

CARLO CRIVELLI BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Henry Tudor-Pole

When Carlo Crivelli left Venice for the last time, in the winter of 1457, he travelled, like everyone else coming and going from the city, by boat. Nothing is known for certain about his movements until 1465, when he is recorded as a citizen of Zadar, suggesting that he had lived there for several years.¹ It is, however, more than likely that he arrived at this Dalmatian city via a sea route, as this was by far the most effective means of transport between the coastal areas of the Adriatic Sea. Towards the end of his life, in 1491, Crivelli completed a large altarpiece for the town of Matelica, nestled within the part of the Apennine mountains that fell within the March of Ancona (figure 1). Now housed, intact, in the National Gallery, London, the altarpiece includes a predella which contains a series of narrative images that pay particular attention to the land and the sea. Four of its five sections represent different locations around the Mediterranean, three of which contain an extra-urban landscape, and two of these represent the sea in contrasting ways: bright and hopeful, and dark and ominous (figures 2–7).

This article will examine Crivelli's representation of land, sea, sky and human inhabitant, in order to interpret how he imagined the geographical region he lived in. This region is understood as a place invested with distinct characteristics. The category of place is useful for two principal reasons. First, it might be considered a less anachronistic category than the more abstract idea of space. During the late fifteenth century, the absolute extension of space, which would later come to dominate European thinking about the universe, was by no means the default. Rather than a universe, Crivelli inhabited an Aristotelian, finite cosmos, subdivided into places, which can be defined as spatial areas invested with their own distinctive, and frequently immutable, characteristics.² As I will argue, the Adriatic can be considered



Figure 1 Carlo Crivelli, *La Madonna della Rondine* (The Madonna of the Swallow), 1491, egg tempera on wood, 247 × 185 cm. © The National Gallery, London. Inventory number: NG724.



Figure 2 Carlo Crivelli, *La Madonna della Rondine*, predella, 1491, egg tempera on wood, 29 × 146 cm. © The National Gallery, London. Inventory number: NG724.2.

as one such place, a region distinct from the others around it. Secondly, place already occupies a significant role in the literature on Crivelli, albeit usually in a negative sense. It is unusual to find a publication on Crivelli that does not begin with remarks on his incompatibility with conventional modes of art-historical categorisation. Whether his style is deemed belatedly Gothic for a Renaissance artist, or his patrons too theologically conservative to foster the humanism that flourished elsewhere, Crivelli's difference from the better-known artists of Italian cities like Venice, Florence and Rome is regularly explained as a result of the peripheral region he inhabited.³ His exclusion from the *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, for example, was due to his work being situated in little cities and districts of the Marche, too remote for news to reach the ears even of that most prolific anecdote gatherer, Giorgio Vasari.⁴ Exiled from his home city of Venice and cut adrift in a region lacking the kind of artistic centres which, according to Enrico Castelnovo and Carlo Ginzburg's influential model, produce stylistic progress, Crivelli's peripherality is legible in both his work and the geographical itinerary of his life.⁵

An account of place as Crivelli imagined it might shed light on aspects of his work that are missed by Castelnovo and Ginzburg's model. While it ascribed value to artistic peripheries, proposing them as potential sites for productive alterity freed from the hyper-competitive conditions of the urban centre, the model left the notion of periphery somewhat vaguely defined, and was notably silent on major cities, such as Naples, with which no distinct artistic style was associated.⁶ However, rather than outline a general, nomothetic approach to the geography of art, the aim of this article is instead to explore how place was imagined by the artist, which might provide a different kind of contribution to the debate on the relationship between Crivelli's emplacement and his work. Crivelli's own life was passed between the littorals, hinterlands and the body of the Adriatic Sea, specifically its more northerly 'upper' and 'middle' parts.⁷ As a result of the extensive maritime trade and pilgrimage routes that passed through it, this region was profoundly connected with the wider world. The sense of place here, in a similar way to the idea of it advanced by cultural geographer Doreen Massey, seems to have been determined just as much by its relationships to other places beyond its parameters, as by its locally originating characteristics.⁸ To what extent did this region affect the way Crivelli represented the landscape?

