Zeal for the Faith: A 16th-Century Account of a Spanish Martyr in Jerusalem[1]

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A fascinating *relación de suceso*[2] narrates the tale of an unnamed Spanish woman who travels to Jerusalem where, fired by Christian zeal, she preaches against Islam, enraging the local Muslims. She is arrested, rejects the advice of an Ottoman judge that she nominally convert to Islam to save her life, and is gruesomely executed. Her story, published in Valencia in 1581, was written by one Francisco González de Figueroa, who claimed it was based on a true account. He structures the story along hagiographic and martyrological lines, depicting the unnamed woman as a Christ figure who preaches, heals, baptizes, makes enemies and meets her death at the same place, in a similar way and at the same time of year as Jesus. Like St. Ignatius Loyola, she travels to the Holy Land without money, trusting in God. Like numerous martyrs before and since, she actively courts death by fearlessly preaching to a hostile audience, and when offered the chance to save herself by converting to Islam, she refuses. The modest goal of this paper is to situate the story within its historical context while examining how generic conventions transformed the sad fate of an overzealous pilgrim into a tale of exemplary martyrdom.

The story

Like many *relaciones de sucesos*, the story of the Spanish woman is written in verse. The first ten stanzas function as a sort of preface that provides the story with its interpretive frame: women in general are so inconstant, González de Figueroa suggests, that when an extraordinarily virtuous and exemplary woman comes along, it's important to take notice and recognize her as a model worth emulating (lines 1-55).[3] The woman first travels from Spain to Rome, where she lives a saintly life of penitence, abstinence and privation that leaves her so weak she has to ride a donkey everywhere she goes. She gains many admirers, but also has detractors who consider her mad (lines 96-100). In due course, she seeks papal permission to go to Jerusalem, and ships out from Venice.[4] We are told nothing of the voyage, except that commending herself to God, she is able to secure free passage for a journey that is normally prohibitively expensive (lines 136-145).[5]

A typical first-person pilgrimage account will relate the traveler's arrival in Jaffa and overland journey to Jerusalem, but this is not a first-person account, and the writer is less interested in the journey than in what the pilgrim does once she arrives in the Holy City. She donates her donkey to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and, carrying a cross in her hand, she

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society in Córdoba, Spain, June 10, 2022.

[2] *Relaciones de sucesos* made up an extremely popular genre of "single event news pamphlets" (Ettinghausen, 242) that can be considered precursors to news periodicals. They are also referred to as *pliegos sueltos* or *pliegos de cordel*. In what follows, I will use *pliego* when I am discussing a booklet, and *relación* when discussing the text contained in the booklet.

[3] I have included a transcription of the text as an appendix. All citations to the text are to that transcription.

[4] Her traveling companion is an honorable man, about whom we are told nothing, except that he may be the one who witnessed her end (lines 131-135).

[5] Pilgrim accounts of travel to the Holy Land typically make a point of mentioning the great cost of the voyage, which generally made the journey all but impossible for those of lesser means. The *relación* implies that her ability to travel for free is a sign of her sanctity. There are echoes here of St. Ignatius, who also undertook his first pilgrimage to Jerusalem without money, seeking to rely solely on God.

sets out to preach Christ and attack the errors of Islam (lines 166-170). The offended Muslims of Jerusalem (referred to as Turks in the text), go to the local governor and demand that she be burned for blaspheming their religion. The governor believes her to be "loca y desatinada" (line 210) and tells the people to let her alone. The people respond that as a Spaniard, she is especially worthy of death.[6] Despite the threat, she perseveres, and when her preaching has no effect, she changes tactics: advertising herself as a healer, she secretly baptizes sick Muslim children who are on the point of death (lines 251-260). Meanwhile, she continues her anti-Islamic preaching, and at last, the people go back to the judge and threaten to inform on him to the Grand Turk if he does not put a stop to it (lines 281-285). He therefore, orders her arrest.

The woman is apprehended during the Palm Sunday procession as she enters Jerusalem astride a donkey, much like Christ, who also rode a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.[7] In another obvious parallel to the accounts of Christ's arrest and trial before Pilate in the New Testament, she is taken again before the Ottoman judge, who again tries to find a way to not have to punish her (lines 316-320). He tells her that if she announces publicly that she is converting to Islam, she will be allowed to go free. Once she is out of harm's way, he says, she can do whatever she pleases (lines 321-330). In other words, he invites her to pretend to convert, knowing that once she is safe at home she will return to Christianity. Outraged by the suggestion, she vehemently blasphemes against Mohammad, leaving the judge no choice but to sentence her to death (lines 341-345). People come from all over, bringing enough wood to burn 10,000 Turks (lines 361-365). The woman, meanwhile, joyfully awaits her fate (lines 371-375). Rejecting the attempt of a local Christian to rescue her, she is taken to Mt. Calvary, where she is tied to a post with her hands nailed above her head (lines 406-410) and continues to preach while she is burned, until her body is reduced to ash and her soul ascends to Heaven. Christians then gather what relics of hers they can.

What we have, then, is the story of a saintly Christian woman who suffers the consequences of valiantly preaching her religion and publicly disparaging Islam in Ottoman Jerusalem. Rather than shrink from those consequences, she anticipates them joyfully, rejecting all attempts to save her or get her to save herself. It's a strange story to present-day readers, who might be baffled by her motives and find themselves inclined to agree with the woman's detractors in Rome and the Ottoman judge that she is more than a little mad. In order to situate the story – and consider what it meant – within its various contexts, it might be helpful to follow the "conceptual prerequisites" that guide Brad S. Gregory's study of early-modern martyrdom in *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*. Gregory suggests, perhaps self-evidently, that for martyrdom to exist, first "the notion of martyrdom must exist and be available to contemporaries. Second, there must be people willing to punish the heterodox with death. Third, there must be people willing to die for their religious convictions. Finally, there must be survivors who view those executed for their religious convictions as martyrs" (26-27). Even though Gregory's study confines itself to the tension among Catholics, Protestants and Anabaptists in early modern Western Europe, these criteria will still be useful for examining this collision between Spanish Catholic missionary zeal and Ottoman bureaucracy. First, though, we need to briefly discuss the proto-news genre in which the story was published.

