

CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

## *Mysterious Anchorages*

On 2 December 1295, a small, well-traveled house fell from the sky into the middle of a road leading to the town of Recanati, in Italy's Marche region.<sup>1</sup> There it sat, on a forested hilltop within sight of the Adriatic Sea, on property owned by a Recanatese woman named Laureta. When locals saw it, they went inside. There they found a beautiful dark painting of the Virgin Mary that they admired without knowing its origins. Their ignorance ended only when Mary herself appeared to identify the structure. She came in a vision to the little chapel's most frequent visitor, an unnamed hermit. "Go tell this to the people of Recanati, whose country I chose from among all the nations to locate my seat, . . . that this place is Holy, and terrible," she began.<sup>2</sup> Mary explained that the humble mud-brick structure was her own house, where she had been immaculately conceived, received the angel Gabriel's Annunciation, and raised the Christ Child. After her death, the apostles had used it as a small church, placing inside it an image of her carved by St. Luke himself.

Mary also spoke of her house's astonishing journey (figure 1.1.a). Angels had carried it away from Nazareth in 1291 to keep it out of the hands of Muslim invaders. It had landed three times along the way before coming to a final stop. First, it crossed the Mediterranean and was deposited on a hilltop near the town of Trsat, in a region that was then referred to by various names—Dalmatia, Illyria, Slavonia—but which corresponds today to

1. The following account of Loreto's origins is adapted from Girolamo Angelitta, *L'istoria della Traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto* (1580).

2. "Narra questo al popolo di Racanati, il cui paese fra tutte le nationi ho eletto, per locar vi la sede mia . . . che 'l luogo è Santo, e terribile." Angelitta, *L'istoria*, pp. 43-44.

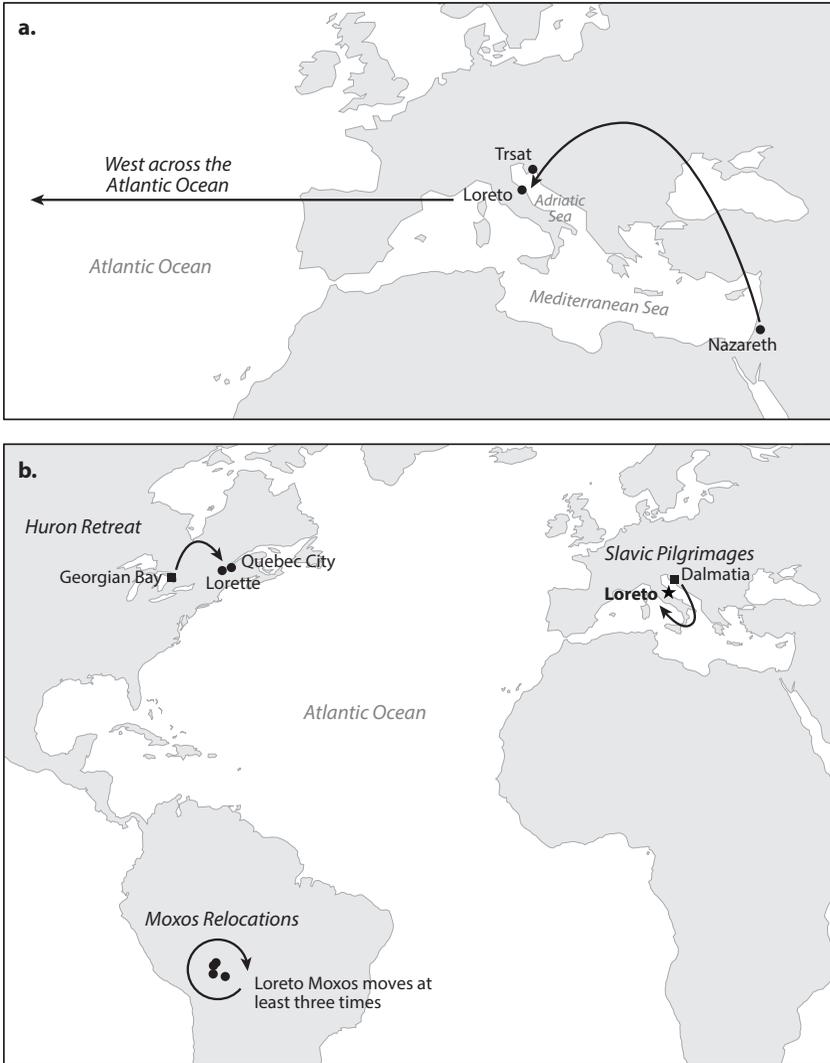


FIGURE 1.1. The flights of Loreto. Based on maps created by cartographer Gabriela Norton. a. Westward ho (1290–1550). b. Retreats, returns, and undertow (1550–1750).

