stannek, “Diffusione e sviluppi della devozione lauretana in Europa,” in *Crocevia religioso*, 291-327.

Hapsburg dynasty from its long-privileged position of political rule. Supported by the Catholic League, the newly elected Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, immediately sought to overthrow Frederick and reclaim the throne, which he succeeded in doing just a year later at the Battle of White Mountain. The victory gave Ferdinand the necessary impetus to begin purging the region of the Protestant nobility, and soon more than 30,000 families had been exiled.<sup>83</sup> Aiming to restore the social and political order through promotion of the Catholic faith, Ferdinand decreed that the homes and possessions of the expelled Protestants be remitted to Catholic nobles living in other regions of the Empire.<sup>84</sup> Many, in turn, constructed chapels or sanctuaries that reflected allegiance both to the re-catholicization efforts of the Counter-Reformation and, by extension, to the court of Ferdinand II. In this way, nobles and dignitaries publicly professed their Catholic confession, simultaneously fostering pilgrimage through an expanded geographical network of devotional shrines.

It is not surprising that the *Santa Casa*, which had so effectively represented the Western resistance of Christianity over its Eastern enemy, should now be adopted as a popular symbol of the overthrow of Protestant opposition to the Catholic faith. Constructed in 1626 at the commission of Katharina von Lobkowitz, the Holy House replica in Prague represents a studied and deliberate reliance on the decorative trappings of the marble *rivestimento* at Loreto. Indeed, the authenticity of the copy seems particularly crucial in Bohemia, as the wife of King Ferdinand, Eleonora Gonzaga, had

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 313.

sent architects to Loreto in 1624 for the purpose of recording precise details and measurements of the monument.<sup>85</sup> Since 1567, popular prints depicting the various views of the Holy House had also been in circulation, produced by Perino Zecchini de' Guarlottis in Rome and sold by Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri in Loreto, where there was a steadily increasing demand (see figure 43).<sup>86</sup> Details of the marble program were therefore widely accessible and also increasingly identifiable by the early seventeenth century, when the Prague replica was executed.

It wasn't, however, a mere regard for staying true to the original that inspired such accurate imitation, nor was Katharina von Lobkowitz concerned with the potential for misidentification of the shrine. Richard Krautheimer has demonstrated how the late medieval phenomenon of replicating Holy Land architecture was centered primarily on the devotional function of copies rather than on the visual or mathematical accuracy of the form.<sup>87</sup> There are, moreover, replicas of the Holy House that sacrifice much of the architectural and sculptural detail, privileging the symbolic and spiritual associations of the relic as a means of invoking the presence of the Virgin for faithful veneration. In Bohemia, it was rather the political climate that effected a concern for architectural accuracy; the marble *rivestimento* was an ideal image of Roman and Catholic ascendancy, indeed of the legitimacy of the Holy Roman Empire and of the Papacy as political and spiritual leaders of the Western world.

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<sup>85</sup> Stannek, "Al Cospetto della Vergine: Il culto della Madonna di Loreto," *Il Santuario di Loreto*, ed. Grimaldi, 238.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Bury, *The Print in Italy 1550-1620* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>87</sup> See Krautheimer, as cited in note 75 above.

When viewed in light of the political aims of the Papacy in the Cinquecento, the marble investiture at Loreto seems an apt choice for emulation in the kingdom of Ferdinand II a century later. The relic itself represented both symbolically and geographically the origins of Christianity, while the Virgin Mary was a pivotal figure in the propagation of Counter-Reformation doctrine. The Jesuits in particular had employed the image of the Virgin's *sacello* as evidence of scriptural truth in their widespread evangelization efforts.<sup>88</sup> However, more than an allegiance to the cult of the Virgin Mary or an affirmation of the authenticity of the relic, the Prague replica of the marble investiture represents a transfer of political ideology, a declaration, as at Loreto, of the glory of the Holy Roman Empire and the triumph of the Catholic confession. Moreover, the monument represented a promise of spiritual unification under the reign of Frederick II, a commitment he had already begun to secure through his victory over the Protestants at the Battle of White Mountain. The importation of the Holy House model to devotional centers throughout northern and central Europe is therefore highly significant of the actual religious and political situation, which renewed the need to affirm sovereign authority. In the period spanning the Thirty Years' War and in the decades immediately following the Peace of Westphalia, the number of Holy House copies constructed throughout central and northern Europe reached its apex. Moreover, most of these replicas sought to reproduce not the humble *sacello* of popular devotional prints, but the highly emblematic *rivestimento* of the Renaissance papal agenda. At least in

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<sup>88</sup> Massimo Bulgarelli, "La Santa Casa di Loreto: L'edificio sacro e le sue copie," *Lotus International* 65 (1990): 87.

architectural terms, the identity of the relic was now synonymous with that of its illustrious marble encasing.