For much of the last two thousand years, the Adriatic has been a geopolitical border zone. Home to a wide variety of religious, linguistic and ethnic groups, it has frequently marked a boundary between East and West, whether those cardinal directions denote communism and capitalism, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Islam and Christendom, or the two principal halves of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, more topographically-oriented histories of the Adriatic echo Fernand Braudel's statement that it was 'perhaps the most unified of all the regions of the Mediterranean Sea',⁹ although these claims rarely escape political interests either, whether redolent of Italian irridentist ambitions over Istria and Dalmatia,¹⁰ or efforts in the 1990s to emphasise the European belonging of the newly independent state of Croatia following the bombardment of Dubrovnik.¹¹ Such a historiographical lens inevitably colours the study of Carlo Crivelli's life and work, and a similar tension between unity and fragmentation can be discerned in that place during his lifetime. Although, as this article will explore, the predella of *La Madonna della Rondine* represents places within the wider Mediterranean, not the Adriatic itself, the experience of inhabiting this distinctive place appears to have been of crucial importance for determining its form.

Housed today within its original frame in London's National Gallery, the altarpiece known as *La Madonna della Rondine* was made for the convent of San Francesco in Matelica in 1491. The altarpiece was an important work of art within the town, having been commissioned by the local prince, Ranuccio Ottoni, and Fra Giorgio di Giacomo, guardian of the convent.¹² As might be expected given its patronage, the highly elaborate main panel unites aristocratic and Franciscan resonances. The enthroned Madonna and Child are flanked by a young Saint Sebastian dressed as a fashionable knight in pale hose, slashed sleeves, and abundant jewellery, while Mary wears a gold crown so large it obscures most of her halo. At the left, Saint Jerome wears a generous, red cardinal's robe that spills over the ledge he is standing on. A popular saint across Italy and especially amongst the Franciscans, Jerome might also have resonated in the Marche, given his Dalmatian or Istrian origins. As Ines Ivić has shown, Jerome was considered the 'universal patron of all Schiavoni coming from the different parts of the Eastern Adriatic Coast',¹³ and there were considerable migrant populations in the Marche, having been invited from across the Adriatic as part of efforts to repopulate following the fourteenth-century outbreak of the Black Death, a pattern

which continued in the fifteenth century, providing a substantial source of domestic, artisanal and agricultural labour in the region.¹⁴

The economy of the Marche had strong connections with the coast.¹⁵ When he completed the Matelica altarpiece in 1491 Crivelli had been an inhabitant of Ascoli, a city deeply embroiled in maritime trade, for well over a decade. In addition to his own experience of it, the importance of the sea to life in these places appears to have had an effect on Crivelli's representation of topography in the predella of the *Madonna della Rondine*. It represents a series of different environments characterised by the interaction of saints, topography and narrative. Juxtaposing several different saints' lives, it invites a sense of journeying and cyclicity that situates itself and its beholders in an imagined world characterised by sea travel and religious conversion. Like the Adriatic in Crivelli's day, it represents an interconnected maritime region in which identity and territorial control is in flux. The altarpiece's typological perspective on the world also produces comparisons with events from Roman history in order to make sense of the present. In so doing, it challenges the historiographical construct of a firm East-West dichotomy, instead indicating a more fluid approach to place and an almost cyclical temporality.

