

The St. Saviour Monastery in Jerusalem and its participation in local economic networks (17th century)

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Since its establishment in Jerusalem (1342) the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land received large amounts of alms for the maintenance of the holy shrines and of the friars. The arrival of alms from Europe, however, did not prevent the friars from participating in the local economy. Research on the Custody in the Middle Ages has shown that the Franciscans engaged in numerous economic activities mainly in the real estate and financial markets. As for the early modern period, the Custody's economy has never been the subject of comprehensive research. The arrival of money from "Christendom" is amply testified by sources and often mentioned by scholarly works, but no attention has been paid to how the alms were integrated into the Custody's economy and, more broadly, to the friars' economic interactions with the local context.

The paper contributes to fill this gap, by exploring the Franciscans' participation in local economic and financial networks in 17th-century Jerusalem and its district. To do so, it rests on the analysis of the account books of the St. Saviour monastery in Jerusalem, which in the 17th century was the headquarters of the Custody. The monastery's account books started to be produced in the last years of the 16th century. They list incomes and expenses on a daily basis. Crosschecking the account books with other sources (such as Chronicles), the paper will reconstruct the economic ties of Franciscan monasteries with the surroundings from different and complementary perspectives. Firstly, it will analyse the friars' daily expenses, such as: purchases of food and services, and salaries paid to dragomans and daily workers. Secondly, the paper will reconstruct the friars' participation in the real estate and financial markets, uncovering investments, purchases of land and properties, and their recourse to credit. Building on this analysis, it will then contextualize the arrival of alms within the economy of the Custody and investigate how the alms were used and circulated locally. Finally, the paper will discuss how the interactions with the local economy are depicted in the account books.