Hamish Scott, ed.

The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1350–1750. Volume I: Peoples & Place.
Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxvi + 777. Hb,
 £90; \$160.

The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1350–1750. Volume II: Cultures & Power.
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There is a certain irony in the task of the reviewer of a project such as *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*—to wit, that the reviewer does what most users of the book will not: read it from cover to cover. It can be disorienting to read such varied material in quick succession, but it does ensure a healthy appreciation for the magnitude of the task Hamish Scott was set, and for the very real achievement the two volumes represent.

A few statistics are in order, to convey the sheer scale of the *Handbook*. The two volumes contain more than fifteen hundred pages, divided among fifty-two chapters, the work of fifty-six different authors. The familiar country-by-country approach has been eschewed in favor of essays defined by theme, region, or methodology; grouped into one of seven “parts;” and sorted into the two volumes under the headings “Peoples & Place” (Volume I) and “Cultures & Power” (Volume II).

Hamish Scott begins “Peoples & Place” with an introduction laying a theoretical foundation for early modern Europe as a field of study. He enumerates nine themes central to the period: renewed demographic growth after the fourteenth century; economic expansion; state-building; the Protestant Reformation; the transition from a society of communities (*Gemeinschaft*) to one of individuals (*Gesellschaft*); a decline in the status of women; Europe’s accelerating encounters with the rest of the world; the introduction of new technologies (especially print and gunpowder); and intellectual developments such as the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution. The bulk of the introduction, however, is a historiographical survey, encompassing the emergence of “early modern” as a term-of-art, the impact of modernization theories, the contributions of German and French scholarship, and finally the problem of periodization. The *Handbook*’s full title notwithstanding, the project embraces the nebulousness of the early modern “period”: “Contributors were asked to begin their chapters at the point during the fourteenth or fifteenth century which had the greatest validity for their particular topic, while certain chapters extend beyond the mid-eighteenth century” (1:21).

The first section of Volume I is “Fundamentals”—overviews of such basic themes as “Weather, Climate, and the Environment,” “Travel and Communications,” and “Languages and Literacy.” Two of the *Handbook*’s best chapters come from this group: Valerie A. Kivelson’s elegant discussion of the history of Europe as a cartographic entity and Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum’s fascinating examination of time and time-keeping.

Next comes “Societies and Economies,” treating in turn broader economic and social trends, levels of societal experience (communities, families, individuals), and sectors of the economy (agriculture, urbanism, manufacturing). Some of the more quantitative aspects of historical economics and demography can be difficult to follow for those not well versed in the relevant sub-disciplines, but the section is remarkably successful as a cohesive picture of the socioeconomics of early modern Europe.

Volume I closes with “Churches, Faiths, and Beliefs,” beginning with David J. Collins, S.J.’s essay on “The Christian Church, 1370–1550.” This is followed by a series of chapters on Protestantism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Islam. The final two contributions examine popular culture and what Mack P. Holt calls “Belief and its Limits,” centered on the concept of “mysteries.”

Turning to Volume II, “Cultures & Power,” we begin with “Ideas and Cultures,” which is to say surveys of intellectual and artistic trends. The former includes essays on Renaissance humanism, political thought, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment. These contributions make a concerted effort to problematize the standard narratives about their subjects: as John Robertson puts it in the first line of “Europe’s Enlightenment,” “The phenomenon known as the Enlightenment has always been a construction” (2:141). The fine arts are reasonably divided between two chapters, one for the visual arts and architecture, the other for music.

Part 5, “Europe Beyond Europe,” features chapters on exploration, the establishment of global empires and trade networks, Jesuit missions, colonial societies, and, most interestingly, R. Bin Wong’s study of Europe’s encounters with Asia, through the lens of comparison with early modern China.

Next comes “Government and Governed,” encompassing both political thought and political praxis, with a heavy focus on monarchy (separate chapters consider the institution in “Western and Central Europe” and “Northern and Eastern Europe”). In keeping with the identification of the “rise of the modern state” as a hallmark of the period, the essays use the state as their heuristic: different kinds of states, the experience of state power both from within and without, different modalities of state action, and so forth.