[6] A common view in many Spanish pilgrimage accounts holds that Spaniards run a greater risk than other pilgrims.
[7] The Franciscan custodian of the holy sites also would ride into Jerusalem on an ass as part of the Palm Sunday procession in a self-conscious imitation of Christ (Armstrong, 171).

***Relaciones de sucesos* as genre**

González published his story as a *pliego suelto*. Also referred to as *pliegos de cordel*, or *relaciones de sucesos*, *pliegos sueltos* were "single event news pamphlets" (Ettinghausen, 242) that can be considered precursors to news periodicals. They were extremely popular in early modern Spain, as they were elsewhere in Europe. In English they are referred to as broadsides, chapbooks, or pamphlets. In their most basic form, they were printed on a single sheet that when folded produced an eight-page booklet. They could be written in prose or verse,[8] and covered a wide range of topics:

> The news topics covered by the *relaciones de sucesos*, like their equivalents in other countries, include: battles, peace treaties and geographical discoveries; conversions, beatifications, canonisations, martyrdoms and autos de fe; royal births, marriages, journeyings, ceremonies and deaths; storms, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and fires; miracles, bloody crimes, the birth of conjoined twins and other malformed humans; exotic animals, fantastical monsters and dire doings of witches and the devil; as well as sports, such as bullfights, tournaments and quintain. (Ettinghausen, 242)

Many *relaciones* were decidedly non-religious in tone, but stories of martyrdom were tailormade for this form of proto-journalism. "Stories about recent violent events were news," notes Jolyon Mitchell (66). "They made for popular and dramatic copy."

According to Henry Ettinghausen, "by the end of the sixteenth century, and certainly in the first half of the seventeenth, single event news pamphlets had undoubtedly become one of the most widely read kinds of printed matter throughout most of Europe" (242). They were often intended to be "recited in public, playing on the amazement or horror of the audience." They did not – and were not intended to – question or counter the status quo. Rather, "the opinions they expressed represented the Establishment – they did not just pretend to provide information, but 'structured' reality by picking out those events that would figure as news and by rhetorically working on their consumers" (242). In other words, readers were not merely informed, but guided toward how they should react to that information by the form in which it was presented to them. Like medieval *exempla*, the tales conveyed information wrapped in a moralizing package and the reader expected – and was expected – to get more out of it than mere information.

However, the exemplary nature of the narrative in some cases may have been simply a pretext for giving the public what it really wanted. As in today's tabloid journalism, sensational stories sold. Although *relaciones* conveyed information, in doing so "they satisfied the European public's increasing appetite for all things *tremendista* or crude" (Aronson, 2-3),[9] while reinforcing Establishment mores. As Ettinghausen points out:

> Terrifyingly gory deaths also figure prominently in the many *relaciones* on martyrdoms which offer their readers and listeners a dizzying range of exotic executions, including

[8] Publishing "news" in verse strikes modern readers as odd, but a text in such a format – along with the woodcut illustration that invariably accompanied it – would have appealed to readers. A.W. Bates notes that "readers probably expected a familiar format, and the rhyming and scanning verse might have helped the less literate to follow the text" (qtd. in Aronson, 2).

[9] *Tremendismo* was a literary trend mostly associated with the decade of the 1940s following the Spanish Civil War. It tended to accentuate the raw and violent undercurrents of society.

> *relaciones* in verse on the crucifixion in Tunis in 1626 of a Majorcan who took three days to die; on the ingeniously varied ways designed by the king of Morocco in 1621 to put to death ten Christians who had refused to be sodomised; or the mass martyrdom of 118 Christians in Japan in 1622. (255)

A sensational tale of a martyred Spanish woman would not have been unusual or out of place in the world of *relaciones de sucesos*. But how unusual is the event itself? Does the story relay factual information? Is it a fiction that nevertheless reflects things that could happen? Or does it simply reflect Spanish prejudices against the Muslim other? To consider these questions, let's return to Gregory's criteria and apply them to sixteenth-century Spain and the Ottoman Middle East.

The notion of martyrdom

According to Gregory, in order for martyrdom to exist, the notion of martyrdom needs to exist. In other words, there needs to exist a mindset that understands that it is possible to suffer death because of one's religious convictions. Concomitant with that, also for martyrdom to exist, someone has to be willing to die for their religious convictions and someone else has to be willing to kill for them.

The early period of Christian martyrdom ended when Constantine legalized Christianity and for Western Christians, martyrdom became a thing of the past. It did not return as a real possibility until the late Middle Ages, when Western missionaries began to evangelize in non-Christian lands. "Dying for the faith became a frontier phenomenon in the West, a real possibility only for Crusaders or, from the thirteenth century, for mendicant missionaries in the Middle East, Asia, or northern Africa" (Gregory, 30).

In the West, martyrdom became strongly associated with the missionary work of the Franciscan Order.

> In the thirteenth century, the Franciscan friar Saint Bonaventure had argued that the martyrdom suffered in the course of missionary activity among infidels constituted the highest level of union with God, as it not only relived physically the passion of Christ, but also imitated His poverty. By the mid-1300s, many Franciscans came to believe that missionary martyrdom was an integral part of the order's identity. This late-medieval religious culture not only would persist but would be strengthened in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the ideal of martyrdom experienced a great revival as a consequence of the violent confrontations between Protestants and Catholics. (Cañeque, 201)

The *relación* we are studying was published in 1581, which coincides with a time when martyrdom – and news about martyrdom – was on the upswing. It was particularly associated with evangelization. Alejandro Cañeque suggests that the "revival of the impetus for martyrdom" would have coincided with the beginning of the Jesuit mission to England in 1580 (207). "It was in 1583 when, on orders of Pope Gregory XIII, a revised, enlarged edition of the *Martyrologium romanum* was published. … This revision and updating of the *Martyrologium* was a direct consequence of the confrontation between Catholics and Protestants" (Cañeque, 207-08).