the outskirts of the coastal city of Rijeka, Croatia. The house was in Trsat for three years, enough time for a respected prior, Alessandro, to receive his own explanatory vision from Mary, and enough time for a nobleman, Nicholas Frangipani, to build a small chapel around the structure. But Mary did not feel the people of Trsat properly venerated her, so she took off once more, flying over the Adriatic Sea in search of more loyal devotees. She descended in Italy in the forest near the town of Recanati on the

eve of 10 December 1294. Though the house tarried for only eight months at this second layover, it came to be known as “Loreto” for the owner of the land, Laureta. Its subsequent moves were mere hops compared to its earlier travels. When two brothers quarreled over how to divide pilgrims’ offerings to Mary, angels lifted her house to higher terrain. The structure’s fourth and last flight was a shift still higher up the coastal ridge, a minor adjustment again intended to keep its early pilgrims safe from thieves.

These unexpected landings were described by the sixteenth-century historian Girolamo Angelitta as a miracle. Yet in the late 1500s when Angelitta wrote, his account was also read as a beautiful, peaceful allegory for the spread of Christianity to the rest of the world. Catholicism, like Italy’s Holy House of Loreto, appeared to drop abruptly from the heavens into new lands, where it anchored itself with magical ease among new peoples. The analogy appealed to the energetic young missionary order of the Society of Jesus. In the 1600s, many Jesuits self-consciously cast themselves as the latest angels in the Holy House’s travels, transporting the Loreto devotion across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. They named new frontier missions for Loreto (table 1.1). These sites stand as concrete, verifiable postscripts to the much older story about the surprising mobility of religious objects. But from the twenty-first-century vantage point, the more recent anchorages also surface as an extension of the original mystery. How did Catholicism fly, and land again? How did this religion move from its Mediterranean moorings out into the world?

Jesuit archives suggest an answer to these questions, though not necessarily the answer one might expect. Early Jesuit sources show that the movement of Loreto cannot be credited solely or even mostly to the Jesuits themselves. It was not a top-down endeavor. For starters, the Society of Jesus did not have any kind of official program to promote Loreto abroad. Their writings and approaches to the Italian devotion were scattered. The Jesuit letters that inform much of this book come from three disconnected seventeenth-century mission outposts named for Loreto: Lorette, built among the Huron in Québec, in eastern Canada; Loreto Moxos, established in the Amazon River basin between today’s countries of Bolivia and Peru; and Loreto Conchó, erected farthest west, on a peninsula in Baja California.<sup>3</sup> Reports from these sites are supplemented with formal publications by the Jesuits and manuscript sources from Italy’s Loreto shrine,

3. Most of these were collected in the Jesuit central archives in Rome, the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* (ARSI) and the Jesuit archives of the Québec province in Canada, the *Archivum Societatis Iesu-Province du Canada Français* (ASJCF).

**Table 1.1:** Selected Jesuit-Founded Loreto Sites in the Americas

<b>Frontier Missions</b>		
Date	Name and Location	Jesuit Founders
1650s	Loreto of Guairá, Paraguay	Giuseppe Cataldini, Simone Mascetti
1674	Lorette-among-the-Huron, near Québec City, Canada, renamed <i>Jeune Lorette</i> (1697)	Pierre J.-M. Chaumonot
1682	Loreto Moxos, Peru/Bolivia	Cipriano Barace, Pedro Marbán, Antonio de Orellana, Joseph de Vega, Antonio Fernández, Manuel Carillo
1697	Loreto Conchó, Baja California	Juan Maria Salvatierra, Francisco María Piccolo
<b>Holy House Replica Chapels</b>		
Date	Name and Location	Jesuit Founders
1674	Lorette-among-the-Huron, near Québec City, Canada	Pierre J.-M. Chaumonot
1679	Colegio de Tepotzotlán, Mexico	Juan Bautista Zappa
1680	Colegio de San Gregorio, Mexico City	Juan Maria Salvatierra
169?	Colegio de Guadalajara, Mexico	Juan Maria Salvatierra
1697	Loreto Conchó, Baja California	Juan Maria Salvatierra, Francisco María Piccolo

the Vatican Secret Archives, Franciscan missionary collections in Bolivia, the French national libraries in Paris, the Portuguese national archives of the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon, and Spain's Archives of the Indies in Sevilla. Taken together, these founts reveal that Jesuit activity surrounding Loreto was tangential to the plans of the original Italian sanctuary and even to the initiatives of the Jesuit order itself.

