



Custodia di Terra Santa

Prot: C-014/08

Jerusalem, February 25, 2008

Mr. George Blumenthal
450 Park Avenue, Suite No. 2702
New York, New York 10022
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Blumenthal,

Pax et Bonum!

We would like to extend a very special thank you to you for your incredible generosity in paying for Mr. Ardon Bar Hama to digitally photograph more than 9,000 images of documents ranging from scrolls to individual letters and numerous Firman's so they can be archived and cataloged. We are very privileged to have been included among your many projects, which have resulted in the digitization of numerous priceless documents in the Israeli Museum, the Vatican Archives, the Julliard School of Music and the New York Public Library.

The oldest documents in the Historical Archive of the Custody of the Holy Land date back to the 14th century. These are documents from Popes and sultans which were, so to speak, apparently inherited after the foundations of the Custody of the Holy Land (in 1342, the juridical and historical date of reference). Until the end of the 16th century, this archival material, with some very rare exceptions, consisted of documents from European ecclesiastical and civil authorities (mostly from popes and Heads of State). There are also documents from the Arab-Turkish civil authorities; those of sovereigns, i.e., sultans, are very numerous.

A number of centuries ago, the archives were divided into two separate collections, distinguished in more recent times from the historical-juridical point of view; they are the most important collections of the entire archive. They are not very large numerically, as the western collection does not contain more than two hundred items, whilst the oriental one is much larger, encompassing more than three thousand documents. Both collections, on the other hand, include documents which are particularly solemn in content and form.

The Firman Collection is made up of this well defined type of document. This name was given to the collection to place greater emphasis on one particular element, the most important by solemnity if not by number, taking a part for the whole. The collection contains juridical documents in Arabic and Turkish, pertaining primarily to property, rights, etc. These documents were issued by authorities in civil offices and by local and central governments. In the latter case, from the origins to 1517, the documents came from the Egyptian government; from 1517 to the 1920s, they were issued by the Turkish Government in Istanbul, followed by those of the British mandate. There are also private documents; however, they are consistently legal in nature, such as deeds of purchase, sale, donations, transactions and declarations.

Your foresight and experience has created an astonishing opportunity for publishing rare documents online, and in your partnership with Mr. Ardon Bar Hama, the Israeli photographer, this potential has, to a certain extent, been realized. For this, you both deserve the thanks and respect of museums, archives, libraries and academic institutions around the world.

We are also very grateful to Mr. Gary Krupp, President of the Pave the Way Foundation, for introducing you to us.

We wish you continued success in your ambitious project of digitization. We hope that one day the majority of the world's important documents will be available on the Internet for users of all ages and backgrounds!

Sincerely Yours,



Pierbattista Pizzaballa
Fr. Pierbattista PIZZABALLA, OFM

Custos of the Holy Land