Willingness to die

Certainly in both East and West, people understood that dying for Christ was integral to the Christian tradition, and that undertaking a mission to "pagan" lands could involve danger. Gregory notes that "the collective dynamic of martyrdom helped shape the character of early modern Christianity. … Bound to the stake or standing at the scaffold, martyrs were the living embodiment of what they believed and practiced as members of religious communities" (6). Being willing to die was the ideal, although not every Christian was able or called upon to live up to it. Nevertheless, Gregory cautions that willing martyrs should not be seen as fanatics:

> Martyrs are not statistically representative of sixteenth-century Christians. They tell us not abut rank-and-file believers and the clergy who struggled to inculcate minimal religious comprehension and observance, but rather about what such a process ideally produced: men and women self-consciously steeped in their faith, willing to make it their overriding priority. … Accordingly, the extremis of martyrdom should be understood not as a fanaticism of the fringe, but as exemplary action. (8)

Gregory decries a "hermeneutics of suspicion" when attempting to understand and explain the past. It is reductive to assume irrationality or even mental illness on the part of martyrs who refuse to recant under threat of torture and death, rather than allowing that their actions were perfectly coherent and logical in context, he says. "Functioning as a presentist mirror, it predictably yields a history reflecting the interpreter's commitments" (14).

Willingness to kill

In sixteenth-century Spain, the Inquisition was at its height; Spanish society showed no qualms about prosecuting religious non-conformity. And as we've already seen, Franciscan missionaries to the Muslim world would sometimes find themselves running afoul of local authorities. According to Christopher MacEvitt, one important difference between early Christian martyrdom narratives and those of the late medieval Franciscans was that early Christian martyrs confronted authority and suffered persecution in the places where they lived, and they were commemorated in the places where they had died. The Franciscans, on the other hand, traveled abroad, and "their memories were consequently preserved in their lands of origin, rather than on the spot." MacEvitt goes on to explain that "not only did the martyrs die distant from their communities, they also died in a different cultural, political, and religious setting from the one with which they were familiar" (2011, 10). However, a focus on late medieval and early modern missionary martyrdoms should not lead us to neglect another strain of martyrdom that had been present for far longer in the Orthodox East, which saw periodic instances of neo-martyrdom beginning shortly after the 7th-century Muslim conquests and continuing up into the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The term "neo-martyr" draws a distinction between early Christian martyrs and later martyrs who appeared in the Muslim period. Christian C. Sahner distinguishes three categories of "neo-martyr" in the early Islamic period:

> The first and most numerous were Christian converts to Islam who then returned to Christianity. Because apostasy came to be considered a capital offense under Islamic law, they faced execution if found guilty. The second group was made up of Muslims who converted to Christianity without any prior affiliation with their new religion. The third consisted of Christians who slandered the Prophet Muḥammad, usually before a high-ranking Muslim official. (3)

The fate of those who slandered the prophet, obviously, is particularly relevant to our story. Sidney Griffith notes that it was "sometimes the Christian enthusiast himself who, if he did not instigate the confrontation with the Muslim authorities, used it as an opportunity to earn his death by defaming Islam and the prophet Muhammad" (169).

By the time our *relación* was written, "the ideal of martyrdom had become closely intertwined with world evangelization in the early modern Catholic world," Cañeque writes, quoting the evangelically minded Jesuit Jerónimo Gracián:

> There are men who go to the Indies to just bring back the skins of cows and other animals, but there are few who imitate St. Bartholomew and go there to give their own skins, letting themselves be skinned alive in order to bring the news [about the Gospels] and true knowledge to peoples who, albeit rational, live like beasts and irrational animals, because they worship oxen and cows and other filthy animals. (198)[10]

Perpetuating memory

The sixteenth century reading public, therefore, was aware of martyrdom, understood martyrdom as an ideal, and understood those willing to die for their beliefs as heroes. Gregory's final criterion for what we might call a discourse of martyrdom is that there need to be survivors willing to accept those killed as martyrs. In other words, there are no martyrs if there isn't a community willing to interpret a violent death as a martyrdom, as happens in the *relación*, where the Christian community gather the woman's remains to venerate them as relics.

And it also includes those who perpetuate the memory of the martyr in written form. The author of the *relación* is clearly seeking to show his protagonist as a model, someone worth venerating at a time when Catholicism felt itself under attack in Europe and in the East. Given this, we can read González's text as a thrilling example of keeping the faith. Its obvious fictive elements give pause, but as Gregory notes:

> All writers fashion narratives according to divergent agendas and view events through distinctive interpretive lenses. Martyrological literature would seem doubly suspect: in some ways it resembles later medieval hagiography, a genre notorious for its imaginative flights of fancy. Moreover, sixteenth-century martyrological writers were overt propagandists. They wrote with the aim, often made explicit, of commemorating their heroes, edifying fellow believers, denouncing religious opponents, and convincing readers that they were chronicling stories of the real witnesses of Christian truth. Their writings are worlds away from detached reporting. How can we penetrate their partisan depictions of the executions they claim to portray? (16)

Castelli notes, "Martyrdom is not simply an action. Martyrdom requires an audience (whether real or fictive), retelling, interpretation, and world- and meaning-making activity. Suffering violence in and of itself is not enough. In order for martyrdom to emerge, both the violence and its suffering must be infused with particular meanings" (34). González's *relación*

[10] Gracian's original says: "Hombres ay que van a las Indias a solo traer pellejos de vacas y de otros animales, y pocos imitan a San Bartholome, en yr a dar su pellejo, dexandose dessollar por dar noticia, y verdadero conocimiento a gente, que aunque tengan vso de razón, viuen como bestias y animales irracionales, pues adoran bueyes, y vacas y otros animales inmundos" (6v).

clearly infuses the woman's story with meaning, functioning along the lines that Gregory describes: his story is meant to edify by providing his readers with an exemplary witness of Catholic faith. Given that González's story has been molded to fit the expectations of a particular genre, to what extent might any of it have actually happened?

Historical Sources

In stories obviously structured along the lines of biblical and hagiographic models and written to be as sensational as possible, it can be hard to determine what – if anything – can be considered historically reliable. However, this event is corroborated in other sources.

The earliest published historical account comes from the Franciscan historian Francesco Gonzaga, who includes the following in his list of Holy Land martyrs:

> Non pigebit his annectere Hispanam quandam mulierem, nomine Mariam, quae duodecim ab hinc annis, fidei feruore accensa, in ipso die palmarum crucem per totam ciuitatem Hierusalem portans, ac Mahumeticam impietatem miseris ipsis Turcis exprobrans, in rogum ignis ardentis iniecta ante atrium sancti sepulchri, inuicto pectore, martyrium subijt, non sine maxima tum virorum, tum quoque mulierum infidelium admiratione: quod Christiana muliercula tam constanter pro sua fide ad martyrium properaret. Eius ossa, et cineres potea Mauri, et Turce Christianis magno precio vendiderunt. (114)[11]

Despite some important differences, this is clearly an account of the same incident. A devout Iberian woman visits the Holy Land, preaches against Islam, is arrested during the Palm Sunday procession, is burned, and her remains become relics sought after by the Christian community.