Even before the Argentine Jesuit Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, scholarship lionized Jesuits as the ultimate professional missionary organization at the heart of the early modern Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> Seen in broader global company of diffusers of Loreto, however,

4. Works like Luke Clossey's *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* and Liam Brockey's *Journey to the East* have emphasized the strong links in the Jesuit worldwide network and have underscored Jesuit successes in proselytizing in far-flung regions. In Western civilization and introductory history courses, the Jesuits continue to be trundled out as prime examples of the Catholic Church's refashioning of itself in the wake of the Protestant Reformation.

the Jesuits who carried this Italian devotion abroad do not stand out for primacy or elite leadership. Ordinary Catholics were already transporting Loreto abroad, and some Jesuits individually opted to join them in doing so. Jesuits, laymen, and converts alike were engaging in the same processes and stumbles around moving Loreto. In this sense, the history of Loreto is truly a history of Jesuits in—and upstaged by—the world. Modern privileging of Jesuit professionalism and internal dynamics has obscured the improvisation that Jesuits in the field shared with the laity.

This book endeavors to show the myriad human hands behind the Holy House's emergence on the Italian and global scene. Movers ranged beyond French, Spanish, Portuguese, and central European Jesuits to include Monquí pilgrims from Baja California, Moxos house builders in Bolivia, Huron female mission leaders in Canada, Inka procession organizers in Peru, Slavic migrants in the Adriatic basin, and German atlas makers, among others featured here (figure 1.1.b). These disparate groups had parallel experiences as unofficial authors, inadvertent pilgrims, unlicensed architects, unacknowledged artists, and unsolicited cataloguers. As the adjectives suggest, the experiences of these individuals who got bundled into the history of Loreto turn Loreto's founding parable on its head. Their participation does not reveal clean, purposeful landings. Instead, their diverse interpretations point to disorder, decentralization, and independent enactments of belief that spilled across boundaries of nation, empire, church, and period.

This is not the sort of accounting that is usually made of the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century. But it is in this very real individual chaos that one can discern the *how* behind the spread of Christianity. It should be noted that this proposed human mechanism of transport differs in magnitude from the Loreto sanctuary's updated twentieth-century explanation of its most famous miracle. Since the 1900s, the Catholic Church has modulated its authorized version of the arrival of Loreto's Holy House by acknowledging human agency, but it has done this so literally that it has prompted criticism. Giuseppe Santarelli, the director of the Congregazione Universale della Santa Casa, espouses the sanctuary's position and the Catholic Church's party line: He reports that a family of Byzantine nobles called "Angeli" were the actual movers of the Holy House in the late 1200s, and they were miscoded in Loreto's archives as "angels."<sup>5</sup>

5. Santarelli, *Loreto*, pp. 13–15. Art historian Ronald Lightbown argues persuasively that the documents on which this conclusion is based (the *Chartularium Culisanense*) are forgeries (Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, p. 43). But the argument of this book owes a large debt to Santarelli and another Franciscan historian of Loreto, Floriano Grimaldi. Santarelli

While Santarelli attaches one group of high-ranking devout to one isolated movement of one revered Catholic object, this book delves into the multiple anchorages and re-anchorages of Loreto to argue that many groups of self-appointed, mixed-rank, often peripheral amateurs carried Catholicism in general to new peoples. In order to root their personal and occasionally unorthodox devotions in new ground, these Catholics reached across cultures and deliberately wrote themselves into the glittering official script of Catholic movement. Their actions offer an alternative understanding of what drives globalization: spontaneous mass participation, not institutions, political mandates, or impersonal forces. “World Christianity” thus ceases to fit the mold of a prepackaged export and becomes the sum total of thousands of insider reformulations.

### *How to Read This Book, and How to Read a Miracle*

The purpose of this study is not to pick apart a magnificent example of a miracle, but rather to test other strategies that today’s historians can contribute to the understanding of a genuinely strange event. The next chapter critically revisits the approaches that historians have traditionally brought to bear to illuminate Catholic miracles. These deconstructive approaches do tell much about Loreto’s first landings, but they also show some places where historians need to stretch or supplement their classic methods to find new answers. Chapter 2 closes by explaining the alternative approach taken in this book: instead of paring down, this history endeavors to reconstruct and consider the accumulated whole.