The last part of the book is concerned with “International Rivalries,” primarily of a hostile nature. There are separate chapters on land and naval warfare,

followed by a masterful overview of Europe's relations with the Ottoman Empire by Gábor Ágoston. The last two essays move away from military history, dealing with the continent-wide balance of power and the rise of modern diplomacy.

What of the Society of Jesus? Collins's account of the pre-Tridentine church ends with a section on "Catholic Reform." Here Collins foregrounds the Jesuits, whom he characterizes as representing "much of what early modern Catholicism has come to mean" (1:565). He offers a *précis* of the order's foundation that stresses that the gradual emergence of iconic ministries like combating heresy, missionary efforts, and teaching.

The most sustained attention to the Society comes in Volume II, Chapter 10: "Jesuit Missions." Thomas M. Cohen and Emanuele Colombo explore the unique linkage of the Society of Jesus and early modern missionary work. Cohen and Colombo begin by enumerating some of the reasons for this association: the recent boom in Jesuit Studies, the Jesuits' unique attitude to mission work, and the abundance of written records. The chapter then proceeds geographically, guided by the travels of "prominent Jesuits whose work influenced generations of missionaries, and whose pastoral strategies were considered models within the Society" (2:255). Naturally enough, the first focus is the Society's early missions to Muslims in North Africa and to Jews throughout Christian Europe. In brisk but not hurried succession, the reader is taken through Jesuits efforts in Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Paraguay, China, India, and finally back to the Americas with New France. A thoughtful conclusion reflects on two crucial themes in the study of Jesuit missions: the oft-debated principle of accommodation and the global perspective at once evinced and demanded by the Society's international ministries.

Nicholas Terpstra's chapter on "Early Modern Catholicism," however, is somewhat puzzling. Terpstra elects *not* to foreground the Council of Trent in a chapter dedicated to what is often called Tridentine Catholicism, explicitly harkening back to the work of John O'Malley, S.J. Organized instead around the broader trends within early modern Catholicism—"evolutions from Moving to Fixed, from Local to Universal, and from Action to Intention" (1:602)—the account feels more substantive and dynamic than most other summaries of the period. However, Terpstra makes the curious decision to allot the Society of Jesus a single paragraph. He stresses the Society's "global mission" and describes the Jesuits as "the strongest proponents of a Church Universal model" of church-state relations (1:616). The resonance of these themes with so much of the rest of the chapter makes this isolated coverage all the more confusing. One wishes Terpstra had integrated further discussion of the Society, and of the other religious orders of the period, into the whole of his otherwise excellent essay.

Readers of this journal may be sure that Cohen and Colombo have represented Jesuit Studies ably and eloquently in their chapter, and all three essays explicitly dealing with the Catholic Church are interesting and well-written takes on their subjects. That said, these chapters are really meant for the uninitiated: the scholar, let us say, of Protestant missionaries seeking a *comparandum* in the Jesuit experience. I predict students of Jesuit Studies will find the *Handbook* most useful in those chapters not directly connected to their own expertise. In this respect the project fulfills the central function of a handbook: it offers readily accessible, informative, and well-informed entrées into particular subfields, methodologies, or debates.

It is a cliché of any review of an edited collection to note that the contributions are “uneven.” The observation feels appropriate here, but more as a judgment of register than of quality: there is a certain incoherence as to what the essays of the *Handbook* seek to do. Within a single section—“Ideas and Cultures,” for example—we have Margaret L. King’s chapter on humanism, which offers an outline of the past century of historiography; Kathleen Crowther’s essay on the Scientific Revolution, which takes two case studies (experimentation and heliocentrism) to illustrate the *present* state of the field; and T.K. Rabb’s contribution on art and architecture, which is a whistle-stop tour of notable figures from Giotto di Bondone to William Hogarth. A few essays, such as Edgar Melton’s study of “The Agrarian East,” put forth new theses challenging or revising the current consensus. Essays in a “handbook” might reasonably follow any one of these models, but to have all of them cheek-by-jowl makes the *Handbook* as a whole a less intuitive tool than it might otherwise have been. Nevertheless, the essays, taken severally, will be valuable indeed as introductions, for those, students and established scholars alike, seeking to find their conceptual and bibliographical footing in unfamiliar terrain.

Spencer J. Weinreich

University of Oxford

spencer.weinreich@hmc.ox.ac.uk

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