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Reseña de “João Rodrigues Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan.” de Michael Cooper (edit.)
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tant approach to the study of early Christianity in Japan and gives an interesting overview of many problems of the time. What may be most important, the author hints at the necessity of new approaches, after his own (in the Conclusion (pp. 161-164) Higashibaba points at what he himself sees as limits of his own study and concrete possibilities to continue and develop it further), to the study of the so called ‘Christian Century’, a term, sometimes, more or less directly, used by Higashibaba himself, but, most fortunately put into doubt by his own study itself. In addition, the study is written in a way that it may be used, too, as an introductory text for students. In addition, the book is nicely made, and despite of mistakes as hinted at very readable. The Glossary (pp. 191-195) of Japanese terminology, especially of the Kirishitan context and the Index (pp. 196-201) are very useful. In two Appendices are given translations from the Dochirina Kirishitan (1591), (“Chapter Eleven”, about the sacraments, pp. 165-175) and “Articles for the Kirishitan” from “Orasho no hon’yaku...” (pp. 176-179).

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João Rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan.

Almost one hundred years ago, the writer Cristóvão Aires published, for the first time, some chapters of the manuscript copy of the Historia da Igreja do Japão by Fr João Rodrigues Tçuzu SJ preserved in the library of the Ajuda Palace, Lisbon (MS Jesusita na Asia, 49-IV-53, ff. 1-181).† Between December 1894 and January 1895, Léonard Cros visited Ajuda in order to prepare his biography of Francisco Xavier. He must have been the first scholar to make use of this highly important missionary history or chronicle written in Macao from c. 1620 to 1633, the year of João Rodrigues’s death.‡ Nevertheless, neither Cros, nor Aires were able to identify the man behind the work, as the Lisbon copy does not show Rodrigues’s name as author. The correct authorship identification would come after the publication of a paper by Georg Schurhammer in 1919-1920.³ From then on, the German orientalist repeatedly quoted excerpts from Rodrigues’s Historia, as is the case of a well-known article on the first European reports on Japan in post-1543 era.⁴ Between 1952 and 1954, José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz translated into Spanish, with copious notes, four sections of the same text. Two of those translations became quite
popular as they deal with the former Japanese capital Miyako (Kyoto) and the tea ceremony. Following these examples, diplomat João do Amaral Abranches Pinto prepared for the newspaper Notícias de Macau the still most complete Portuguese edition of Fr Rodrigues’s Historia do Japão (2 vols, 1954-1955). An absolute bibliographic rarity today, it transcribes – with too many faults and practically no notes – about two thirds of the Ajuda copy. The single complete edition of this manuscript appeared in Tokyo by the hand of Doi Tadao, the doyen of Rodrigues studies in Japan, under the title Nihon Kyōkai Shi (2 vols, 1967-1970). It includes a highly praised critical work. However, the language chosen for the edition gives few chances to the significant majority of readers outside Japan. In 1973, Michael Cooper used the same Lisbon text to make an incomplete English translation presented as This Island of Japon. Cooper is recognized as an authority on João Rodrigues’s legacy since the presentation of his doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford on the writings of this Portuguese Jesuit (1969). His book Rodrigues the Interpreter is both an essential opus on the subject and a standard biography. With João Rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan, Michael Cooper is back on the trail of someone he helped to recover from the past. This new work consists of an annotated translation of the two books of Rodrigues’s Historia on Japanese life and culture and is a welcome addition to This Island of Japon. Though excluding the entire part that deals with missionary history, Cooper offers a careful edition of what he recognizes as the extant most important study of Japanese life among European reports on Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