As outlined in chapter 2, the methodology for this project is culled self-consciously but directly from its subject matter. The way this history is being written in 2017 resembles the way Loreto’s mythohistory was itself formed centuries ago. While this may seem an obvious consequence of an experiment of reconstruction, it bears repeating that the purpose here is

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catalogued, compiled, and republished much of the corpus of writings relating to the Virgin of Loreto and has also drawn attention to the oral tradition preceding and coinciding with Loreto’s textual history. Grimaldi, a director of the archives of the *Santa Casa*, published the most thorough regional history of the sanctuary, describing Loreto’s local beginnings in the Marche. Both men hint at a multiplicity of Catholic participants involved in historicizing Lauretan devotion. I take up their hint vigorously and extend my search for agents across the Atlantic. Santarelli’s most complete interpretation of Loreto’s origins can be found in: Santarelli, *La traslazione della Santa Casa di Loreto*; also, Santarelli, *Indicazioni documentali inedite*. Grimaldi’s exhaustively researched local account of Loreto is: Grimaldi, *Devozione e Committenza nelle Marche*.

not to blindly reproduce Loreto's past or Loreto's sources, but rather to answer the question: How, and why, could a miracle like Loreto be persuasive to people? Because of how it was made, told, and refashioned. Methodology is part of the answer to the mysterious endurance of miracles, which is why there is a full chapter devoted to making it transparent.

In order to understand how Loreto moves people, and how it was moved by people, the remaining chapters follow the mythohistorical mold. They highlight accretion and emphasize the interconnections between the original and its aftermaths. The chapters are structured to repeatedly demonstrate this process of overlay, from the moment of first encounter to final anchorages. Each chapter opens with an "Anchoring Ideal," a compelling and carefully constructed early narrative of arrival such as the one that opened this chapter: a mysterious house lands. The attractive elegance of these sanitized ideals is presented first to accentuate the contrast between them and the "Actual History" that follows.

The "Actual" chapter sections survey variant experiences among Catholics as they found their own ways to reflect and articulate the ideal. These people's messy and collaborative attempts to apply the essence of Catholic miracles reverberate back on the ideal. Miracles like Loreto's landing had staying power partly because of the earnest efforts of these people to connect with old ideas, yet their innovations and criticisms also produced change. For historians, the dissonance between people's gritty experiences and the initial motivating mystery is essential; it indicates the intrusion of reality into an ever-growing, jointly reimagined narrative.

To demonstrate how the real and the ideal interact, each chapter closes with an in-depth consideration of a "New Expression" of Catholicism, a more radical example of a lived practice being taken up and negotiated by new people. This last snapshot of a fresh inflection of devotion is offered in the same spirit as the three Jesuit missions that appeared early in this chapter, appended to the famous Italian Holy House. Which one is the true Loreto, the older Italian site or the more recent offshoots that continue to carry forward its name? By setting them both alongside each other, this book insists that both make the truth, in combination.

Following Part I, the work is divided into two main parts to reflect the exceptional journeys and pairings that mark Loreto's mythohistory. Part II, "Approaching Loreto," describes the multiple *journeys* of authors and pilgrims to and from Loreto. Part III, "Leaving Loreto," focuses on the *pairings* (and uncouplings) of objects associated with Loreto, including the Holy House, the image of Mary, and the name Loreto. The third essential component of the Loreto corpus, the *lived experience* of a multiplicity of people, is

highlighted throughout both central parts of the book, most especially in the “New Expression” concluding sections of all chapters. In this way, the three dimensions foregrounded in Loreto’s founding narrative—movement, additions, and real situations—are used to reconstruct a full picture of the power of miracles, rather than to pick the miracle apart (Part IV).

This brings us back to the initial miracle of Loreto, and the central question looming behind this study: How did *Catholic devotion* spread? The miracle of Loreto preserves in amber a response verified by other archives. Beneath Loreto’s persistently captivating narrative of mysterious Christian arrival, there are hundreds of thousands of individually orchestrated and negotiated Catholic landings, some gathered here. These landings have been paradoxically obscured and enshrined in the historical record of Catholicism. They are presented here as a hypothesis: Vast and *voluntary* participation was key to Catholicism’s movement and survival. Real, repeated self-enlistment, viewed by today’s more skeptical audiences as miraculously unlikely, *did* contribute profoundly to the global diffusion of religion.