

RELIGIONS IN THE EASTERN ADRIATIC AND GREECE AS EXPERIENCED BY NETHERLANDISH SIXTEENTH-CENTURY PILGRIMS

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Abstract: *This case study makes use of five sixteenth-century Netherlandish travelogues of pilgrims to analyze how they experienced religious otherness in the Eastern Adriatic region and the Greek islands en route to the Holy Land. The region has not yet been much studied from this angle, thus the main aim of this study is to provide an impetus for future research comparing travel accounts coming from different traditions. While the five sources cannot truly be representative or generalizable for a conclusion, they did show that the Eastern Adriatic was described much more succinctly in many areas. The further one moved away from the known habitat of Catholicism, the more elaborate the descriptions become. The dichotomy between East and West is emphasised more strongly. Here, the East is not only to be understood as the Ottomans or the Islamic other, on the contrary, hardly anything is said about them and the focus is mainly on the similarities and differences to be found with the Greek or Orthodox faith. Consequently, one gets a much clearer picture of traditions and customs in Greek Orthodox churches than the religious traditions in Catholic churches in the Eastern Adriatic towns, where more descriptions of relics, the veneration of saints and the like are mentioned. Reasons for this may include, on the one hand, the fact that the Eastern Adriatic region was possibly too similar to the pilgrims' own Catholic traditions and therefore could not be of interest to potential readers if the pilgrims decided to publish their travelogue on their return. On the other hand, the Orthodox faith had such different ways and customs that this could prompt the pilgrims to emphasise religious otherness.*

Keywords: *Eastern Adriatic, Greece, Pilgrims*

Introduction

Going on a pilgrimage was one of the greatest and most important traditions in Christianity during the Middle Ages and early modern period. People from all layers of society made one or more pilgrimages during their lives to a holy place as a sign of religious worship.¹ People made the pilgrimage for health reasons, to express gratitude, as a means of commuting a punishment and as a means of searching for forgiveness and so on.² Many pilgrimages took place on the

¹ Carey 2016, p. 5.

² O'Doherty & Schmieder 2015, pp. ix–xiv.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

local level, but from 1300 to almost 1800, places like Rome, Compostela and especially the Holy Land were very popular.³ People who had the money and time prepared themselves for pilgrimages that could take months depending on various circumstances that could prevent or facilitate the journey. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was popular early on due to the various crusades that took place there from the eleventh and twelfth centuries but even during the rule of the Mamluks and Ottomans, Jerusalem and other Biblical sites in the area remained a popular place for Christians to practise devotion. As a matter of fact, the Franciscans also had a huge influence on the course and popularisation of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is why scholars sometimes speak of a so-called “pilgrimage-industry” that characterised pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the end of the Middle Ages and certainly in the sixteenth century.⁴

Although the early years of the sixteenth century were characterised by the emergence of the Reformation and caused the number of people making pilgrimages to the Holy Land to decrease, one of the assumptions of the Council of Trent in the twenty-fifth session of 1563 ensured that the veneration of cults, images, saints and relics were an important part of the Catholic faith and identity.⁵ This resulted in the growth of the popularity of the pilgrimage once again.

The pilgrims who made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land came from different places in Europe. Moreover, many of them decided to have this unique experience written down themselves or by someone else, with in some cases even aiming to have the travel account published on their return. There are hundreds of travelogue known from 1300 to 1800 by travellers that can be classified today under, for instance, early modern German, French, English, Italian, Swiss and Netherlandish travel literature.⁶ In the past, researchers have been particularly attentive to the accounts of travellers such as Pero Tafur or Felix Fabri and especially to expose the dichotomy between the Christian West and the Islamic East.⁷ That way, they try to find out how the Church’s thinking towards the non-believer could possibly seep further at the level of pilgrims who met different kinds of people with different kinds of backgrounds and beliefs along the way.

Consequently, this article aims to further explore these representations and observations that pilgrims had on the people they encountered on their way. Specifically, the aim is to narrow down to a region that has not been scrutinised

³ Kuuliala & Rantala 2019; Webb 1999; Webb 2022, pp. 44–77.