An account of Rodrigues’s life and career as complete as possible is available to the reader since the publication of his biography by Michael Cooper thirty years ago. As reminded in the introductory pages of the Historia da Igreja do Japão published by the Hakluyt Society, this is a rather difficult inquest as Rodrigues, modestly, seldom speaks about himself in the writings he printed or organized for printing. Moreover, we only have ten private letters exhibiting his signature, nine of them written in Macao and elsewhere in China and only one in his adoptive land of Japan. The few remaining indirect references to the matter are often laconic but informative enough to tell us that he must have arrived in Nagasaki for the first time in 1577 at the approximate age of fifteen, leaving behind a poor childhood in northern Portugal. After following the troops of old Otomo of Bungo, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1580 and received – in the noviciate of Usuki and then in the seminary at Arima – the basis of an intellectual formation he never had the chance to get in Europe. Alessandro Valignano
was one of the first leading figures in the Jesuit mission to become aware of Rodrigues’s remarkable skills as a speaker of Japanese and used him as interpreter when he was received in audience by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1591. In the following years Rodrigues was special adviser to the Vice-Provincials Francesco Pasio and Pedro Gómez, and rendered most valuable services as go-between with Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Also appointed as the mission’s procurator, or treasurer, and as commercial agent of the shogun, he found himself in the worst place possible when the equation that mixed silk business with Catholic proselytism was perceived as a threat to the Tokugawa regime. After the so-called Madre de Deus incident, in the beginning of 1610, João Rodrigues was sacrificed in the name of the real-politik and forced to an exile for life in Macao and inner China. His former post as court interpreter was given to Ieyasu’s new protégé, William Adams, an Englishman who had arrived in Japan ten years earlier carried in a Dutch ship. Tomorrow had arrived.

Although fascinating, João Rodrigues’s political accomplishments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Japan cannot be compared to the place he earned in the history of Japanese-European cultural relations by publishing in Nagasaki between the years 1604 and 1608 the *Arte da lingoa de Iapam* (*Arte grande*), virtually the first grammar of spoken Japanese, followed by a revised edition, *Arte Breve da Lingoa Iapoa* (Macao, 1620). These masterpieces came after the *Vocabulatio da lingua de Japan*, the monumental Japanese-Portuguese dictionary also printed by the Jesuit mission of Nagasaki between 1603-1604. Whether Rodrigues was one of the editors of this vocabulary or not is still a matter under discussion. Even though, Michael Cooper – close to Charles Boxer’s opinion – is ready to consider that possibility as plausible. On the other hand, Cooper does not comment on the *Dictionarium Latino Lusitanicum, ac Iaponicum* (Amakusa, 1595), the first printed dictionary of the Japanese language and another collective work in which Rodrigues might have been involved. Apart from the *History of the Church of Japan* and a couple of writings closely related to it, the curriculum of his Chinese years includes the first European description of the Nestorian Stone found near Xianfu around 1623 and a handful of important lost projects such as polemical treatises on the problem of Christian terminology used in China after Fr Ricci’s intellectual accommodation practice, a common catechism for the missions in China and Japan and a three-volume atlas of Asia. Most of the evaluations on Rodrigues’s capacities also tend to agree with a couple of limitations: the fact that he lacked the academic discipline required to provide a global time-proof work; and that sometimes he was closer
to a poet than to an objective writer when composing in China about his lost Japan. None of these additional features is forgotten in the biography traced by Cooper.

In 1620, after a request from the Jesuit superior in Japan, João Rodrigues was asked to write the *Historia da Igreja do Japão*. It was the fourth attempt made by the Society of Jesus to accomplish a project of this kind. Following a proposal by the Jesuit historian Giovanni Pietro Maffei – that realised the importance of such a work while preparing his *Historiarum Indicarum libri XVI* (Florence, 1588) – around 1584 Luís Fróis was commissioned to compile a similar history of the Japanese mission. Fróis completed his task, working for about ten years in his epic *Historia de Japan*. When this chronicle was finished, Valignano vetoed it. The Visitor aimed at a concise one-volume history that could provide European readers with an effective account of the Jesuit enterprise and Fróis’s achievement was unsuitable for that purpose. Valignano still tried to fill the gap with his own *Del Principio y Progresso de la Religion Christiana en Japan*, but this treatise was left unfinished in 1601. Twelve years later, the Portuguese missionary Mateus de Couros would be appointed to take up the same task, again with no positive results. When he was excused from it, they called for Rodrigues. As Cooper reminds us, he knew the country and spoke the Japanese language fluently. He had lived for about three decades in the Jesuit mission and had personally met most of the outstanding Japanese personalities of his time.\(^6\) Besides, there he was, an over-active man whose limited knowledge of Chinese language was an obstacle to a full missionary performance. It was important to keep him busy, particularly after publishing his second grammar book in 1620.\(^7\) But was that all?

