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Review of Catherine Infante, *The Arts of Encounter: Christians, Muslims and the Power of Images in Early Modern Spain*

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Infante, Catherine. *The Arts of Encounter: Christians, Muslims and the Power of Images in Early Modern Spain*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2022. x + 264 pp.

Catherine Infante's innovative monograph explores the intersections of race, religion, transnational mobility, and cultural production in early modern Spain. She contextualizes devotional objects within cultural encounters between Christians and Muslims, often incorrectly viewed as inherently different and even binarily opposed. Infante views Muslim-Christian relations through the lens of Freedberg's *Power of Images*, honing in on the multivalence of devotional images to both groups in the interconnected and porous context of the Mediterranean. She argues that the "power of images" was key to the intermediation of early modern Muslims and Christians, both of whom employed images as instruments of discrimination and integration.

Infante references a wide range of literary genres (fiction, theater, and poetry), and primary sources (historical chronicles, Inquisition cases, religious treaties, miracle books, travel memoirs, captives' testimonies, letters, and biographies) in concert with visual and material culture to show that textual representations produced by early modern Spanish writers mediated unfixed interfaith relations and even portrayed cross-confessional relations in their own intellectual production. These authors, Infante argues, understood Christian-Muslim encounters on visual terms. Although these critical references to religious visual culture have often been overlooked, Infante proposes that they offer a rich source of nuanced understanding of cross-cultural and religious interactions. Infante calls this the "arts of encounter," referring to the "diverse ways in which Christians and Muslims interacted with one another and...negotiated meaning from the interactions that took shape around religious images" (5). Her book thus reevaluates notions of interreligious encounters through spaces of religious and cultural cohabitation between both religions throughout the wider Mediterranean.

Infante's multidisciplinary approach debunks pervasive historiographical assumptions that overemphasize confrontation in Christian-Muslim encounters. These assumptions presume that Muslims always rejected Christian imagery and vice-versa. On the contrary, Infante argues that the rejection of images "was neither universal nor extensible to all Muslims" and when it occurred, Muslims' reasoning "was based more on cultural practice than on Islamic law" (7). While sacred images could be contested by both communities, they were commonly respected across the Mediterranean. Infante's work contributes to the rich historiography of tolerance and toleration from below, stressing that in daily encounters with images individuals more often acted to avoid interfaith conflicts. She proposes that the rejection of devotional images should be understood in its social, political, and cultural contexts. She understands these objects to be closely related to human experience because their symbolic value and meanings were acquired and

transformed by human interactions. These objects symbolically evolved through each interaction and likewise shaped the identities of their owners.

Infante's book is divided into six chapters. The first part is dedicated to the Iberian Peninsula, with the remainder to the wider Mediterranean—though Infante does not split the book into two distinct parts. Drawing from Braudel's conception of the Mediterranean's interconnectedness, Infante emphasizes the sea's social, cultural, and religious similarities over its differences. In the first three chapters, Infante analyzes the situation of Moriscos and the ways religious objects channeled their integration into and rejection from Christian society. She studies ways that authors manipulated the precarious relationships of Christian and Muslim communities and their coexistence with sacred idols. In each chapter religious images play a prominent role as a middle-ground between Islam and Christianity. Infante demonstrates that early modern writers negotiated the representation of Muslims' receptions of Christian objects. Writers employed Muslims' reception of symbols such as the cross to justify their expulsion from Spain. She also considers how Aljamiado texts empowered Muslim resistance against the veneration of Catholic images.

The last three chapters explore religious cases of martyrs, renegades, captives, corsairs, Muslim princes, diplomats, and friars who navigated worlds as cultural and religious go-betweens. They grappled with the theological differences between Mary's iconic veneration in both religious traditions, presenting her as an equally persuasive proselytizer to both faiths, even though she only was given material form in one. While the Virgin Mary could express reconciliation between religious traditions in her representation as a mother, her vocation as a "divine conqueror" could also be weaponized against Muslims. While religious images could serve as a tool of conversion despite outright rejection of their physicality, in the context of the Mediterranean and African captivity, these images reaffirmed and negated identity depending on the circumstances. Infante's analysis of sacred images' circulation across the sea highlights transregional connections as well as the multivalent symbolic capital of these objects which were taken, sold, and redeemed by individuals across the sea.

The *Arts of Encounters* adds to a growing list of works contributing to our understanding of the cultural, political and religious interconnectedness of the Mediterranean and shifting confessional identities in early modernity. It redefines cross-cultural religious encounters and exchanges in the Mediterranean, signaling more spaces of cohabitation than confrontation. Historians of early modern Iberia, race, religion, and culture, as well as art historians will find this book useful in their reanalyses of human relationships with visual and literary culture in the early modern Iberian world.

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