Christian-Muslim Relations
A Bibliographical History

Volume II. South and East Asia, Africa and the Americas (1600-1700)

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Matteo Ricci

Li Madou, Xitai, Qingtai, Xijiang, Matthaeus Riccius, Matthaeus Ricci

DATE OF BIRTH 1552
PLACE OF BIRTH Marcerata, Italy
DATE OF DEATH 1610
PLACE OF DEATH Beijing

BIOGRAPHY
Matteo Ricci was an Italian Jesuit, born in Marcerata in 1552. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1571 and arrived in Goa in 1578, where he was ordained. Alessandro Valignano (Chinese: Fan Lian, 1539-1606), the Visitor overseeing the Jesuits’ East Asian missions, sent him to Macau to learn Chinese. Ricci became one of the first Jesuit missionaries to open the mission to China outside of the port of Macau, gaining permission to reside in Zhaoqing in 1583, and Shaozhou in 1589. He invented a system of romanising the Chinese alphabet, and in the late 1590s was able to visit Beijing. He was the head of the Jesuit mission to China from 1597 to 1610, returning to Beijing in 1601 to obtain imperial permission to spread Christianity. Ricci referred to Muslims in his mission reports, in which he tried to make sense of their presence in China and blamed them for spreading rumours of the missionaries’ links to Iberian colonial expansion. In 1596, Ricci published Xi guo ji fa, an essay on mnemonics, edited by Zhu Dinghan and Alfonso Vagnoni (Chinese: Gao Yizhi) and reprinted in 1625. In this, he uses the example of a Muslim woman in one of his memory aids (Zhu Weizheng, Li Madou, p. 146). In 1602, he spoke with a group of Muslim merchants, who informed him of Christians present in the north-west of China (Spence, Memory palace, p. 120).

In his 1602 Kun yu wan guo quan tu, also known as the Mappamundi, a map of the world constructed with the assistance of Li Zhizao using European techniques, Ricci fails to provide details on places important to Islam such as Arabia, Mecca, Medina and Istanbul, portraying Christianity as the primary Western religion. Despite this, the work became important in both China and Japan, and was used by Chinese Muslims alongside other geographical and scientific works by Ricci and Li such as Qian kun ti yi (1608) in the construction of later works.
Illustration 8. Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi, from Toonneel van China, 1668, plate facing p. 138 (Dutch translation of Athanasius Kircher, China illustrata, trans. J.H. Glazemaaker)
MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary
Matteo Ricci (Li Madou) and Zhu Dinghan, Xi guo ji fa, 1625 (repr. in Wu Xiangjiang (ed.), Tian zhu jiao dong chu an wen xian, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1965, pp. 1-70; and in Zhu Weizheng (ed.), Li Madou zhong wen zu yi ji, Hong Kong: Xianggang cheng shi da xue chubanshe, 2001, pp. 79-214; editions at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II, and BNF; trans (German), Michael Lackner (Lang Mixie), Das vergessene Gedächtnis. Die jesuitische mnemotechnische Abhandlung ‘Xi guo ji fa’. Übersetzung und Kommentar, Stuttgart, 1986; digitalised version of the text available from BNF: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9006393v)
Matteo Ricci (Li Madou) and Li Zhizao, Qian kun ti yi, 1608 (repr. in Zhu Weizheng, Li Madou zhong wen zu yi ji, Hong Kong: Xianggang cheng shi da xue chubanshe, 2001, pp. 599-640

Secondary
M. Fontana, Matteo Ricci. A Jesuit in the Ming court, Lanham MD, 2011
A.C. Ross, A vision betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742, Maryknoll NY, 1994
In his 1605 report on the discovery of the Kaifeng Jews, Ricci writes that the recently discovered groups of Christians in north-west China had declined in number due to suspicions sown by Muslims. Clarifying this point, he states that Muslims are everywhere the enemies of the missionaries (Ricci, Letters, pp. 86-7). In the same report, he describes the ways the Chinese refer to the foreign (Abrahamic) religious groups, which they view as extremely similar in nature (p. 87). Each is given the common title of Hui hui, to which different suffixes are added: Muslims are referred to as the ‘Hui hui of the three laws’, Jews as the ‘Hui hui who extract the sinews from their meat’, and the Christians as ‘Hui hui of the word ten’ (the cross) (p. 87).

In a further letter from the same year, which records Ricci’s meeting with a Jew named Ai Tian, he notes that ‘Moors’ outnumber the Jewish and Christian remnants of previous migrations and missions, and refers again to the aforementioned terminological similarities used for referring to the Abrahamic religions (Ricci, Letters, pp. 468-70; Ricci, Opere storiche, vol. 2, pp. 289-93). In two other missionary reports, Ricci notes that his Tian zhu shi yi, published in 1603 and 1607, had a wide readership amongst the ‘Saracens’ and ‘Moors’, seemingly due to its consistency with their doctrines and its strengths in comparison with other available Chinese texts (quoted in Ben-Dor Benite, “Western Gods meet in the East”, p. 518). His final notes on Islam feature in a passage discussing Chinese idolatry (Ricci, ‘Final assessment’, p. 91), which opens by stating that Islam is an evil that exists alongside China’s idolatrous religion. He reports that a large number of Muslims have entered China, where they have multiplied and spread by means of procreation. He notes that the Muslims do not attempt to proselytise and live subject to Chinese laws, but are held in low regard by the Chinese despite being treated as natives. He also argues that the Muslim literati abandon their beliefs and practices upon receiving rank. For Ricci, Islam as a religion is of little importance. It is the existence of Jewish and Christian communities that is of primary importance to him.
SIGNIFICANCE
Although Ricci’s texts are to a certain extent anti-Islamic in approach, they are not polemical. Rather, they are primarily descriptive works tinged with anti-Islamic negativity. Furthermore, his texts from the early 17th century illustrate a movement away from his earlier claims and conventions. While Ricci still regarded the religion as evil, he did not refer to the idea, present in his earlier work, that Muslim rumours hampered the Jesuit mission. Moreover, there is a shift in his use of terminology. In late 16th-century works, he refers to Muslims as ‘Moors’ (Mauri) or ‘Muḥammadan Saracens’ (Saraceni Macometani), affirming the separate- ness of Muslims from the Chinese. However, in his final text, he uses the term ‘followers of Islam’ (della legge macomettana) (Ben-Dor Benite, “Like the Hebrews”, p. 420). Ricci’s work was copied and added to by a number of his successors.

PUBLICATIONS

STUDIES
Ben-Dor Benite, “Like the Hebrews in Spain”
Ben-Dor Benite, “Western Gods meet in the East”
Spence, Memory palace
Löwenthal, ‘Early Jews in China’

James Harry Morris