⁴ Bale 2016, p. 153.

⁵ General Council of Trent: Twenty-Fifth Session. - Council Fathers - 1563, < <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/trent/twenty-fifth-session.htm> >.

⁶ See for example the work of Reinhold Röhricht: Röhricht 1890.

⁷ Beebe 2014; Tafur 2007..

so much in this way, but was on the route most pilgrims chose when making the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Most of them boarded a ship in Venice and thus chose the route that took them through the Adriatic sea and Ionian sea to Jaffa.⁸ The places visited en route to replenish supplies, to spend the night, to shelter from heavy storms or to wait for good winds were also described in the travel reports.

Observations about the towns, cities and islands of the Eastern Adriatic (contemporary maritime Croatia) and Greece will be analysed. Although, as already mentioned, hundreds of travel accounts are known for the early modern period, we will look at the travelogues of Flemish and Dutch pilgrims which together belong to the Netherlandish travel literature. Netherlandish travel literature is generally relatively understudied in comparison with research on German, French, English and Italian travellers. This article will make a small contribution to demonstrating how Netherlandish travelogues also have a lot to offer for different themes. Since the sixteenth century is most represented, the aim will be to find out how sixteenth-century Netherlandish pilgrims experienced and described other religions in the regions of the Eastern Adriatic (the maritime regions of present-day Croatia, Albania and Montenegro) and Greece.

The sixteenth-century Netherlandish travelogues

It has been decided to analyse five Netherlandish pilgrims in this article. The oldest amongst them, named **Jacques Lesaige** travelled in 1518. He was incorrectly categorised by many researchers in the past under French travel literature. However, the traveller, a silk merchant, was from Douai, which today belongs to France but at the time was for a long time part of the county of Flanders and later of the Spanish-Habsburg possessions of the Low Countries.⁹

Furthermore, **Jan Want**'s travel account of 1519 will also be analysed. Want was a Dominican priest originating from 's-Hertogenbosch.¹⁰

Arent Willemszoon and **Jan Govertz** originated both from Delft and were travelling companions during their pilgrimage in 1525. Both their travelogues have survived to the present day and will be analysed.¹¹

Finally, the pilgrimage of **Jan Hendrikszoon van Beveren** described in his travel account of 1536 will be examined. It cannot be omitted with certainty

⁸ Lane 1966, pp. 3–24; Guilmartin 2003.

⁹ Duthilloeul 1851; Yerasimos 1991, p. 139.

¹⁰ Van Beurden 1896, pp. 156–226.

¹¹ Gonnet 1884; Wasser 2014, p. 238; Gaspar 2016; Yerasimos 1991, pp. 156–157.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

whether this traveller was from Leiden or The Hague.¹²

Although five travelogues are not very representative, the main aim is to show the possibilities and the types of comments we can extract about faith in the Eastern Adriatic and Greece from the travel accounts. Some sixty travel accounts are known from Netherlandish travellers between 1400 and 1800.¹³

Netherlandish pilgrims and religious otherness in the Eastern Adriatic region

Pilgrims sometimes had to stay in Venice for weeks or months to await the best weather conditions and depart on the galley that could carry as many as a hundred travellers at once. It was deliberately chosen to sail down the coast of the Eastern Adriatic because most of the towns there had been under the rule of the Republic of Venice for several centuries.¹⁴

When departing and setting off on the Adriatic, one of the first stops was the Istrian peninsula. Towns such as Rovinj, Poreč and Pula were regularly visited not only to replenish supplies after several days underway, but also to go to mass and visit, observe and, in some cases, compare the religious characteristics of these towns with aspects of their own lifestyles. Although in most cases not all three towns were visited and it often depended on how far the weather conditions cooperated and supplies were replenished quickly, we still get an idea of the beliefs that were or were not present in this region of the Mediterranean from the travel accounts of the Netherlandish pilgrims of all three of these towns.