The predella

All of the figures in the enclosed, heavenly setting of the main panel have an episode from their lives represented in the predella: *Jerome in Penitence*, the *Nativity*, the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (figures 4–6). These three hagiographic images, situated respectively in the Egyptian desert, the outskirts of Bethlehem, and Rome, are bookended by an aristocratic *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* in an architectural niche, and a chivalric *Saint George and the Dragon* in a desert landscape outside the Libyan city of Silene (figures 3 and 7).¹⁶ In addition to evoking the locations of each hagiography, the predella images construct a geography through which the altarpiece's beholders are invited to imaginatively progress, as if on a journey. An initial sense of participation in the spaces represented throughout the altarpiece is suggested by their constant lighting, which strikes the forms from the same direction, behind and to the right of the beholder. This illumination corresponded to the position of a window at the back of the chapel in which the altarpiece was installed, thereby integrating the beholders' space with those represented within the altarpiece.¹⁷ As this suggests, the altarpiece itself, as is often the

case with Crivelli's work, acted as an interface of heightened connection between the saints and the beholders, rather than a frame containing a series of paintings to be appreciated from the position of a detached observer.¹⁸ This sense of participation is deepened by the remarkable series of natural and architectural arches that occur throughout the predella.

Arches point upwards, and they act as frames that direct the gaze through them. That Crivelli wanted to draw our attention to the directional and framing functions of the arches in the predella is suggested by Saint Catherine, who gestures to the arch formed by the intersection of her wheel with the lower edge of the panel. Unlike the rest of the sections of the predella, Catherine is represented in an iconic rather than narrative mode, standing in front of the niche rather than within an encompassing landscape, and looking into the space of the beholder. With her right hand she gestures towards the wheel which, in its position at the right edge of the panel, opens up an implicit space between the architectural background and the immediately adjacent edge of the frame. The beholder's gaze is invited to pass through it.

Several other arches are visible in the predella. Apart from those at the gates of distant cities, all frame areas of sky, drawing attention to the variable conditions of weather and visibility, which correspond to the action occurring in the landscapes. In the *Jerome in Penitence* section, for example, the saint's self-inflicted torment takes place under suitably dark clouds, part of which is framed by the natural and rugged arch at the top right corner. In contrast, in the triumphant *George and the Dragon* panel, the similar rock arch frames an orange sun rising, or perhaps setting, over the sea in a resplendent fashion. In the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* section, while the saint is penetrated by arrows, a small area of clear blue sky is visible under the complex and apparently incongruous network of Roman arches in the city, but our view of this sky is mostly blocked by trees that bend as if in strong wind. In the *Nativity* section, the logic of the arch is pushed further, in keeping with the central moment in time it represents. The night sky is supernaturally white, with the moon, gold stars and an angelic apparition visible within it – evidently also visible to the upward-looking shepherds at the right edge. This clarity signals a heightened connection between heaven and earth, an idea which is confirmed by the break in the arch, with the uppermost stems of a tree just reaching through, suggesting the removal of obstacles to heaven and the interpenetration of the heavenly and the earthly in the person of Christ.¹⁹



Figure 3 Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* predella panel from *La Madonna della Rondine*. © National Gallery, London. Inventory number: NG724.2.



Figure 4 *Saint Jerome in the Desert* predella panel, from *La Madonna della Rondine*.
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Guided by these arches, the beholder is taken through an imagined geography in which the land is in dialogue with the sky. Given the altarpiece's Franciscan patronage, the skies are suggestive of a Franciscan perspective on nature – or rather, creation – which saw all of it in terms of a chorus of praise to God's glory, whatever the weather. This idea is memorably expressed in Saint Francis' *Cantico al sole*, a song that rejoices in aspects of the world such as the sun, moon, water, fire and wind, and establishes a sense of kinship between human beings and these nonhuman things:

Laudato si, mi signore, per sora luna e le stelle, in celu l'ài formate clarite et pretiose et belle.



Figure 5 *The Nativity predella panel, from La Madonna della Rondine.* © National Gallery, London.

Laudato si, mi signore, per frate vento, et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo, per lo quale a le tue creature dai sustentamento.

[Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.^{20]}

In it, Francis refers to ‘Brother Sun’ and ‘Sister Moon’ as means through which creation praises its creator, but also less pleasant phenomena such as ‘Brother Wind’ and even ‘sora nostra morte corporale’ – ‘our Sister Bodily Death’.²¹ Composed at a moment of crisis for Francis, the hymn praises



Figure 6 *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* predella panel, from *La Madonna della Rondine*. © National Gallery, London.

the glory of the world despite its hardships, and also serves to diminish humanity's sense of estrangement from the rest of creation, emphasising their symbiosis.²² The predella can be approached in a similar way. In the *Nativity*, the personified moon fringed by a red penumbra and shining through the arch recalls 'Sister Moon', while the *George* might have reminded the friars of 'Sir Brother Sun' ('*messor lo frate sole*') who Francis says resembles God ('*de te, altissimo, porta significatione*'): suitable for the triumphant moment of the panel.²³ From this point of view, the less propitious wind and clouds of *Sebastian* and *Jerome* might similarly have been seen as cause for joy despite the earthly hardships with which they correspond, because the saints' eventual victory is assured.



Figure 7 Saint George Killing the Dragon, predella panel, from *La Madonna della Rondine*.
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With an unmistakable sense of what John Ruskin called the ‘pathetic fallacy’, the skies therefore seem to act in tandem with the events occurring beneath them, and the arches, whether natural or man-made, reinforce this relationship by directing the beholder’s gaze through and up. However, other aspects of the landscapes are likely to have disturbed the buoyancy of the Franciscan approach to nature. Given the dangers associated with the sea, the dark clouds of the *Jerome* panel might have appeared even more ominous in 1491 than they do today. On their way to the Holy Land in 1483, the Swiss Dominican friar Felix Fabri and his companions crossed the Alps and caught sight of the Adriatic Sea from a high vantage point. Fabri recalled the experience in the following way:

Casting our eyes out across the region which lay to southward, we looked from the mountains into the Italian plain, and beyond the plain saw the Mediterranean Sea; at the sight of which my lords, being young and sensitive, were appalled and stood still, contemplating the sea and their future dangers. And in fact I too was struck by some qualms at that sight, for all that I had tasted its bitterness thoroughly [on his previous voyage]. For the view from the mountain did have a sufficiently wild appearance. What was near could be seen clearly and the evening sun displayed all the forward part – but all the rest, whose bounds no one could detect, seemed to be towering clouds, thick, gloomy and darkling in atmosphere and colour.²⁴

Here, in terms similar to Crivelli’s, the sea is an object of fear. Fabri contrasts the forbidding clouds with the comfort of the evening sun, similarly to how Crivelli contrasts the cloudy sky in the *Jerome* with the orange sun in the *George* section of the predella. The sea’s remote boundaries are evoked by Crivelli’s dark horizon, and their proximity to the Holy Land is indicated by the figures surrounding the city behind Jerome, who are dressed in the robes and turbans by which Crivelli, like many artists of his time, represented the inhabitants of that place. For example, on the left of the *Nativity* section of the predella, the figures entering the city, implicitly Bethlehem, are similarly attired. Jerome’s penitence took place in the Egyptian desert, which, although perhaps not quite the Holy Land, was close to it and far to the east, for which the figures wearing turbans appear to be wearing a suitable costume.

Conversion

The dress of the distant figures, however, demands further attention as a sign of the way in which the predella has been shaped by the concerns of the Adriatic region. They might be considered a place marker, denoting the far-off (but reachable by sea) Holy Land and its environs, or, perhaps, the 'East' in general, an idea more or less coterminous with the Islamic world.²⁵ Although fairly loose, these were far from neutral spatial designations. Authors, both during Crivelli's day and ours, vary in their willingness to divide the world into East and West. However, James G. Harper contends that, 'used flexibly the terms 'East' and 'West' denote dominant political, religious, and cultural systems, as well as a historically accurate awareness of early modern perceptions of difference'. With its roots stretching as far back as Herodotus, 'the East-West dichotomy is operative and predominant during the period under examination'.²⁶ Both Nancy Bisaha and Suzanne Akbari argue that, while medieval references to a dichotomised 'East and West' were rare, from the eleventh century effectively the same distinction was preserved under the labels 'Christian' and 'Infidel'.²⁷ With the notion of place tied so closely to religion, the robed, turbaned figures in the *Jerome* and *Nativity* sections of the predella carry an unmistakeable sense of religious difference.²⁸

