

ABSTRACT

“Believing is Seeing: The Holy Land among the Antiquarians”

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Though sixteenth-century antiquarians occasionally fell victim themselves to the wishful thinking of forgers like Annius of Viterbo, in general they aspired to cleanse secular and sacred history of misleading medieval accretions. In Rome, Poggio Bracciolini and numerous generations of like-minded antiquarians banished the myths and misattributions attached to ancient ruins by medieval pilgrimage guides like the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*. As the other papers in this panel demonstrate, antiquarians all across Europe performed a similarly purgative function while restoring their national pasts. There was one place, however, that proved particularly vexing to the antiquarian project: the Christian Holy Land. As Maurice Halbwachs first signalled in 1941, the Holy Land owes its very existence to the fictitious, ahistorical imagination of late antique and medieval pilgrimage guides; strip away the legends, and nothing remains to historicize. As any good reader of Josephus knew, the Jerusalem of the Passion simply ceased to exist in 70 AD, when Titus and Vespasian destroyed the Second Temple and razed the city. The Holy Places known to sixteenth-century travelers were by and large untrustworthy fourth- and twelfth-century localizations, the fruits of Constantine's and the Crusaders' efforts to recreate the Holy Land according to contemporary tastes. For this reason, antiquarians distrusted the Holy Land, questioning the siting of the Holy Sepulcher or the story of St. Helena's *inventio Crucis*. And yet, as the antiquarians also knew from their reading of Eusebius and Jerome, proper understanding of the sacred texts was impossible without an intimate and accurate knowledge of biblical topography. In this paper, I will look at several examples of how antiquarians wrestled with this dilemma, seeking to rewrite the history of a landscape that not only had ceased to be, but that had never existed in the first place. I will focus particularly on the interaction between pilgrims' and antiquarians' dissonant ways of seeing and authenticating biblical ruins, in an effort to gain greater insight into the relationship between faith and historical method in the Renaissance.