Rovinj was in most cases the very first stop where the galleys anchored several kilometres into the fuller sea and pilgrims were transported to the port and mainland on smaller boats. Both Lesaige and Want, Willemszoon and Govertz clearly mention in their travelogues that they visited Rovinj. All four also give similar comments. The town was best known for preserving the body of Saint Euphemia in its church. For pilgrims, this was obviously important to visit and was also in line with what was later recorded in the already mentioned twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent. In most cases, therefore, we can read the general comment that pilgrims went to visit the body of this female saint. In addition, we get to read from these four pilgrims how the body of this saint is said to have miraculously reached Rovinj. The legend, thus also mentioned by the pilgrims, is that this saint from Chalcedon (noteworthy is that some travellers incorrectly mention Cappadocia in present-day Türkiye as her place of birth) was murdered because she did not want to make sacrifices to the Greek

¹² Gaspar 2011.

¹³ Wasser 1983.

¹⁴ Dursteler 2013, p. 133.

gods. Her body was thrown into the sea in a marble tomb and so is said to have miraculously docked untouched in Rovinj, where the inhabitants thus began to venerate her and gave her a place in the church.¹⁵ Remarkably, the pilgrims were allowed to admire the body up close and so we learn from Lesaige that, according to him, the saint had rather large fingers, wore a necklace and held a golden lamb in his hands.¹⁶ We can also read from the same pilgrim that there are many monasteries around the city that would be nice to visit.¹⁷

Poreč was often only visited on the return by sixteenth-century pilgrims because this town was often where pilgrims decided to sail back to Venice on a smaller ship. To this day, this town is home to the Saint Euphrasian Basilica. This was logically noticed by pilgrims in the sixteenth century. According to Lesaige, it was a small beautiful church so beautifully decorated, which they had not seen since Venice. Moreover, there were said to be six chapels in the vicinity in which he and his fellow pilgrims were particularly struck by the beautiful paintings hanging there.¹⁸ Jan Want also visited the basilica and briefly describes that the bodies of Saint Demetrius and Saint Julian would be found there, as well as the bodies of virgins Bertha and Acolita.¹⁹ However, Jan Hendrikszoon van Beveren, Arent Willemszoon and his fellow traveller Jan Govertz remain silent about the basilica in Poreč. The latter two do note the many tombs and chapels around Poreč that would characterise the region.²⁰ Pula was only mentioned by the pilgrims regarding the amphitheatre. They do not have any comments about the religious aspects of daily life.

On leaving Istria, the next town in the Eastern Adriatic was usually Zadar. Pilgrims went ashore there to listen to mass but more importantly to go and see another important saint's body. The first comment these Netherlandish pilgrims made about Zadar in religious context was that it was an archbishopric.²¹ Consequently, they visited the church where the body of Saint Simeon was said to be kept. This, according to pilgrims, is the saint who is said to have shown Christ to the temple and said "Nunc dimittis".²² It was obviously an important stop on the pilgrimage of these Catholic pilgrims. Only Jan Want goes into

¹⁵ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 66; Van Beurden 1896, p. 166; Gonnet 1884, p. 50; Gaspar 2016, p. 48r.

¹⁶ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 66.

¹⁷ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 66.

¹⁸ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 167.

¹⁹ Van Beurden 1896, p. 222.

²⁰ Gonnet 1884, p. 165; Gaspar 2016, p. 157v.

²¹ Gonnet 1884, p. 52.

²² Duthilloeul 1851, p. 156; Van Beurden 1896, p. 222; Gonnet 1884, p. 52; Gaspar 2016, p. 48r.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

detail by telling that the saint's body is kept in a tomb and that there is a silver chest above the body that the Queen of Hungary is said to have donated. Further, this pilgrim tells that there is a miracle whereby if Saint Simeon is placed in that silver chest, he is always found back in his original tomb without anyone having moved him.²³ Although no further detail is given by these pilgrims as to what that saint looks like, where it is located in the church and what the church looks like both inside and outside, we are otherwise merely given a list of the other important relics located in the same church. For instance, the church is also said to hold the bodies of Saint Grisogoni and the virgin Anastasia, as well as a phalanx of Thomas Aquinas and "many other jewels and mass vestments".²⁴