But the differences are significant and give insight into the varied rhetorical demands of chronicles and martyrologies. In Gonzaga's account, there is no mention of a sympathetic judge who pressures her to convert; she does not ride a donkey. She is executed outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, not at Mt. Calvary, and although she is burned, there is no mention of her hands being nailed to the post. And rather than her remains being gathered by pious Christians after the execution, they are sold to the Christians by "Moors and Turks."

Gonzaga published his book in 1587 and says Maria's martyrdom occurred twelve years prior – roughly 1575. A later Franciscan historian, Francesco Quaresmius, expanded on Gonzaga's account with eyewitness testimony.

> Adhuc viget Ierosolymis illustris memoria honestae ac piae mulieris Lusitanae nominee Maria, de que agit Gonzaga Parte 1. Hist. Franciscanae religionis, loquens de Martyribus Terrae santae, et alii. Nos de ea dicemus quae singulariter accepimus in his partibus ab his apud quos recens erat huius mulieris memoria. (57).[12]

[11] "… add to these a certain Spanish woman, named Maria, who twelve years hence, inflamed with the fervor of faith, on the day of the palms itself carrying a cross through the whole city of Jerusalem, and denouncing the Mohammedan impiety of the miserable Turks themselves, was cast into a pyre of burning fire before the court of the holy sepulchre. With an unbroken breast, she underwent martyrdom, not without the greatest astonishment of unbelieving men as well as women: that a Christian woman should hasten so steadily to martyrdom for her faith. Her bones and ashes were sold to the Christians by the Moors and the Turks at a great price."

[12] "In Jerusalem still flourishes the illustrious memory of an honorable and pious Portuguese woman named Maria, of whom Gonzaga speaks in Part 1 of his *History of the Franciscan Religion*, where he speaks of the martyrs of the

Quaresmius first arrived in Palestine in 1616, and briefly became custodian in 1618 He returned to Jerusalem in 1626, and by then was already working on his *magnum opus*, commonly referred to as the *Elucidatio* (Leahy and Tully 2019, 70-71). The book wasn't published until 1639, but if he gathered his information during his first, or even his second, stay in Jerusalem, he could conceivably have met people who remembered the Maria incident.

One new piece of information that Quaresmius provides is that Maria is a member of the Franciscan Third Order.[13] Quaresmius writes that Maria had left Lusitania (Portugal) to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and once there decided to remain. Another critical detail missing from Gonzaga's account is Maria's work as a midwife and secret baptizer of Muslim children:

> Conuersabatur ergo cum illis nostra Maria, dabat eisalutis Monita, et singulariter illas adiuuabat in partu. Et si quando videbat illarum filios periclitari, zelo salutis illorum succensa, credens se rem Deo charam facere, illos elam sacro Baptismatis lauacro tingebat, quod et alias simili occurrenti occasione faciebat, ex quo animabus illis salus et Christo gloria prouendiebat. (57)[14]

As in Gonzaga's account, Quaresmius reports that, fired by religious zeal during the Palm Sunday procession, Maria began to preach against Islam and the Prophet Mohammad, inflaming the crowd, who – egged on by the Jews – beat her, dragged her to a pyre, and burned her.[15] There is no sympathetic judge and no offer to pardon her if she were to convert.

Juan de Calahorra, another Franciscan historian, this time working in 1684, adhered closely to Quaresmius, but offered some fresh details. He refers to Maria as a "devota Peregrina Española, … natural del Reyno de Portugal, y de la profesión del Venerable Orden de Penitencia" (452). Maria sets out as a pilgrim and soon decides to spend the rest of her life in the Holy Land, devoting herself to worshiping at the holy places and to charitable works. Because of these charitable works she becomes beloved by all, "que hasta los Turcos la permitian entrar en sus casas, y conversar familiarmente con las mugeres Turcas, a las quales daua saludables consejos, y asistía con solicitud en sus partos" (452). If in her ministrations she saw a child in danger of death, "inflamada en el amor de su salvacion, la bautizaua" (452).

As with Gonzaga and Quaresmius, in Calahorra's telling, she doesn't begin to openly preach until that fateful Palm Sunday when "leuantando la voz de entre la confusion de las turbas, le cantaua al Salvador mil alabanças" (453). She leaves the procession and enters the Holy City, "predicando a aquellos Infieles la inmensa Clemencia, y benignidad de tan grande Rey, y Señor" (453). But here, Calahorra offers something new. Word of her preaching has reached the Cadí, who has her brought to him. Because she does not speak Arabic (*lengua Morisca*), she speaks to the Cadí in her own language, interpreted by "un perfido Hebreo" (453).

Holy Land, and others. We shall speak of that which we received in these parts from those among whom the memory of this woman was fresh."

[13] The Franciscan Third Order was founded by St. Francis of Assisi as an organization of lay men and women who "adapted the teaching of the saint to their domestic or social responsibilities" (Robson, 42). Members of the Third Order made vows and followed a rule, but continued to live in their own homes and live secular lives.

[14] "Our Mary then conversed with them, gave them salutations, and helped them singularly in childbirth. And if she ever saw that their children were in danger, she was inflamed with zeal for their salvation, believing that she was doing the thing dear to God, and dipped them in the holy water of Baptism, which she did at other times on similar occasions, from which she brought salvation to those souls and glory to Christ."

[15] A detail strangely absent from González's *relación*.

She preaches of Christ, and makes sure to add that "Mahoma era engañador, y falso Profeta, y que como tal los auia dado la ley que ellos muy bien sabían, la qual los conducía con él a las penas eternas" (453). After Maria refuses to convert, the Cadí "mandó que la escarpiassen (a semejança de Iesu Christo a quien predicaua) en un Leño, y que fuesse quemada en aquel modo, para que tan horrible, y exemplar castigo sirviesse de escarmiento a los otros Christianos" (453).

