Christian-Muslim Relations
A Bibliographical History

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Nicolas Trigault

Trigautius, Trigaultius, Jin Nige

DATE OF BIRTH 1577
PLACE OF BIRTH Douai, Belgium
DATE OF DEATH 1628
PLACE OF DEATH Hangzhou

BIOGRAPHY

Nicolas Trigault joined the Society of Jesus in 1594. He studied mathematics, astronomy and geography in Europe, and left in 1607 for Macau, arriving there in 1610. He undertook Chinese language training in Nanjing and later moved to Beijing. He left China in 1612 as procurator of the Jesuit mission, reaching Rome in 1614, where he received approval for priests to offer the mass and breviary in Chinese. After travelling around Europe gaining support for the mission, he left again for China in 1619, and on arrival evangelised in Kaifeng. In 1624, he visited Shaanxi, and he died in Hangzhou in 1628.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Secondary

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas svscepta, ab Societate Iesv, 'The Christian expedition to China of the Society of Jesus'

DATE 1615
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Latin

DESCRIPTION
During his journey to Rome between 1612 and 1614, Trigault completed a Latin translation of an Italian manuscript originally written by Matteo Ricci, describing China and the Jesuit mission there. Trigault also edited Ricci's text and composed an additional five chapters in order to bring the history up to date, to finish in approximately 1613. His text, which Ricci had composed as five books, was some 646 pages long. Of the reprints, some are shorter, others longer, covering up to 712 pages, while translations stretch to over 1,000 pages. The full title of the text is *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas svscepta, ab Societate Iesv ex P. Matthaei Riccj eiusdem societatis commentarijs. Libri V. Ad S. D. N. Pavlvm V. In quibus Sinensis regni mores, leges atqu: instituta & noua illius ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur. Auctore P. Nicolao Trigavtio Belga ex eadem societate*. In the English translations, it is often difficult to ascertain which sections are original to Ricci and which are from Trigault's hand. In any case, the influence of Ricci on the interpolated text is clear, as several of his concepts are repeated in it. The text similarly draws on the work of Diego de Pantoja, or at least reaches similar conclusions and posits similar theories.

Muslims and Islam feature several times. Trigault (and Ricci) note the existence of the court-sanctioned 'Saracen' astronomers and the passing of astronomical information from 'Saracens' to the Chinese. They attribute the great number of Muslims in China to a law prohibiting Muslim migrants from leaving China if they have stayed for a period longer than nine years (Purchas, *Hakluytus posthumus*, p. 424; the references that follow are to this text unless otherwise stated). The author and translator argue that Muslims maintain their practices and temples, but do not teach about their religion and are unskilled in the knowledge of their own tenets (p. 465).

Like de Pantoja, they attribute the origin of China's Muslim population to the Mongol invasions, noting that, due to the time over which

the population had established itself, the religion was no longer treated with suspicion (p. 465). The authors note the ability of Muslims to study like the Chinese, and state that some Chinese believe that Muslims become natives after four generations (p. 465). Nevertheless, those Muslims who become educated often abandon their religious beliefs (p. 465).

Trigault furthermore notes that Mughals informed Ricci of the existence of Christians in China (as had been the case with Jerome Xavier) (p. 465). As in Ricci's own reports, Trigault records his predecessor's conversation with the Jew Ai Tian, noting that Ricci learnt that many Christians became Jews, Saracens or idolaters due to the suspicion with which they were regarded (p. 466). He also repeats the ways in which Christians, Muslims and Jews are distinguished from one another, and the ways in which the Muslims refer to Christians, originally found in Ricci's work (p. 466). In these passages, the focus is more on Judaism and Christianity than on Islam; thus, for example, Islam is referred to in reference to Jewish conversions to the religion.

In the same text, Trigault describes the journey of Bento de Góis, based on Ricci's records and other sources (Trigault, *Cathay and the way thither*, pp. 549-96; all the references that follow are to this translation). De Góis's mission was sanctioned by officials in India on the basis of reports that informed them that Cathay contained a large number of Muslims and that it was not generally believed (except by Jesuits in China) that Cathay and China were the same place (pp. 550-1). Trigault argues that the Muslim informants who had relayed this information had either lied, as was their nature, or misled the missionaries present in India by mistaking Buddhist imagery and practice for Christianity (p. 551). De Góis was chosen for the mission because of his knowledge of Persian and Muslim customs, and he set out with a great number of traders from the Mughal Empire, as was customary for those traveling to Cathay (pp. 550, 553). While it is certain that the majority of characters who feature in the narrative are Muslims, knowledge of this is for the most part assumed by the author and so there are relatively few explicit statements about Islam or Muslims. At one point in the narrative, de Góis meets a *ḥajj* pilgrim (p. 556), whereupon he describes the *ḥajj* as performed for the sake of a blasphemous doctrine, a pilgrimage to the 'imposter's carcass' at Mecca (p. 557).