Furthermore, Lesaige and Govertz are the only ones left with an eye for the island of Sveti Andrija, on which there is supposedly a monastery of Friars Minor.²⁵ That they make a comment about the Friars Minor or Franciscans is not so illogical. As already mentioned, the friars have played an important role in accompanying pilgrims and providing them with accommodation along the way as in the Holy Land from the very beginning of the popularisation of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Although after these descriptions it seems that these pilgrims appear to be fairly superficial and, apart from mentioning the relics, tombs, churches and cathedrals visited in the Eastern Adriatic, do not have much else to say about the religious "other" in the Eastern Adriatic, this does not mean that one can generalise this for all (Netherlandish) pilgrims of the sixteenth century. There are plenty of other travel accounts known from travellers whose observations go into much more detail and can likewise reveal something about the religious beliefs of the inhabitants they met on their journey.

In this case, the superficiality about the religious characteristics of the towns and islands in the Eastern Adriatic can be explained from several angles. One of the biggest reasons may be that the pilgrims wanted to save space in their travelogue for the descriptions and impressions about the Holy Land, because after all, that was the reason for the long journey. Another explanation may be that the travellers, being Catholics, considered the religious traditions and characteristics of the Eastern Adriatic to be very similar to their own customs and therefore did not consider them unique enough to pay much attention to them apart from the standard visits to the shrines and relics. Since the towns visited in the Eastern Adriatic largely belonged to the Republic of Venice, where Catholicism was also the main religion, it was a normality to stop in

²³ Van Beurden 1896, p. 222.

²⁴ Van Beurden 1896, p. 222; Duthilloeul 1851, p. 156; Gonnet 1884, p. 52; Gaspar 2016, p. 48r.

²⁵ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 156; Gaspar 2016, p. 48r.

Rovinj, Poreč and Zadar. Furthermore, by the sixteenth century, pilgrimage to the Holy Land had become so popular that pilgrims who wanted to publish their travelogue on their return already during the journey took into account aspects that any pilgrim might mention, which could lower the originality of their own story. Some pilgrims were also really looking for unique things to distinguish themselves from the rest. Finally, this popularisation of the pilgrimage in the sixteenth century may also have meant that certain things on the route simply became a habit for pilgrims so that it was no longer so interesting to mention. This may partly explain why Dubrovnik, for example, is completely ignored in the travel accounts by all five Netherlandish pilgrims analysed in this case study. This city was in most cases one of the most visited and described in travelogues, also because of Saint Blasius and other important relics kept in the cathedral there. Moreover, the wealth of gold and silver in the churches did not leave many other pilgrims from previous centuries neutral. However, these five Netherlandish pilgrims paid no attention to the city at all and will only have sailed past it due to optimal weather conditions.

The more the pilgrims distance themselves from the “known Catholic world” and territories under Venetian jurisdiction, the more details they reveal. The superficial observations of the Eastern Adriatic give way to slightly more detailed observations and even attention to the inhabitants in Albania and Montenegro, which were then areas where there were much greater territorial distinctions between Venetian and Ottoman territory.

Before leaving the Eastern Adriatic and navigating the Ionian Sea, pilgrims still passed Albania and Montenegro with the galleys. Coastal towns such as Herceg Novi, Budva, Ulcinj, Sköder, Himarë are regularly mentioned in most travel accounts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Of Albania, we first and foremost get a general picture of the people who would live there. For instance, all travellers write that the region belongs partly to the Turks and partly to the Greeks, whereby it would be dangerous for the Christian inhabitants to live there but they would maintain and cultivate the Turks’ vineyards, since the Islamic faith would prohibit the cultivation of wine.²⁶ Moreover, near Himarë is said to be the largest mountain in the world. Possibly it could be the largest mountain in Albania called the Korab, but it could just as well be another mountain range and rather out of habit be connected to the ethnotypology that is always mentioned together with the mention of the mountain. Arent Willemszoon and Jan Govertz talk about the “Stradieten”, which were described as clean men who would wear hats with high spouts.²⁷ They are clearly the so-called Stratioti. These were mercenary units recruited from the region around

²⁶ Gonnet 1884, p. 52; Gaspar 2016, p. 49r; Gaspar 2011, p. 32.