Although small, the robed figures in the *Jerome in Penitence* and the *Nativity* sections appear to be wearing the Ottoman style of turban, a white cloth wrapped around a red cap known as a *tāj*.²⁹ Following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, coastal cities along the Adriatic had been falling to the Turks at an alarming rate. In 1478 they had captured Valona, or Vlorë, in Albania, giving them their first major Adriatic port at a particularly narrow choke point of the sea, from where they were able to occupy the coastal town of Otranto, Puglia, spreading fear throughout Italy.³⁰ The presence of robed figures under the dark sky of the *Jerome in Penitence* seems indicative of the fear provoked by the Turks' apparently unstoppable advance. In this context, the altarpiece's representation of saints who inhabited an early Christian moment, characterised by confrontation with the institutionalised Roman religion or its cultural vestiges, might have provided a historical parallel by which beholders could make sense of their own times. As Suzanne Akbari notes, despite its scrupulous monotheism, medieval Latin references to Islam tended to posit it as a form of idolatry, which could easily overlap with representations of Roman polytheism.³¹ Other representations of the

penitent Jerome do in fact represent elements of Roman culture in the position where Crivelli paints Turks, such as a 1460 panel by Jacopo Bellini now at the Museo di Castelveccchio which has a closely related composition to Crivelli's – but a 'pagan idol' on a column in the place where Crivelli inserts his robed figures (figure 8). Following the conquest of Constantinople, the Turks were often considered as the successors to the barbarians who sacked Rome, a reference that Crivelli may be making here.³² Albeit more rarely, the Ottomans could also be directly associated with the Romans themselves. This was something that had been actively encouraged by Sultan Mehmet II (d. 1481), who commissioned Italian medals representing him in the guise of Roman emperor.³³ The typological flexibility of the turbaned figures could therefore have allowed beholders to identify the city of the *Jerome in Penitence* panel with the idolatry of the Roman world, or its fall to the barbarian invaders, or indeed the contemporary Islamic 'idolatry' of the Egyptian setting of this part of Jerome's hagiography. Whether associated with temporal power or religious heterodoxy, they seem, under the clouds, to be intentionally contrasted with the fervent piety of Jerome.

From this starting point, the rest of the predella encodes a meta-narrative of religious conversion that leads from tribulation to triumph. To a greater degree than the English word 'convert', the Latin '*converto*' carries the sense of physical turning as well as religious reorientation. As well as the celestial objects circling the earth in Ptolemaic fashion, a sense of rotation is introduced by Catherine's spiked wheel.³⁴ The *Catherine* panel's asymmetry sets it apart, as if in introduction to a narrative arc that is subtly plotted through the *Jerome in Penitence* panel to the left and the *George and the Dragon* panel at the right. These two panels roughly mirror each other: both contain a rock arch at an opposite edge, both have a coastal, walled city thronged with people, and in both the spatial relationship between saint and city is mediated in a similar way, by a wooden plank that bridges a narrow crevice otherwise separating the two. Furthermore, each saint has his companion animal, Jerome's lion and George's white horse, and both sections contain a dragon in a state of subjection. While Jerome's dragon slinks away with its tail between its legs, George's is gravely wounded, its imminent killing lending a sense of completion to the ad hoc narrative cycle, while preserving the symmetry between its beginning and its end. As Fabio Mariano noted, the city in the *George and the Dragon* panel resembles a typical Veneto city with a fortified



Figure 8 Jacopo Bellini, *Saint Jerome in the Desert*, c. 1460, tempera on wood, 95 × 65cm, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona. Public Domain: <https://www.wikioo.org/paintings.php?refarticle=D79AE8&titlepainting=Saint%20Jerome%20in%20the%20Desert&artistname=Jacopo%20Bellini>

gate and bell towers, plus the unusual addition of a veranda above the gate.³⁵ This description also matches the city behind Jerome, lending an architectural cohesion to the whole. The most significant difference is in the figures that surround the cities. The *Jerome in Penitence* panel's turbaned figures ignore Jerome. In contrast, the figures outside the city in the *George and the Dragon* panel are dressed in red caps and hose or dresses – that is, clothing of a kind worn in a Latin Christian city – looking on as George performs his heroic action, with a regal figure appearing on the balcony. According to the *Golden Legend*, once George had killed the dragon outside the Libyan city of Silene, the grateful inhabitants were baptised en masse.³⁶ Based on the change of clothes and direction of attention between the otherwise similar cities, the same process appears to have occurred across the predella. The citizens have been converted from idolatry to Christianity.