Calahorra, again following Quaresmius, devotes considerable space to defending the validity of the baptisms performed by Maria:

> Pudiera dudar alguno que no procedia con acierto, por hazerlo sin licencia de sus Padres, a los quales parecía, que les vsurpaua el derecho, que tenían sobre sus hijos. Pero esta muy lexos de ser digna de reprehensión; porque si bien es verdad, que no se pueden bautizar los hijos de los Infieles contra la voluntad de sus Padres (quando estos no están sujetos a alguno de los Principes Christianos) como tienen comúnmente los Teologos; con todo esto no es ilícito el bautizarlos en el articulo de la muerte, como se haga con cautela, y sin que lleguen a entenderlo sus Padres, como lo haría nuestra devota Maria, disimulando, que los quería dar algun aliuio, y refrigerio en aquel vltimo peligro. (454)

Parental authority ceases to be binding when it's a matter of life or death, and, in fact, a Christian who is able to baptize a child in danger of death and declines to do so, commits a mortal sin against charity.

If MacEvitt is correct that "Martyrdom in any case is much more about the community who commemorated the martyr than about the individual who died; the community was responsible for preserving his relics and telling the story of his suffering and death" (2020, 366), then it is obvious why the Franciscan historians would point out Maria's Franciscan affiliation. All of these accounts were produced years or even decades after the *relación*, yet many details added to later Franciscan accounts are already present in González's story. This suggests that González had access to a different, earlier source. Curiously, the *relación* makes no mention of a Third Order affiliation or of perfidious Jews, but does include details common to martyrologies (the interviews with the judge and "Maria's" valiant refusal to convert to Islam) or that make her imitation of Christ crystal clear (she rides a donkey, she is crucified at Mt. Calvary). The demands of the genre clearly conditioned how the story would be told. As Jolyon Mitchell notes, "…martyrdom texts were not stable narratives, as they were re-described, re-formed, and recreated to serve the needs of both local and wider communities (66).

The Franciscan connection

That Maria was a Third Order Franciscan seems significant, given that almost from the beginning of its existence, the Franciscan Order understood that its mission could include martyrdom. "For Franciscans as much as for Tertullian, martyrdom was not only a way to ascribe meaning to death suffered through religious persecution but also a way to ascribe meaning to the world around the martyr" (MacEvitt 2011, 2). The Franciscan *Regula non bullata* acknowledged two ways to undertake missions to the Muslim world. One was non-confrontational. "The brothers who felt called to witness to the Muslims should truly be minores and convince Muslims of the superiority of Christianity, not through preaching or speech, but through the humble mien appropriate to those who serve a humble and crucified God" (MacEvitt 2011, 7-8). The other way "placed conversion at the center of the friars' activities – infidels must hear the word of God to be saved – but exposed the friars to the greatest possibility of being

martyred. Encouraging Muslims to abandon their faith was a capital offense under Islamic law; denigrating Islam and its prophets (*sabb*) was equally so." Franciscan missionaries who chose the second option tended to follow a pattern:

> After arriving in a Muslim-ruled city, they proceeded to the main mosque of the town, where they preached salvation through Jesus Christ, and denounced the lies of the prophet Muhammad and his 'demonic faith.' Often warned that their actions were illegal and offensive, the friars persisted in their preaching and their insults until the Islamic authorities brought them to trial and sentenced them to death. (MacEvitt 2020, 365)

This pattern gets repeated in multiple martyrdom accounts, including González's *relación*. However, as previously noted, the Franciscan accounts that mention her preaching all say it began on Palm Sunday, when Maria was overcome by the emotion of the moment. González has her preaching from the very beginning, but omits entirely Maria's Franciscan affiliation; he is more interested in proclaiming a Spanish martyr than a Franciscan one. The Franciscan historians, on the other hand, are very interested in claiming her as a member of their order, even though the accounts of her death do not follow the typical Franciscan martyr template.

Neo-martyrologies

González does follow the template, and in doing so exhibits many of the rhetorical hallmarks of a different martyrdom tradition – that of the neo-martyr stories that were popular in the Orthodox East from the early Middle Ages through the early modern period. As we have seen, one hallmark of neo martyr stories is the willingness of the martyr to deliberately court death by "defaming Islam and the prophet Muhammad." Sidney Griffith observes that another important element of neo-martyr stories is the interview with a Muslim official:

> [a] special feature of the martyrologies which recount their exploits is often the report in them of an interview between the martyr and a caliph, an emir, or some other Muslim official, in which the martyr takes the opportunity to give instructions on the rudiments of the Christian faith, along with a declaration of what he views as the short-comings of Islam. (169).

Griffith is writing specifically about neo-martyrs from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, but neo-martyrologies continued to be produced into and throughout the Ottoman period. A near contemporary story about a Coptic Egyptian saint offers an interesting point of comparison. In their study of St. Salib, a Coptic Christian who was executed in 1512 in Mamluk Egypt, Febe Armanios and Boğaç Ergene point to important differences between how the event was reported in a contemporary Mamluk chronicle and how it was later depicted in a martyrology. Like the Spanish woman, Salib blasphemes against Islam, is offered the chance to save his life by converting, and refuses. *The Chronicle of Ibn Iyas* notes that:

> He pledged not to change his religion, so the judges condemned him to death. Representatives of the ruler bore witness to this [confession]. So they mounted him on a camel while he was nailed, and they displayed him in Cairo until they brought him to al-Madrasah al-Salihiyyah. They beheaded him under the windows of the school. The people then brought fire and wood and burned his body in the midst of the market [*suq*].

> When nighttime fell, the dogs came and ate his bones, and his matter ended. (qtd. in Armanios and Ergene 119)

The details are sparse, but suggestive: Salib is offered the chance to change his religion, and refuses. Like the Spanish woman, he is nailed before being killed, and his body is burned, leaving nothing but bones.

