

Spanish Friars on the Move: Alms-Collecting and information gathering in the Early Modern Ottoman Mediterranean

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The papers in this panel collectively explore a unique religious institution known as the Commissioners of the Holy Land, a Franciscan network attached to the Custody of the Holy Land. The Custody is the venerable Franciscan institution based in Jerusalem which has overseen the operations of Catholic pilgrimage since the fourteenth century. The extensive seventeenth century correspondence of the Spanish commissioners found in the National Archives in Madrid illuminates a network that functioned as a vital spiritual, political and economic connective tissue linking the Custody, an institution operating within the boundaries of the Ottoman empire, and a globally expanding Catholic tradition. This paper looks more specifically at its function as a valued information network through a consideration of three dimensions of its operations: Franciscan spirituality, Ottoman governance, and personal experience. I will suggest that Franciscan privileging of mobility and the *imitatio Christi* as central Franciscan ideals, the legal and political access extended by Ottoman authorities, and the extensive personal experience acquired by commissioners in pursuit of their alms gathering duties invested them with special authority as “local” experts.