CHAPTER VI  
CONCLUSION

In 1969, with NASA's cooperation, an image of the Virgin of Loreto accompanied the Apollo mission into space and, after four days of travel, landed safely on the moon.<sup>89</sup> The Virgin of Loreto had been designated the patron saint of aeronauts in the 1920s, an identification inspired by the "flight" of the *sacello* associated with the Holy House legend. Her suitability for the Apollo mission, an epic moment in human history, was therefore determined by the enduring impact of the fifteenth-century translation legend. For Teramano's readers in the early Renaissance, the feat of landing on the moon would certainly have constituted a miracle of divine proportions. For twentieth-century astronauts, the Virgin of Loreto was a fitting agent of celestial protection. Her image had, after all, protected pilgrims and inspired crusaders during centuries of pious expedition; she had also accompanied the vehicle of the *Santa Casa* as it journeyed to distant lands.

The arrival of the Virgin of Loreto on the moon is emblematic of the extent to which her image was translated both geographically and theoretically in the early modern period. The legend of the translation endowed the relic with an economy of movement, setting a precedent for its continued physical and symbolic "translation" to new devotional centers throughout Europe. Not only was the relic topographically transferred from Nazareth to Italy, it was subsequently translated symbolically, from a local to a

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<sup>89</sup> Bulgarelli, 88.

universal expression of sacred identity and divine favor. Ricci's ecclesiastical gloss of the translation legend confirmed the centrality of the relic to Christian—and therefore Roman—doctrine. Moreover, the theological and Christological associations of the Holy Land sites were also effectively transferred to papal control by way of the Virgin's *sacello*. Believed to be part of the original architectural landscape of Palestine, the *Santa Casa* affirmed the legitimate role of the western Church in the propagation of Christianity in its new spiritual capital. Not only the Papacy but also the devout inscribed their own desires, perceptions and ambitions onto the relic, thereby modeling its religious and political persona. Ex-votos attached to the walls of the house reflect the sheer variety of spiritual or physical necessity, along with the range in social class, of those seeking the Virgin's assistance. Her adaptability as intercessor, as well as theological emblem, partly explains the changing nature of her image: throughout the centuries, that image is molded to fit the particular needs of those who seek her divine intervention. Moreover, the miraculous nature of the relic only strengthened and extended the Virgin's powers of intercession. Indeed, the *Santa Casa* seemed to magnify both the thaumaturgic and theological efficacy of Loretan imagery, providing a physical connection to her humanity, as well as to her role in Christian doctrine. The *sacello* itself became associated with restorative powers, as evidenced by the little containers of Holy House "dust" sold to pilgrims for purposes of consumption beginning in the late sixteenth century.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Dust, or "polvere," which custodians swept from the walls of the relic, became available to pilgrims for purchase beginning in the late sixteenth century. Often sold in small envelopes decorated with an image of the *Santa Casa*, the contents were traditionally consumed or mixed with clay before being fired into bowls,

Significantly, there is a pronounced indentation in the marble base surrounding the *Santa Casa*, a mark of five centuries of pious circumambulation. In compassing the relic on bended knees, pilgrims have literally imprinted themselves into the physical, and by extension spiritual, structure of the shrine. Similarly the Papacy, through its importation of artistic and theological referents, as visible in the transept chapels and on the marble *rivestimento*, projected the specific concerns of Papal Rome onto the image of the Holy House at Loreto. In the same way that the Virgin's universality guaranteed her protection of devotees against all forms of individual ailment, it also assured her theological defense of Papal Rome in opposition to political hazards ranging from Turkish invasion to Protestant polemics. Upon leaving the shrine, pilgrims subsequently diffused the memory of their experience there through oral testimony as well as through imagery adorning pilgrimage tokens and devotional prints. In this way, the sacred power and identity of the shrine were continuously "reshaped" by the expectations and perceptions of those visiting (and constructing) the site.

The dispersion of the cult at Loreto reflects a centrifugalization of sacred identity, which is equally matched by the centripetal force of artistic and devotional activity at the shrine. This continuous movement—and translation—of sacred identity is what shaped the devotional experience at Loreto and assured its spiritual longevity throughout religious history. Indeed, the Holy House of Loreto is steeped in over five centuries of pious legend and sacred ritual. Its identification as the house of the Virgin, and site of the

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vases or other utilitarian objects. Because of its direct contact with the relic, pilgrims believed the dust to possess restorative or apotropaic powers against illness and misfortune. See for example, Grimaldi, *Il sacello della Santa Casa*, 296.

Incarnation, makes it unique to the Catholic tradition as a spatial relic where earthly and celestial domains converge. Moreover, a direct connection to the humanity of Christ makes the Holy House an appropriate backdrop for the liturgical rite that unfolds on the main altar of the basilica. Thus, while legend describes the relic's translation in the geographic sense, the house also underwent theoretical and devotional translations. In its earliest stages, the Loretan iconography attested to the singularity of the Marian shrine at Loreto, identifying the Christian origins of the relic while simultaneously advancing local jurisdiction for its administration. Through an ambitious building and artistic campaign, Rome subsequently amplified the universality and renown of the site, stamping it as specifically Roman and mapping it in the geography of sacred ritual. Finally, pilgrimage souvenirs and architectural replicas of the house spread the cult of Loreto throughout Europe, and particularly to areas divided by religious tension, making it a truly international symbol of Christianity.

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