A later martyrology, on the other hand, adds details, including miracles and meetings with multiple Mamluk officials, all of whom entice him to recant his earlier statements and convert to Islam. He refuses and finally the sentence is carried out. Armanios and Ergene note that "the neo-martyrdom genre as a whole not only embellishes the bravery of its heroes but also insists on noting the judicial processes used to condemn these individuals to death" (130). Many neo-martyr stories, then, focus on the judicial element and the attempt to get the prisoner to convert. Conversion had its benefits. As Felicita Tramontana points out:

> Generally speaking by converting the legal position of the subject changed. Becoming Muslim altered the legal value of testimony and the set of inheritance rights; it might be a way to escape the death penalty or to be freed from prison. Conversion, moreover, resulted in the cancellation of debts contracted with non-Muslims, since according to Islamic law Muslims could not owe debts to non-Muslims. (30)

Rejecting that temptation enhances the martyr's reputation. "Neo-martyrs, including Salib, gain more credibility and respect when they must defend themselves multiple times in front of numerous Muslim judges and rulers" (Armanios and Ergene 130). Multiple interviews with a judge or judges – as in the *relación* – enhance the spiritual reputation of the martyr, and also reflect the experience of Christ, who endured multiple interviews with multiple judges before being executed. As Armanios and Ergene point out, "it is important to note that many Christian hagiographic texts reflect a desire to present the martyr as one who strives to mimic the life of Christ (*Imitatio Christi*)" (130).

The St. Salib story parallels our *relación* in many ways. Like him, the nameless woman is also offered the chance to convert in multiple meetings with the Ottoman judge. Before being burned, she is crucified, a punishment that "was occasionally inflicted upon both Muslim criminals and Christian offenders of Islam" (Armanios and Ergene, 135). The Salib incident occurred in Mamluk Cairo, while the Jerusalem incident occurred more than half a century later in Ottoman Jerusalem, but culture and customs in Jerusalem would have been much the same as they were under the Mamluk regime. The transition from Mamluk to Ottoman did not happen all at once. "Indeed, the Ottomans had conquered the Holy City in 1517, and throughout the sixteenth century the district retained many characteristics of the Mamluk sultanate" (Tramontana, 19). In fact, the Ottoman Century in Jerusalem cannot really be said to have begun until the 17th century (Ze'evi 1-2).[16]

[16] In the century following the Ottoman conquest, the district of Jerusalem still retained many characteristics of the vanquished Mamluk sultanate. Old social institutions, laws, cultural norms, and even surviving members of the ruling elite itself, were part of the new scene, and served as constant reminders of this slowly fading past. Not until the end of the sixteenth century did Ottoman rule emerge as a distinct type of Muslim government, leaving its special mark on culture and society (Ze'evi, 2).

Summing up

Despite its rhetorical embellishments, what happened to María was something that could and did occur, and Spanish readers consumed stories of similar incidents with relish. Martyrs from the beginning of Christianity really did deliberately court death in the face of active persecution, and what can seem mad to modern readers, or dismissed as pathological by psychiatry,[17] can make perfect sense in the realm of belief.

In the context of her own time, it would not be fair to dismiss Maria as mentally ill, even though – as depicted in the *relación* – she may have been thought mad by some of her contemporaries. To return to Brad Gregory, "a hermeneutics of suspicion often implicitly undermines the sincerity and integrity of people whose actions fall beyond the boundaries of behavior enacted 'in good faith'" (14). Instead, the impetus toward martyrdom must be understood in the context of its own time and on its own terms. "Martyrdom possesses an arresting logic and lucidity if approached on the martyrs' own terms," Gregory notes. "Put simply, martyrs were willing to die for their religious views because they believed them to be true, because revealed by God" (105).

To paraphrase Gregory, in the context of her time and place, "Maria" is not mad; she is exemplary:

> One can maintain as an axiom that a willingness to die for religious views is insane. This is not an explanation, however, but rather simply the expression of (secular) values and beliefs different from those of the martyrs. Almost no evidence could be employed to argue that early modern martyrs were insane, if by this is meant some sort of mental disorder or delusional madness. The martyrs and their fellow believers regarded their actions as laudable, not pathological or imbalanced. By contrast, the renunciation of one's beliefs was foolish and dangerous. Many martyrs expressed with precision and elegance the reasons for their willingness to die. They were not raving lunatics, but men and women who articulated and enacted values held in common with fellow believers in their respective communities of faith. (Gregory, 101)

While Maria is clearly acting contrary to local law, the *relación* views her as obviously justified. What seems mad to present-day readers makes perfect sense in the context of the time. In the Christian worldview, baptism is essential to salvation; María is saving souls by secretly baptizing Muslim babies and she is furthering the cause of Christ by publicly insulting Islam.

Given that as the aim of Maria herself, what is the aim of the *relación* that publicized her fate? If, as Ettinghausen notes, *relaciones de sucesos* served to reinforce official discourse, we might ask what values are being upheld by this story. The *relación* was published barely a decade after the Battle of Lepanto (1571) at a time when the Ottoman Empire was seen as an existential rival to the Christian west.[18] The story conveys a sense of Christianity under siege and

[17] It is tempting to interpret Maria in the light of Jerusalem Syndrome, a term that "is used to represent a pathological phenomenon in which the combination of a visit to Israel—in particular Jerusalem—and religious—in particular Christian – expectations prior to arrival either triggers or worsens a mental illness" (Van der Haven, 103). On the other hand, Van der Haven posits that rather than a pathological phenomenon, "the Jerusalem Syndrome should be seen as an eschatological subculture, consisting of foreigners who believe they are called by God to come to Jerusalem, and in which symptoms of mental illness and religious behavior coexist successfully" (118).

[18] It might be worth mentioning in passing that the story was published the same year (1581) that Philip II had himself crowned king of Portugal, which may or may not have something to do with why a Portuguese woman called "Maria" in the Franciscan chronicles becomes an unnamed, generic Spanish woman in the *relacion*.

offers an example of acceptable Christian valor in the face of implacable opposition. Where the Franciscan historians give us mob violence, González presents an Ottoman judge who insists on following legal procedures. The Ottoman east is hostile to Christianity, but not anarchic. Why would the story include an element that essentially exonerates the Ottomans of barbarity? One reason, as mentioned above, is that the sanctity of the martyr is enhanced if he or she resists multiple opportunities to recant. But in the case of the *relación*, there is another obvious reason: the writer is not simply reporting the news, he is crafting an exemplary tale. At a time when Christians caught behind enemy lines, as it were, could easily save themselves first, by not overtly attacking Islam and second, by converting to Islam, it was important to give an example of someone who did not take the easy way out.

