

Marian Venerations and Religious Policies in Early Modern Bavaria

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It is still said today that the Virgin Mary is the patroness of Bavaria. This expression of devotion has its roots in the “confessional age” of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. This article examines what significance the Marian venerations had in the historical circumstances of early modern Bavaria.

The Marian cult and pilgrimages to the places where she was invoked had surged around 1500, the Marian chapel of *Altötting* was the most successful example among them. After the decline of criticism of the Reformation, the Marian venerations were reanimated through the promotion of Bavarian princes. Duke Wilhelm V. (1579-97) founded Marian sodalities to encourage the pilgrimage and sponsored processions in Munich in which biblical scenes of Mary were performed. His son Maximilian I. (1597-1651) dedicated his land to Mary to pray for protection of “*Patrona Bavariae*”. On the battlefields of the Thirty Years’ War his army raised the flag of Mary and called out her name, and in Munich the statue of the Madonna was fixed upon the façade of his residence and on the top of the pillar in the central square.

The piety of Bavarian rulers had a lot in common with that of their subjects. However, their religious policies aimed not only for Maria’s protection of their house and land, but also at governing churches and controlling the uncouth behavior of the people. The introduction of a new public holiday commemorating Maria’s Immaculate Conception (1629) and the order to investigate the local practices of Marian venerations (1670) led to stricter control over the churches and priests. On the other hand, the institutionalization of Marian devotion meant also disciplining folk belief and indecent habits, although the public policy couldn’t penetrate into the world of popular culture. For rural and urban dwellers the ducal power was both the defender and the punisher of their religiosity.