

SNSF-Advanced Grant Research Project *Holy Networks: Locating, Shaping, and Experiencing Palestinian Loca Sancta (1187-1852)*, coordinated by Prof. Michele Bacci, University of Fribourg



Job Announcement: PhD position

Website: <https://jobs.fr.ch/job/Fribourg%2C-CH-PhD-Position-Sari/782793202/>

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The SNSF Advanced Grant Project *Holy Networks: Locating, Shaping, and Experiencing Palestinian Loca Sancta (1187-1852)*, coordinated by Prof. Michele Bacci (Chair of Medieval Art History, University of Fribourg, Switzerland), offers a four-year doctoral position with a focus on the multireligious holy sites in the Jerusalem. The specific topic which the doctoral student will deal with is “Cross-Religious Evocations of the Holy at the Tomb of Prophet Samuel in Nabi Samwil”. She/he will be fully responsible for the designated subproject and maintain constant dialogue with the team members and the project’s PI.

The doctoral student will be responsible for the specific research subproject aimed to providing a historical and art historical analysis of the Tomb of Prophet Samuel, with focus on the dynamics whereby site-bound holiness came to be shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Her/his specific tasks will include the examination of available textual, visual, and material evidence, database feeding, the writing of the thesis, active collaboration with the other team members, the organization of events and workshops and participation in scientific events.

Requested profile

- Applicants should have obtained a MA in art history, history, or literature, and possess linguistic competencies enabling access to sources written in Latin and major Western European languages;
- A good knowledge of the cultural traditions associated with the Holy Land, as well as familiarity with the historical analysis of holy sites and/or with Medieval and early modern pilgrims' travelogues will be strongly appreciated;
- The application should consist of a cover letter and a detailed CV. The documents should be submitted before **December 15th, 2023**, via the website of the State of Fribourg (<https://jobs.fr.ch/job/Fribourg%2C-CH-PhD-Position-Sari/782793202/>).

Activity rate: 75%-80% (full-time position)

Workplace: University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Submission deadline: 15.12.2023

Date of appointment: 01.02.2024 or to be determined

Aims of the Project

The present project aims to provide a methodological reassessment of and a new interpretive frame to the materiality of Palestinian *loca sancta*, their interaction with the surrounding environment, their interconnectedness in the frame of topographic networks meant to be experienced through physical movement, and more generally, the construction of sanctity through and in things and its sensory apprehension.

Subject and Objectives

The project deals with the dynamics by which the three “Abrahamic” – Jewish, Christian, and Islamic – traditions in the Holy Land gave shape to forms of religious experience strictly associated with specific geographic locations, i.e., worship-worthy sites invested with memorial qualities and deemed, more or less explicitly, to provide a direct, inherent and unmediated access to the supernatural, divine, or transcendental dimensions. The topic will be investigated by analysing the visual, spatial, sensorial, performative, and narrative strategies whereby site-bound holiness was located, evoked, staged, and perceived in the chronological frame of the post-Crusader period of Islamic (Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman) rule in Palestine, from Salah ad-Din's reconquest of Jerusalem (1187) to the establishment of the so-called *status quo* by Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid in 1852. Its focus will be on a corpus of ca. 400 holy sites belonging to, and often shared by, different religious groups.

Methodology

The project relies on a teamwork combining the expertise of scholars with different training, academic age, and geographic origins. It is committed to simultaneously gather textual, visual, geographic, and material information about the holy sites and the topographic networks they were involved in. Typically, it raises questions as to: 1) the **material features** which were viewed in pre-modern times as indicators of a site's exceptional status; 2) the **narratives and legends** worked out to legitimate the site's exceptionality and the ways in which such narratives were communicated; 3) the site's interaction with the **natural environment** around it; 4) the different **kinds of hallowed matter** offered to believers' devotion; 5) the **nature and material appearance of the main cultic**

foci, their setting in space and the framing, enshrining, lighting, veiling devices used to visualize their holiness; 6) the narrative, performative, emotional associations carried by holy sites and their cultic foci and the impact of their **staging** on their worshippers' attitudes and devotional behaviour; 7) the **social actors** involved in the promotion of site-bound worship and the specific contexts in which the latter emerged; 8) the role played by **ephemeral and permanent décors** in shaping the experience of holy sites and the extent to which believers themselves contributed to their staging; 9) the latter's **transformations in time and space**; 10) the extent to which **specific sets of forms** came to be associated with distinctive cult-phenomena; 11) the **interconnectedness** of the holy sites in the frame of wider topographic networks defined by pilgrimage routes and kinetic devotions; 12) the role played by the *loca sancta* as **stopovers** in the pilgrims' embodied experience; 13) the **impact of landscape's evocativeness** on the location of site-bound holiness; 14) the specific interaction between the pilgrims' **physical movement** and their **contemplation of Palestinian landscape** as a sequence of mutually interrelated holy spots.

Outcomes

Apart from the golden open access publication of the research outcomes in the form of articles and multi-authored books, the team will be committed to the creation of an interactive map documenting the circuits of pilgrims and the topographic networks of the Holy Land. The latter will also integrate simulated 3D virtual reconstructions, or interactive panoramas, of the same routes.