Appendix[19]

Obra nueuamente compuesta por Francisco Gonçalez de Figueroa, natural de la ciudad de Murcia, sacada de vna verdadera relacion, dando se cuenta la vida, y el martyrio de vna santa mujer Española: y fue, que la quemaron viua en la ciudad de Hierusalen, en el monte Caluario, donde fue crucificado nuestro Señor Jesu Christo. Y esto hizieron los Turcos enemigos de nuestra santa fe catholica, el Domingo de Ramos en el año pasado de mil y quientos y ochenta, porque predicaua la ley de nuestro Señor Jesu Christo. Vista, y examinada, e impressa en Valencia, Año MDLXXXI.

[19] For ease of reading, I have modernized the spelling throughout, except for the title.

La cosa más simple y varia
más flaca, y de menos ser
que Dios hizo, es la mujer,
aunque fue muy necesaria
para el mundo engrandecer.

Es torpe, flaca, y liviana:
sin virtud, ni fortaleza
desde su naturaleza:
y así pocas veces mana
de ellas hechos de nobleza.

Sabéis quien es la mujer
que cuando Dios la formó,
como el demonio la vio
tan simple y de bajo ser,
con ella propia se armó.

Y siendo con ella armado
contra el hombre peleó
hasta que lo derribó
de la gracia y el estado
que nuestro Señor le dio.

Las que de esta han procedido,
las más han sido ignorantes,
frágiles, muy inconstantes,
torpes, faltas de sentido,
pesadas como elefantes.

Son muy prestas para el mal
en nada consideradas:
son bestias desenfrenadas:
y las de mayor caudal,
no son en nada avisadas.

Pero la que es virtuosa,
y en sus hechos muy constante,
es una rosa fragante,
y una piedra muy preciosa,
y un finísimo diamante.

Y así hubo muchas buenas
de muy notable memoria
que alcanzaron fama y gloria
que huelen como azucenas
los renglones de su historia.

Que aunque gran tiempo ha que fueron
de aquesta vida pasadas,
son sus vidas tan loadas,
que con los hechos que hicieron,
jamás serán olvidadas.

Muchos años han pasado
que mujer santa no había
como otros tiempos solía
porque está el mundo adornado
de vanidad y falsía.

Y así nos quiere mostrar
nuestro dios glorificado
un santo y claro dechado
de do podremos sacar
muy virtuoso traslado.

Este dechado salió
de nuestra España famosa
su labor es tan preciosa
que por Roma se extendió
entre gente virtuosa.

Es cierto que a Roma fue
el año santo pasado
a que esta muestra y dechado
muy bien labrado
de abstinencia pespuntado.

Sus costumbres eran tales
y de tan alto valor
que andaba de su labor
entre obispos cardenales
muy grande fama y labor.

Era tanta su abstinencia
de ayunar y tanto oraba
que la salud le faltaba
y así con mucha paciencia
encima un jumento andaba.

Siempre a San Pedro venían
los más días comulgaba

y en la puerta se dejaba
el jumento que traía
que ninguno le tomaba.

Las iglesias donde había
estación o indulgencia
andaba con diligencia
que ningún punto perdía
de esta santa penitencia.

No con las demás parlando
como por acá lo usáis
cuando en la iglesia os hayáis
que siempre estáis conversando
con que algunos perturbáis.

Más esta santa mujer
cuando a la iglesia venía
mucha gente la seguía
muy admirados de ver
la devoción que tenía.

Por los actos exteriores
que siempre hacer la veían
los que no la conocían
de su vida detractores
por muy loca la tenían.

Esto suele el vulgo usar
quien viendo un caritativo
y en servicio de dios vivo
por fisga suelen llamar
ves aquí el contemplativo.

Pero el que es siervo de dios
y tiene el mundo olvidado
no se da por afrentado
que murmuremos yo y vos
de su vida y de su estado.

Así esta mujer prudente
ninguna cosa se daba
del que loca la llamaba
más antes discretamente
oía y disimulaba.

Deseando el sumo bien
eternamente alcanzar
procuró luego ordenar
partirse a Jerusalén
para más gloria ganar.

Como tres años había
aquí dentro en Roma vivió
hasta qué lugar halló
de hablar al Papa un día
y licencia le pidió.

Y viendo que así desprecia
el mundo y su vanidad
se la dio y con brevedad
partióse para Venecia
creciendo más su humildad.

Llevaba en su compañía
un hombre honesto y honrado,
bueno y bien intencionado
que entiendo yo que sería
cual ella el fin ha mostrado.

Ya que a Venicia llegó
fue donde está la embarcación
su vida fe y devoción
fue el flete con que pasó
que es cosa de admiración.

Que a otros muchos ducados
suele costar tal jornada
más ella sin llevar nada
poniendo en dios sus cuidados
fue brevemente embarcada.

Y en llegando que llegó
comenzó a ejercitar
confesar y comulgar
por donde más se encendió
de fe para predicar.

La iglesia del monasterio
a donde continuaba
San Francisco se llamaba
donde el Santo refrigerio

y su alma y cuerpo daba. 155

Al santo Sepulcro dio
el jumento que traía
y luego una cruz ponía
en su bordón y empezó
a predicar cada día. 160

Y con la cruz en la mano
por las calles predicaba
y a los turcos les mostraba
ser Mahoma vario y vano
en cuanto les enseñaba. 165

Dábales luego a entender
que Cristo encarnó y nació
de virgen y en cruz murió
y en aquello han de creer
y en su secta perra no. 170

Y este estandarte real
que conmigo llevo hermanos
por el bien de los cristianos
nuestro dios universal
puso aquí sus pies y manos. 175

Decid que santos tenéis
que os muevan a devoción
sino solo un zancarrón,
en quien vosotros creéis
quien verlo da confusión. 180

Que nosotros los cristianos
Cien mil millones tenemos
de cosas que contemplemos
de los santos soberanos
cuyas historias leemos. 185

Un san Pablo degollado,
ver su cabeza saltar
y a Jesús siempre llamar
y aún san Lorenzo asado
con su carne convidar. 190

Los Turcos muy enojados
en ver que vituperaba
su secta y menospreciaba
se fueron muy agraviados
do el gobernador estaba. 195

Y le dijeron señor
el pueblo está alborotado
de ver como ha predicado
una mujer sin temor
la ley del crucificado. 200

Mandadla luego que quemar
pues es ley del gran Señor
que cualquier predicador
que otra ley venga a exhortar
muera como malhechor. 205

El gobernador que oyó
su querella tan malvada
les dijo no se os de nada
que esa mujer (creo yo)
que es loca y desatinada. 210

Responden es Española
y por ser de tal nación
debe morir con razón
por aquesta causa sola
con cruel muerte y pasión. 215

Dijo si perseverare
en estas cosas que vemos
según nuestra ley tenemos
si más en su ley tratare
muy bien la castigaremos. 220

Más por eso por eso no dejaba
de escupir y blasfemar
de Mahoma y renegar
y la cruz siempre mostraba
deseando los salvar. 225

Y como no aprovechaba
su santa predicación
sentía grave pasión
y por mil modos buscaba
a sus almas salvación. 230

Y a Dios orando pedía
que siempre la encaminase
con que del todo quitase
su secta y falsa herejía
y el pueblo se bautizarse.