The meta-narrative resolves Jerome's pain and suffering in George's triumph and the mass conversion of the city. This theme would have been agreeable to the Franciscans, whose principal tasks were to preach, repent and win converts, and its arc mirrors a core Christian concept of trial through suffering leading to eventual victory, most obviously figured in the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Taking place between two similar coastal cities, the story locates itself within a kind of geography that would have been familiar to many of its beholders, as well as to Crivelli, and where the exchange of cities between different confessional groups is likely to have had an immediate resonance. While it ends on a hopeful note, the encoded conversion narrative also reflects an awareness of the mutability and even precarity of identity of coastal cities in the region, caught between competing powers of different faiths. The courtly, chivalric qualities of the Ottoni commission also allude to the perilous nature of the region. The notion of crusade, frequently called for throughout the fifteenth century, including in Franciscan texts, is present within the military overtones of the altarpiece in combination with the conversionary theme. Especially after 1453, calls for crusade often blurred the distinction between the Ottomans and other Islamic powers, treating them as equally valid targets.³⁷

East and West?

It would, however, be reductive to characterise the encounters between the Latin and the Islamic parts of the Adriatic solely in terms of hostility.

The extensive trade and pilgrimage networks are an indication of peaceful exchange and cooperation, and Crivelli's predella also hints at this in the turbaned figures in the background of *Jerome in Penitence* which are, in themselves, in no way threatening or hostile. Unarmed, they stroll around the city, two men rowing innocently in a little boat. As Claire Norton has argued, the notion of a firm East-West dichotomy, albeit emphasised in humanist texts, is not borne out by the extensive artistic, mercantile, diplomatic and intellectual relationships between the eastern and western Mediterranean. Following Wilson and Brummett, Norton characterises the Mediterranean rather 'as a zone of diffusion *and* difference', while Anna Contadini suggests that 'we need to heed the complexities of trading patterns and look at the Mediterranean less in terms of large-scale power blocs and more in terms of a patchwork of cultural centres participating in a set of loosely structured transactions.'³⁸ Instead of a civilisational battle between East and West, many of Crivelli's viewers are likely to have understood their region in this more piecemeal fashion. The late fifteenth century was also a time of change in Christian representations of Muslims. Julian Raby introduced the term 'Oriental Mode' to describe a way of representing the East that emphasised its difference from the Latin West. Yet this 'mode' appears to have taken place in a different milieu from Crivelli's, and slightly later.³⁹ In the wake of Bernard von Breydenbach's printed pilgrimage account, *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, first published in 1486 with its topographical illustrations by Erhard Reuwich, and Gentile Bellini's 1479–81 visit to Ottoman Constantinople, artists made concerted attempts to represent the eastern Mediterranean in terms of its contemporary appearance, such as Gentile and Giovanni Bellini's 1504–7 *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria* or Vittore Carpaccio's 1507 *Saint George Baptising the Selenites* in the Scuola degli Schiavoni. These helped to emphasise its inherent difference from the Latin world. Crivelli, on the other hand, prefers a generic, typological representation of cities and their inhabitants, determinable by the signifiers 'Infidel' or 'Christian', which are liable to be exchanged. Rather than emphasising the exoticism of a remote East, this mode of representation suggests its closeness to Crivelli's own geographical location. The implication of the conversionary narrative across the *Madonna della Rondine* predella is that the places represented are part of a shared region, with a flux of temporal powers, of orthodoxy and idolatry. Absent is any strong notion of difference along cultural lines that

is prominent in Breydenbach, the Bellini or Carpaccio. Crivelli's imagined geography therefore seems not to be a region of immutable difference, but part of a common sphere with which union was possible, either in the favourable terms of a unification with the Latin church, or catastrophically by Ottoman conquest. Domination by an idolatrous power had happened before in its history, and Crivelli therefore represents a cyclical repetition to the events that occur within his imagined geography, an interconnected maritime region of perpetual conversion and reconversion.