²⁷ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 73; Gonnet 1884, p. 52; Gaspar 2016, p. 49r.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

Albania, Greece and other parts of Southeastern Europe. In Venice, due to their unique headgear, these soldiers were also called “cappelletti” and mainly associated with the Albanians.²⁸ That the Stratioti were noticed by the travellers can only clarify that they had entered a region where there was a constant need for military preparedness due to the proximity of the Venetian and Ottoman territories. However, the travellers reveal nothing about the experiences they had with this extreme part of the Eastern Adriatic. Those aforementioned coastal towns were not visited very often either, precisely because of local political-territorial tensions. When sailing past the Greek islands, however, the descriptions become very detailed and elaborate.

Netherlandish pilgrims and religious otherness in Greece and its surrounding islands

In most cases, the first stop after passing the maritime towns of Albania and Montenegro was planned on the island of Corfu. However, in the Netherlandish travelogues analysed, we do not get a clear picture of the experience with religions on the island. This does not mean that nothing was said about Corfu completely and that there are no other travellers from the sixteenth century who paid attention to the religious context of the island. Of many islands, we first again get a general idea of which ruler the area belonged to. Of Cephalonia, Jacques Lesaige says in 1518 that it belongs to the Turks, while Arent Willemszoon in his 1525 travelogue claims that it is Greek but belongs to the Venetians.²⁹ Lesaige must have been mistaken, since Cephalonia was under the rule of the Venetian Republic from 1500 until the end of the seventeenth century due to the major Venetian victory in the second Ottoman-Venetian War.³⁰

Jan Want is very specific to many Greek islands and their religious customs, and so his travel account in itself could offer as an entire study for analysing the religious characteristics of the Greek islands that pilgrims sailed past in the sixteenth century. One of the many islands he describes in detail as early as entering the Ionian Sea is Lefkada. He refers to the island by the castle of Santa Maura, which again clarifies the military and territorial aspect. He says many Jews and Stratioti (he calls them “Strajotten”) would be living there. Noteworthy is his very detailed description of a Greek funeral.

Jan Want describes the following in his 1519 travelogue, which is worth quoting:

“When someone dies, the friends of the dead person enter the church with the priest. In the centre of the church a table is set, covered with a tapestry and a

²⁸ Birtachas 2018, pp. 325–346.

²⁹ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 73; Gonnet 1884, p. 53.

³⁰ Setton 1978, p. 515.

platter with various things and different colours is put on the table. In the centre of the platter is a lit wax candle. Above and below on this table are furthermore a bottle of good wine and one with water with which one refills the wine because it is strong wine. When all this is ready, the priest starts walking around the table with the incense and sings the vigil in Greek. When the vigil is done, the priest sits down with the friends on the right side of the church. There, the friends also sing the vigil around the platter with the sugar and the wine and then they eat and drink from it.”³¹

The descriptions of the priest of ‘s-Hertogenbosch further catch on with the descriptions of the celebration of Mass on the Greek island:

“Nor do they celebrate their Mass like us. When they want to celebrate, the priests first take a leavened bread, as clean as a “negenmannekijn” [a small silver coin that was part of the Brabant guilder] and they cut a round hole out of the top of the bread almost like a penny and in it is written ‘nica’. That would mean as much as Jesus Christ, after which they cut that round piece down to the crust as a cross, after which it is broken to consume. They sing Kiri eleison three times, which is more than what we do. They also make the sign of the cross more often like we do and they celebrate mass with cold and hot water and wine.”³²

Jan Want also has differences to note about communion:

“They also have a special way for communion. After the blessing, the priest goes through a door and rests the chalice on his chest, which is covered with silk and consecration cloths and he carries that in his left hand. With his right hand, he covers the lid of the chalice with a cloth and so he shows the people the beatifier. He does this completely covered and not publicly as we would, and then he goes through the door again. This they do with great devotion, moving their heads and beating their chests, as they continue the rest of the Mass back at the altar. They cut the bread into square pieces from which ‘nica’ had been cut and which is thus blessed bread, which is given to those in the church listening to Mass. When the priest will eat of the bread, he breaks the round bread into four pieces and puts it into the chalice to consequently take it out with a spoon or in a way that suits him. Something that was unpleasant to me is that he wore his beard in a cloth but not with such reverence as it should be. The ornaments and mass vestments are made our way. They also give sacraments to the sick. They do this by crumbling white with wine in a chalice or vessel and give it to the sick. They keep the sacraments in a wooden box, papered inside, which they close without a lock and which hangs on a wire above the altar with little reverence. Over the streets they carry it with lit candles and a bell. But this priest has no choir robe on, except an overgarment around the neck and a hat on the head.”³³

Although this description is quite on the extensive side, we get a very clear picture of how this traveller experienced the religious other in this region of

³¹ Van Beurden 1896, p. 169.

³² Van Beurden 1896, p. 169.

³³ Van Beurden 1896, p. 169–170.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

Europe. It is clear that the Netherlandish travellers actually went into particular detail about the religious practices of people they did not consider to be part of their own faith and its traditions. The main reason he goes into such detail is because Want himself was a priest, which may explain from his own interest and background why he compared the own traditions he was used to as a priest to the traditions that were common sense in the Orthodox church.

The next Greek island most Netherlandish travellers have to write about is undoubtedly Zante (called "Gente" by Jacques Lesaige in 1518, "Jodie" by Jan Govertz in 1525 and "Janthis" by Arent Willemszoon in 1525).³⁴ Jacques Lesaige stresses in his travelogue that they "go ashore to see the ways of the people like the Albanians and Jews". With this, he thus makes a clear distinction between the different types of inhabitants on the island, largely depending on their religious beliefs. Furthermore, this traveller and his travelling companions visited some more churches that he found little decorated, but saw paintings painted "in the Greek way". According to him, the sign of the cross and images of saints would be hung there differently in the - clearly Orthodox - church than he knew from home. Furthermore, he also heard a priest who was teaching entirely in Greek and, moreover, Lesaige ventured to read the Greek alphabet, but he himself admitted that he could not recognise a single letter. Again, he compares his own known Catholic lifestyle by making the distinction that Greeks do not use Latin. Lesaige is further unfinished on what he knows about the Orthodox Church. For instance, he goes on to describe that all priests are married. If the wife died, those priests would also not be allowed to marry again because the children from that second marriage would be considered bastards. Finally, he adds that priests can be recognised by their black hats and long beards. Not only did Lesaige still account for the Orthodox Church, or the Greek faith as many travellers call it, but he is also said to have dined with a resident of the island of Zante the same evening after visiting those churches. Remarkably, a Jewish resident would have been brought in because he could communicate with the pilgrims in Italian, and the distinction between Jewish customs and Catholic customs soon becomes clear to Lesaige when he describes how this Italian-speaking Jew refused the offer of wine. Lesaige goes on to mention how at first he did not know the man was Jewish and that for this reason the misunderstanding over the wine came about.³⁵ Lesaige is not the only sixteenth-century Netherlandish pilgrim to pay attention to the ways and people of the island of Zante and the corresponding characteristics of religious life on the Greek island. Jan Govertz and Arent Willemszoon who travelled together in 1525 also mention the island in their travel accounts. However, Willemszoon remains on

³⁴ Duthilloeul 1851, p. 74; Gaspar 2016, p. 52v; Gonnet 1884, p. 54.

³⁵ Duthilloeul 1851, pp. 74–75.