Y luego Dios inspiró
un remedio en su memoria
con que encaminó a la gloria
muchas almas que libró
de aquella infernal escoria.

Y fue que a muchos habló
si algunos hijos tenéis
enfermos llamaréis
y veréis como les do
medicina que os gocéis.

Y aun que quieran espirar
llamadme que luego iré
y medicina traeré
para sus males curar
y luego los sanaré.

Y así muchos la llamaban
cuando algún niño enfermaba
si para morir estaba
y a su casa la llevaban
y luego los bautizaba.

Llevaba un paño mojado
cuando aquí esto sucedía
y aunque alguno la veía
estaba muy descuidado
de aquello que ella hacía.

Y el tiempo que el agua echaba
lo que conviene decir
para no dar lo de sentir
en secreto lo hablaba
cosa digna para oir.

O cautela tan famosa
memorable acá en el suelo
o santo y divino celo
de mujer tan gloriosa
que envió tantos al cielo.

Con esto nunca dejaba
su perfecto predicar
que su decir y hablar
do quiera que se hallaba
era la fe publicar.

De nuevo se conjuraron
los malditos fariseos
y con malvados deseos
nuevamente la acusaron
siendo ellos mismos los reos.

Y al gobernador decían
que si no la castigaba
y luego no la quemaba
que al gran Turco le darían
cuenta de ello de lo que pasaba.

El juez lleno de temor
porque el cargo no perdiese
y castigado no fuese
envió con gran rigor
gente que se la trujiese.

Era Domingo de Ramos
el día que fue acusada
fiesta mucho señalada
la cual todos celebramos
por ser tan solemnizada.

Madrugó con gran contento
en este tan santo día
con el celo que tenía
y recibió el Sacramento
que de costumbre lo había.

Madrugó por visitar
las estaciones sagradas
de Cristo y santas pisadas
que aquel día quiso andar
por nuestras culpas pasadas.

Y a la vuelta que tomaba
para entrar en la ciudad

con mucha riguridad
la gente aguardando estaba
por concluir su maldad.

Y como venir la vieron
aquellos que la aguardaron
ante el juez la llevaron
y justicia le pidieron
y de nuevo la acusaron.

Más como el juez la tenía
por una mujer muy sancta
del tribunal se levanta
y en secreto le decía
lo que la historia discanta.

Por qué te puedas librar
del furor de aquí esta gente
confiesa públicamente
que turca te quieres turnar
y podrás ir libremente.

Y de este modo podrás
ir libre donde quisieres
y después por donde fueres
a tu voluntad harás
lo que tú por bien tuvieres.

Pero luego como oyó
que allí Turca se llamase
y qué tal ley confesase
su alma más encendió
Dios porque gloria alcanzarse.

Y de nuevo blasfemaba
y a Mahoma maldecía
renegaba y escupía
de quien en el adoraban
y de quien en el creía

Y el juez aunque quería
dejarla de sentenciar
no se le pudo excusar
y entonces santísimo día
fue sentenciada a quemar.

Y luego se pregonó
por la ciudad que llevasen
leña con que la quemasen
y poca gente quedo
que de ello no se holgasen.

Llenos de envidia y carcoma
mandan otro pregón dar
que vengan a ver quemar
la enemiga de Mahoma.
por la indulgencia ganar.

Y así todos procuraban
traer la leña y venían
y algunos que no tenían
con las puertas se cargaban
de las casas dos vivían.

Tanta leña se juntó
que fue cosa de espantar
que había para quemar
(según noticia se dio)
diez mil Turcos a la par.

De este modo la sacaron
de la ciudad brevemente
con gran concurso de gente
y mucho placer tomaron
los de aquel pueblo imprudente.

Iba muy regocijada
esta gente perniciosa
más ella ufana y gozosa
como a bodas convidada
iba a ser de Dios esposa

Y adorando la Cruz
y contino predicando
y con su boca loando
siempre el nombre de Jesús
y esto grandes voces dando.

Un buen Cristiano venía
que en Jerusalén moraba
que consolar procuraba
algún Cristiano si había

que algún turco lo agraviaba.

El cual no supo ni oyó
aquello que había pasado
y así estaba descuidado
más luego que ella le vio
muy grandes voces le ha dado.

Entendiendo que venía
de aquel fuego la librar
le mandó luego callar
diciendo que ella quería
por Dios tal muerte pasar.

Aquel pueblo inicuo y vario
De este modo la llevaron
hasta que todos llegaron
al pie del monte Calvario
donde la martirizaron.

Estaba un palo hincado
donde así como llegaron
muy reciamente le ataron
donde luego fue ordenado
el fuego en que la quemaron.

Encima de su cabeza
las dos manos le clavaron
porque muchos se enojaron
por la cruz hermosa pieza
aquí en la mano le hallaron.

Mas ella se encendía
de viva fe y devoción
pero allá en su corazón
impresa la cruz tenía
inflamada su intención.

Al derredor le pusieron fuego
y aunque se quemaba
el predicar no dejaba
hasta que su cuerpo vieron
que en ceniza se tornaba.

Los cristianos que allí estaban
mucha compasión tenían
y de la ropa cogían
y en reliquias la guardaban
y los huesos que podían.

Veis aquí como acabó
esta bienaventurada
muy digna de ser loada
y su ánima subió
al cielo a ser coronada.

Veis aquí la nueva estrella
salida de nuestro España
relumbrando en tierra extraña
para que se imite a ella
búsquese algún modo y mañana.

Señores ved que dechado
de nuestra España hoy tenemos
razón será que tomemos
cada uno su traslado
para que nos salvemos.

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