Trigault reports a number of incidences of 'conflict' between de Góis and Muslims, and much of the narrative is set to the backdrop of wider

conflicts between the Islamic kingdoms through which de Góis travelled and the rebels within them (pp. 559-61, 567, 570). One such incident was the spreading of false reports by Saracens that de Góis had been put to death by Muslim clerics for invoking the name of a false prophet (pp. 567-8). Another was a threat made to de Góis's life over dinner by a Saracen who wanted him to invoke the Prophet's name (p. 569). Elsewhere, de Góis was forced to bribe priests for exemption from fasting laws (p. 574). Trigault notes that such falsities were a regular occurrence.

The author regularly portrays Christian-Muslim debate as resulting in Christian victory (pp. 569, 574-5). In one debate, between de Góis and some mullas, de Góis argued that the direction of prayer was unimportant because God is everywhere. On hearing this, the mullas concluded that Christianity had some good qualities (p. 569). During another debate with those learned in Islamic law, de Góis silenced and defeated his opponents through his fidelity to his faith (p. 578). This caused the ruler of the region to express his approval for Christianity, stating that the Christians were true believers (pp. 574-5). Concurrent with de Pantoja's reports (which are more or less repeated with some additional details later in the narrative), de Góis met merchants pretending to be an embassy in order to enter China on their return journey (pp. 577, 582-3). These merchants gave de Góis information about Peking and the Jesuit brothers there (pp. 577-8). Through this, de Góis was able to affirm that Cathay and China were indeed the same place, and his last doubt evaporated when he reached the border and heard more stories (pp. 577-8).

In describing Muslims who live on the Chinese border, Trigault notes that they lack a spirit of war and could be easily overcome by their Chinese neighbours, should the latter choose to act (p. 580). At the border, de Góis was delayed at a city divided into two parts, one for Chinese and one for Muslims who had come for trade (pp. 581-2). Many of the Muslims had taken wives and had children, and so would not return to their home countries (p. 582). Trigault notes that these Muslims lived under Chinese law, unlike the Portuguese in Macau (p. 582). Stuck at the border city, de Góis wrote to Ricci to ask for assistance in order that he might escape his company of Saracens (p. 584). Ricci dispatched a Chinese Jesuit named John Ferdinand (p. 585).

Trigault notes that de Góis endured more annoyance from the Muslims at this border city than at any other point during his whole journey (pp. 585-6). He hid part of his supply of jade so that his Muslim compatriots would not steal or spend it (p. 586). Shortly after the arrival of

Ferdinand, de Góis died from an illness that some suspected to be caused by poisoning by Muslims (pp. 586-7). Before his death, he had written to Beijing to warn the Jesuits there not to place faith in Muslims (p. 588). Trigault records that, following de Góis's death, the Muslims sought to take his possessions and destroyed his travel journal because it recorded their debts to him (p. 587). Furthermore, they demanded that he be buried according to Muslim customs, but John Ferdinand was able to prevent this (p. 587). They also captured de Góis's Armenian travel companion Isaac and, in a dispute over de Góis's possessions, demanded that he invoke Muḥammad (p. 588). In the court case that followed, the Muslims attempted to problematise the relationship between Ferdinand and Isaac, claiming that one was a Saracen and the other a Chinaman. But, since Ferdinand was able to assert that Isaac hated Islam, and because both men ate pork, the case was dropped (pp. 588-90).

SIGNIFICANCE

Trigault takes three approaches to Islam. In dealing with the life and work of Ricci he more or less follows the assertions of Ricci and his predecessors, with some minor additions. These passages are for the most part descriptive and generally lack overt anti-Islamic sentiment, as was common to Ricci's later work.

On the other hand, Trigault's account of the journey of de Góis takes an often explicitly anti-Islamic and polemical approach. This might suggest that his source material for de Góis was more strongly anti-Islamic than the other source material, or it may have resulted from the fact that Muslims in de Góis's story interacted with the protagonist directly, which necessitated the use of value judgments.

A third approach is taken with regard to Muslim leaders who are praised for their material and moral support of the Jesuits. The Mughal leadership (pp. 550, 552, 557), the king of Yarkand (pp. 565-6), the nephew of the king of Cascar (pp. 572-3), and the illegitimate son of the king of Cascar (pp. 574-5) are all viewed in a positive light because of their patronage of de Góis's mission.

Trigault generally favours the term *Saraceni*, which is common to the period, though he also uses *Mahometanae*. The large number of translations and reprints suggest that the work had on-going importance for the composition of later works and the forming of European understandings of China and its Muslims.

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