

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

Volume 11. South and East Asia, Africa and
the Americas (1600-1700)

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Matteo Ricci

Li Madou, Xitai, Qingtai, Xijiang, Matthaëus Riccius,
Matthaëus 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

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- Matteo Ricci (Li Madou), *Kun yu wan guo quan tu*, 1602 (repr. in Zhu Weizheng, *Li Madou zhong wen zhu yi ji*, Hong Kong: Xianggang cheng shi da xue chubanshe, 2001, pp. 215-78; Italian trans., P.M. Delia, *Matteo Ricci, il mappamondo cinese del P. Matteo Ricci*, Vatican City, 1938; English trans., L. Giles, 'Translations from the Chinese world map of Father Ricci', *Geographical Journal* 52 (1918) 367-85; 53 (1919) 19-30
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Secondary

- D.A. Madigan, 'Global visions in contestation. Jesuits and Muslims in the age of empires', in T. Banchoff and J. Casanova (eds), *The Jesuits and globalization. Historical legacies and contemporary challenges*, Washington DC, 2016, 69-91
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- Z. Ben-Dor Benite, '“Like the Hebrews in Spain”. The Jesuit encounter with Muslims in China and the problem of cultural change', *Al-Qanṭara* 36 (2015) 503-30
- Z. Ben-Dor Benite, '“Western Gods meet in the East”. Shapes and contexts of the Muslim-Jesuit dialogue in early modern China', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012) 517-46
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- R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City. Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*, Oxford, 2010
- A.C. Ross, *A vision betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742*, Maryknoll NY, 1994
- J. Spence, *The memory palace of Matteo Ricci*, London, 1985

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Letters and reports

DATE 1600-10

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Italian

DESCRIPTION

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 separateness 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

Matteo Ricci (Li Madou), *Letters on Kaifeng Jews*, in Matteo Ricci, *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci, S. I.*, ed. P.T. Venturi, 2 vols, Macerata, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 86-7, 468-73, vol. 2, pp. 289-93 (English trans. in R. Löwenthal, 'The early Jews in China. A supplementary bibliography', *Folklore Studies* 5 [1946] 353-98)

Matteo Ricci (Li Madou), 'A final assessment of Islam' (actual title unknown; in Matteo Ricci, *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*, Macerata, 2000, p. 91; P. d'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane. Storia dell' introduzione del christianesimo in Cina*, Rome, 1942, pp. 110-11; English translations in Spence, *Memory palace*, p. 118, and Ben-Dor Benite, "Like the Hebrews in Spain", p. 519)

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