As the mutability of the otherwise nearly identical cities in the predella suggests, Crivelli's representation of a Mediterranean littoral is more in keeping with this account than with those of a later generation who would emphasise exoticism and difference. There is a further sign of this in the predella. While the figures in the *Jerome* panel wear clothes that define them in negative, religiously inflected terms, the Christian converts in the *George* panel also owe elements of their dress to the Islamic world. The princess' bi-horned escoffion was a fashion in Latin countries based on encounters with Ottoman military headgear.⁴⁰ In addition, the carpet draped over the balcony is redolent of the Turkish carpets that proliferated throughout the Adriatic as objects of prestige, used here as a sign of the king of Silene's high status in a way that was found across Christian courts. Rather than the cardinal directions 'East and West', Crivelli's places are imagined in terms of a wider region that is contested, but nonetheless closely connected: an expansive, outward-looking sense of place.⁴¹ Undoubtedly there was a tendency for 'West' to imply orthodoxy and 'East' heterodoxy, but, as shown by the presence of heretical groups in the Marche, the Islamic caliphates in Africa and Iberia, and Crivelli's fluid imagination of different places in the predella, this dichotomy appears to have been far from rigid.

The imagined geography of *La Madonna della Rondine* is therefore highly responsive to events taking place within the region of the Adriatic and can contribute to our historical understanding of life there. It represents a coastal topography in religious flux, in which human events are mirrored in the skies. In contrast with accounts of Crivelli as an artist outside the main currents of his time, here his work grapples with global historical events, both ancient – the conversion of Rome to Christianity – and modern – the rise to world power status of the Ottoman Empire, and it identifies similarities between them. Historians regularly describe the Adriatic littoral as a zone of heightened

contact and exchange, and this is borne out by Crivelli's imagined geography of both diffusion and difference.⁴² This perspective applies pressure to the characterisation of the Adriatic as a border between the innately different Eastern and Western Mediterraneans. While it was the site of religious and political conflict, it was also defined by more friendly contact, suggesting that many of its inhabitants did not perceive it as a civilisational boundary. The same place, as Massey emphasises, is experienced in starkly contrasting ways by its different inhabitants. The altarpiece's Franciscan and courtly interests certainly impute a moral imperative to this state of affairs: repent and convert; go on a pilgrimage or a crusade. The general tenor of humanist texts is to emphasise the implacable opposition of Christendom and Islam. Yet Crivelli's work also implies the existence of other, less dichotomised ways of understanding the region, which, for many of its inhabitants, might have been considered one of the central meeting places of the world.

Notes

This article is based on my Upgrade paper, the outcome of the first year of my PhD. Thanks are due in particular to my PhD supervisor, Professor Alison Wright, as well as to my secondary supervisor, Professor Rose Marie San Juan, and my external advisor, Professor Donal Cooper of Jesus College, Cambridge, for their invaluable contributions.

- 1 Ronald William Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (Yale University Press, 2004), 3.
- 2 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (University of California Press, 1997), 73–129.
- 3 For example, Martin Davies, *Carlo Crivelli* (National Gallery, 1972), 7; as further discussed in Stephen J. Campbell, 'On the Importance of Crivelli', in *Ornament & Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, ed. Stephen J. Campbell, exh. cat. (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2015) which offers a more productive approach to geography providing the basis for that of this article.
- 4 Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli* (Nardini, 1986), 19.
- 5 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, 'Symbolic Domination and Artistic Geography in Italian Art History', trans. Maylis Curie, *Art in Translation* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–48, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175613109787307672>.
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