the brief side regarding his observations and only mentions that the island is said to belong to Venice, but that it is Greek.³⁶ He will probably have added the latter to indicate that although it belonged to the Republic of Venice that was Catholic, Orthodox faith did prevail on that Greek island. His travelling companion Jan Govertz, who himself belonged to the clergy in Gorkum and Delft, testified about the Jews allegedly wearing yellow hats on the island so that they could be distinguished from the rest. Furthermore, Govertz said he attended mass there at the Franciscan church and some relics were shown to him and the other pilgrims, such as the arm of Saint Simon the brother of Judas, a piece of the cord or girdle of Saint Francis, a part of the knee of Saint Laurentius, a piece of the pillar where Jesus is said to have been scourged and a piece of the cross on which Christ died on Calvary.³⁷ The Franciscan church not mentioned by name in the travel account could probably be the Saint Mark catholic church on the island, which was used by the Franciscans from 1518 onwards.³⁸ Finally, Govertz talks about a remarkable custom in which they visited a cellar where the bodies would stand against the wall and that this was done so that the noblemen could visit their deceased relatives. Furthermore, he gives another long description about mourning, something similar to what Jan Want told at length about the customs of mourning on the island of Lefkada near the castle of Santa Maura. However, what Willemszoon exactly meant by this remarkable custom in the cellar remains unclear.³⁹ Jan Hendrikszoon van Beveren, who previously remained rather silent when describing the religious characteristics of the Eastern Adriatic, also had something to say about two islets supposedly located near Zante. Van Beveren calls them “Stryvaly”, probably referring to the Strophades islands or the island of Stamfani due to the proximity to Zante. Noteworthy is that he talks about a male monastery he has seen there, said to be called “Basyly”, over which the “Venetians are said to rule and which is very strong the Turk does not fear much.”⁴⁰ It would most probably be the monastery of the Virgin.⁴¹ That van Beveren mentions “Basyly” could possibly mean the Greek word “Basilus” or sovereign than the name of the monastery which is what the pilgrim thinks. Greek emperor and hence sovereign Theodoros I Laskaris founded the monastery in the thirteenth century.⁴² About Zante itself, unfortunately, this

³⁶ Gonnet 1884, p. 54.

³⁷ Gaspar 2016, pp. 52v–53v.

³⁸ Minaoglou 2013, p. 13.

³⁹ Gaspar 2016, p. 52v–53v.

⁴⁰ Gaspar 2011, p. 33.

⁴¹ Dermitzaki 2022, p. 92.

⁴² Dermitzaki 2022, p. 101.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

traveller from Leiden has nothing useful to say for this analysis.

As the penultimate main island, pilgrims passed by Crete, which was called Candia at the time when pilgrims passed there. Jacques Lesaige visited many churches, the most beautiful of which would have been that of the “Cordeliers d’observance”. By the Cordeliers he probably meant the Franciscans, as the aforementioned Cordeliers are a branch of religious order. However, a large part of the church would have been destroyed by the earthquake of 1500 but it could be opened to the public and the Mass was sung in Latin just like “at home [by ons]”.⁴³ In this way, some pilgrims also see similarities between the customs of their own faith from their region of origin and the religions which they encountered on their way. Lesaige also visited the Church of Our Lady where the ceremonies are said to be sang in Greek and the mass there would be three times longer than “at home”.⁴⁴ During his further visit to Crete, Lesaige makes the observation already made about the exterior characteristics of the Jews, namely that they would have yellow headgear to distinguish themselves from the rest.⁴⁵ Arent Willemszoon also gives exactly the same comment during his stay in Crete.⁴⁶ Once again, however, there is no detail on the religious customs of the Jews and their communities, which were thus numerous on the various Greek islands.

The last island visited before sailing on to Jaffa was Rhodes, visited by many travellers because of the different relics that could be found there.⁴⁷ However, it was only mentioned by Jan Want in connection with religion and otherness regarding the selected travelogues for this case study. According to the pilgrim, Mary was said to be strongly venerated there, as was Saint Nicholas. The pilgrims were shown some more relics and further, the traveller merely describes that in the church at the altar there are always thirteen silver lamps burning.⁴⁸ On the religious customs he was otherwise so comprehensive about on the previous islands, however, he is very succinct for Rhodes. Probably, like the other pilgrims, he was now ogling very hard at the arrival in Jaffa after having travelled for weeks, and this in turn may partly explain why the other pilgrims, for example, had very little to say about religion on Rhodes. After all, there still had to be room for the detailed description of the Holy Land, the main reason they had embarked on the pilgrimage.

⁴³ Duthilloeul 1851, pp. 81–82; Dermitzaki 2022, p. 198.

