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Megan C. Armstrong, *The Holy Land and the Early Modern Reinvention of Catholicism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xiv + 443pp. Notes, references, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781108832472; \$120.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781108962995; \$120.00 U.S. (online). ISBN 9781108957946.

Review by Moshe Sluhovsky, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Megan C. Armstrong's thoroughly researched book deals with a very minor religious entity in a faraway country that throughout most of its history never counted more than a hundred members. The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land (*Custodia Terrae Sanctae*), centered in the old city of Jerusalem, is a community of friars that has facilitated pilgrimages to the Holy Land since at least 1342. Dressed in their distinctive brown robes, the friars remain a familiar site in the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem as they lead groups of Catholic pilgrims in well-choreographed visitations of the sacred Christian sites (many of which were invented/discovered by previous generations of the very same custodians). Yet, Armstrong manages to use this miniscule group of friars to examine numerous early modern histories whose contexts are wide, even global. The Custody's history reveals complex contacts between Islam and Christianity—in fact, Christianities—in the Eastern Mediterranean; papal, French, and Spanish diplomatic intrigues; religious conflicts within and among religious traditions; and the significance of what might mistakenly look, at first glance, like the minutiae of liturgical rituals. A central argument of this book is that the Holy Land was (and has been) a critical place in which many early modern Catholics sought holy perfection while, at the same time, participating in the political and mundane efforts to gain legitimacy, establish credibility, and claim precedence over other Christian powers and traditions. The Custody was engaged in creating and preserving sacred geography and sacred history, which, in turn, served competing political, ideological, religious, material, and economic interests.

Much of Armstrong's book deals with different aspects of the revival of Catholicism after the Reformation and the Council of Trent in the mid sixteenth century. Armstrong is first and foremost a religious historian and is very attentive to the centrality of altars, liturgy, processions, and even devotional lamps in spiritual life. She offers very detailed descriptions of Christian sites in the Holy Land and the transformations they underwent in late medieval and early modern times, and is careful to remind her readers that in the Near East, Christianity came and comes in the plural: no less than ten different Christian faiths competed for souls, beliefs, and properties in the Holy Land, even within the confines of one building, the Holy Sepulcher. Importantly, the infighting between these Christian groups took place under the judicial and political umbrella of Islam, first the Mamluk and then the Ottoman regime, which had the sole authority to grant Christians privileges to worship in specific sites.

The goal of being physically present, risking their lives to get there, and claiming precedence has been a priority for Latin Christian individuals and polities since the Crusades. Whether it was the knight who made a pilgrimage to obtain membership in the Order of the Holy Sepulcher, an order whose members claimed its origins in the times of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth century, or a diplomatic mission to the Porte to gain a Firman that would grant this or that Catholic representative a commercial advantage, being present physically in the Holy Land endowed people, states, and religious orders with prestige and power. As such, the sacred histories Armstrong explores represent realms for competition among rival powers.

For readers of this journal, the most important chapter in Armstrong's rich and fascinating book is the fourth. This chapter details the multiple ways in which the French state under the early Bourbon kings tried to increase and then impose its authority on the Custody. Armstrong contextualizes this effort within a number of political settings. First, by performing a commitment to militant Catholicism by way of sending pilgrims to the Holy Land and endowing holy sites, the Bourbons could erase their suspect beginnings with Henri IV's multiple conversions and the persistent presence of Protestants in France. Secondly, the growing French presence in the Holy Land affirmed France's leading role as the eldest daughter of the Church against the rival claims of the Spanish Habsburgs. But, above all, claiming the spiritual high ground was a means to whitewash the problematic, even embarrassing, commercial and political alliance between Catholic France and the Islamic Ottoman regime. This alliance, first established in 1536, was a sacrilegious manifestation of *raison d'état* a hundred years before Richelieu made it state policy. It was the Ottomans who gave France the status of the Protector of the Holy Sites, one capitulation in a series of military, political, diplomatic, and commercial agreements between the two countries against the interests of other European Christian powers. Establishing authority over the Custody of the Holy Land thus served long-standing French interests while at the same time legitimizing them and crowning them with a spiritual aura. Sending French Franciscans to Jerusalem was also a part of a wider French enterprise during the seventeenth century intended to establish its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean: France sent Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries to Syria and Cyprus, established and financed chapels and shrines, and obtained privileges to enable and enhance the religious life of Catholic merchants and ambassadors in the East.

While a huge amount of scholarship has dealt in the last thirty years with Catholic expansion overseas, be it in the Americas or in the Far East, Armstrong reminds us that the Holy Land continued to function as a uniquely powerful source of spiritual and political legitimacy. Changes in the balance of power among European Christian rival claimants directly shaped politics in Jerusalem and vice versa, with important consequences for the operations of the Custody. Thus, in the seventeenth century, more than ever before, the Custody became a site of intense intra-Christian, or, to be more precise, intra-Catholic, conflicts. The Holy Land and its Franciscan Custody became, in fact, an overseas extension of European political dramas.

As previously mentioned, Armstrong's monograph deals with a very large number of topics and offers the most detailed history of the Custody available as well as uniquely meticulous and sensitive discussions of the history, geography, layouts, and even decorations of the holy Christian sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Based on research in archives in Jerusalem, Rome, Venice, Paris, and Madrid, and on careful reading of hundreds of documents, from legal privileges to pilgrims' diaries, *The Holy Land and the Reinvention of Catholicism* has much to offer scholars of

the Middle East and of the Christian presence there, as well as those interested in the history of missions, of Greek Orthodox and Latin Catholic relations, and of the tensions and collaboration between Islam and Christianity. But it also has much to offer to scholars of early modern France, whether they are interested in its diplomatic, commercial, or religious history.

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