⁴⁴ Duthilloeul 1851, pp. 81–82.

⁴⁵ Duthilloeul 1851, pp. 81–82.

⁴⁶ Gonnet 1884, pp. 55–59.

⁴⁷ Zoitou 2021, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Van Beurden 1896, p. 173.

Conclusion

The decision of the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent that the veneration of images, saints and relics was part of the Catholic faith resulted in an intensification and even greater popularisation of pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the sixteenth century. Consequently, pilgrims who could afford it left en masse from all corners of Europe for Jerusalem. In the Low Countries too, this unique pilgrimage could count on much response. This short case study has attempted to find out, using five Netherlandish travelogues of sixteenth-century pilgrims, how those pilgrims paid attention to the different beliefs and religious traditions they encountered on their route via Venice to Jaffa. Although it has already been stressed that it is not possible to form a general conclusion from five travel accounts, there are some smaller affirmations that have emerged from the analysis.

To begin with, it became clear that the descriptions of the Eastern Adriatic compared to the Greek islands and the Ionian Sea are very different in the travelogues. The Eastern Adriatic and especially the part from Istria to Dubrovnik is very concise in all five travelogues and rests mainly on observations of reality. The pilgrims limited themselves mainly on the visual religious characteristics of the towns in the Eastern Adriatic such as churches and chapels, as well as relics and statues found there. In no instance did we read anything about the religious traditions and customs of the inhabitants of the Eastern Adriatic, and it was even remarkable that Dubrovnik was not described at all in relation to religious architecture by these five pilgrims, which was emphasised more strongly by other pilgrims in the fifteenth century, for example. One reason for these brief descriptions could be, among other things, that the Catholic Flemish and Dutch pilgrims could strongly identify with these Catholic maritime towns, making them less authentic to describe in detail. The Eastern Adriatic was in some respect even earlier recognisable territory and therefore had customary and recognisable traditions for many pilgrims.

The further one descended through the Eastern Adriatic towards Albania and Montenegro, the stronger the distinctions between the territories of the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire became. In the latter two regions in particular it became clear that these territorial distinctions also drew a clear line where Christians were and where Muslims could be found and where they possibly coexisted. More attention also came to the specific people who could be found there such as the Stratioti.

When sailing the Ionian Sea and visiting or passing the Greek islands, further attention is paid to the different faiths found there. The pilgrims, for instance, are mindful of the Jewish communities on the islands, but are particularly atten-

tive to the Orthodox, or as they call it, Greek faith. This was visible in the highly detailed descriptions of mass celebrations, mourning traditions, the dress of priests and so on. The Catholic pilgrims found both similarities and differences with this, to them, clearly other-faithful, or at least “other” Christian who had his own customs and habits that were worth mentioning in the travelogue. It is noteworthy, however, that no descriptions can be found of the Islamic customs of the Ottomans that were present in these regions. This can be explained from the idea that there was general contempt throughout Western Europe towards this Islamic other and therefore deliberately not much attention was paid to it. On the other hand, we do then see in travelogues that when visiting Egypt and other areas more to the east, for example, there is more attention paid to the customs of Islam. Even travellers who travelled to, say, Constantinople for non-religious but diplomatic reasons were more attentive to that Ottoman and Islamic “other” than these sixteenth-century pilgrims. Descriptions about the different faiths in the Eastern Adriatic and Greece did not depend only on the pilgrims’ personal interests because they were approaching the Holy Land or because they wanted to be original if the goal was the publication of the travelogue. Sometimes it depended on the weather conditions, whether or not to decide to sail further or explore the town or island and so on.

This case study has analysed just five of the hundreds of travel accounts that exist from the sixteenth century. The Eastern Adriatic and Greece may only have been on the route towards the Holy Land, but it has become clear that much can be revealed about how these Catholic pilgrims experienced all the similar and different religious customs and beliefs during their journey, among other things, based on the Church’s own values. Some travel accounts offer a wealth of information, where a comprehensive comparative analysis of travelogues coming from different traditions could form a stronger conclusion in the future about the different aspects of experiencing the religious other.

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THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

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