We think that the circumstances underlying the commission of this fourth *History of Japan* include further reasons. Other basic stimulus resulted from the pressure that the Mendicant Orders based in the Philippines were imposing over Japanese ground. This was at least as important as the mission’s financial problems and the consequent need for an account that could help raising funds. Even a manuscript like the one Valignano left incomplete in 1601 can only be understood under this new perspective since it is much closer to the apologetic style than to the chronicles. After publishing his *Historia de las Islas del Archipelago, y Reynos de la Gran China* (Barcelona, 1601), Marcelo de Ribadeneyra OFM received a prompt reaction from the Jesuits via Pedro Chirino’s *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* (Rome, 1604). And Pedro Morejón SJ, former rector of the Kyoto seminary, had just written more than 400 impetuous *Apostillas* to the provocative *Relacion del Reino de Nippon* by Bernardino de Avila Girón OFM. In addition,
we should bear in mind the complex political scenery that combines the administrative getting away of the Japanese and Chinese missions from the Province of Goa (that Rodrigues supports) with the progressive disassociation of the China mission from the Padroado (a trend he tried to contradict, as we can see whenever he attacked the whole Valignano-Ricci tradition on the vital matter of the Chinese liturgical terms). The great attention paid to China within the structure of the *Historia do Japão* looks like a clear sign of this double ideological compromise.

The ambitious plan drawn by João Rodrigues was left unfinished. He intended to write a prologue, ten introductory books on the land and people of Japan, ten books on the history of the Japanese mission from 1549 to 1634, plus four books describing the missions in China, Siam, Cambodia, and Korea. So far only the first two introductory books (exactly those translated in the present volume by Michael Cooper) and the first book describing the foundation of the mission by Francisco Xavier (1549-1552) came to light. There is some evidence to prove that Rodrigues might have finished the first forty years of the *History* (1549-1590), but certainly the most regrettable absence are the remaining eight introductory books, as they would deal with the Japanese king, nobility, Buddhist sects, Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism. Anyway, what he left about Japanese culture is a precious treasure (we must recall that the sad disappearance of the thirteen introductory chapters on Japanese life to Fróis’s *Historia* also increase the importance of this surviving description). His insights into etiquette, the tea ceremony, flower arrangements, painting, calligraphy or the social habits of the gentry are the best among contemporary European reports. The same can be said on his view of Hideyoshi’s Miyako and some of the explanations given about imperial chronology, provincial geography, house building, terms and writing.

Here and there Rodrigues’s account of Japanese history is an idealized one, and his belief on the religious asceticism of Zen monks is nearly lyrical. His literary skills are also far from accurate: limited vocabulary, constant repetition of basic words, and a substantial lack of logic in the structure of the whole work are among his weak points. Michael Cooper tries to compensate some of these faults by offering an ‘improved’ translation. He calls for the use of synonyms and provides a version that reads more smoothly than the original text. In view of the didactic purpose of the presente edition, we accept this option. Above all, this new English translation offers to the reader a generous set of notes where Rodrigues’s statements are confronted with the writings of contemporary European authors, his gaps and unclear sentences are explained, and the most relevant
topics receive a brief but incisive elucidation. Last but not least, Cooper faces the key-question of the authorship of the anonymous manuscript of the *Historia da Igreja do Japão*. Although quoting extensively the supposed additions by Martinho Hara that can be found in the autograph titled *Bispos da Igreja do Japão* – a rather puzzling addendum to the *History* describing the work of the first six bishops of Japan – he has no doubt in considering Rodrigues as the sole author. Scholars like Léon Bourdon supported the same view, but, in fact, after the presentation of the *Bispos’s* seven-folio fragment by Josef Schütte the question of the authorship was never completely settled.

João Rodrigues’s firsthand experience of Japan made possible the above-mentioned unique excerpts on life and culture. Yet he was a man of his time, hence large sections of his two introductory books are heavily dependent on other writers’ material. Moreover, it is easily perceptible that he often borrows data from them without acknowledgement. It is also clear that he quotes many works he never read. Once again, Cooper’s reading of this *History* goes further than any previous analysis. Fortunately, this does not mean that there is no place left for progress on the matter of inquiry of sources.

The large Chinese sections – on the whole, a sort of a treatise inside the treatise – are a perfect example. After a clue left by Rodrigues himself, Cooper identifies the use of Giovanni Magini’s *Geographia* (Cologne, 1597), a work that reproduces Ptolomy’s *Geographia* together with Magini’s own description of the world. The *Tu-shu-bian*, an illustrated encyclopaedia first published in 1613, is used once to confirm Rodrigues’s claimed dependence on Chinese books. A reference to Jesuit translations into Chinese of European mathematicians’ books is identified with the Ricci-Xu Guangqi edition of Christopher Clavius’s *Euclidis elementorum libri XV* (Beijing, 1606-1607). Another reference to a Jesuit gradated universal map is immediately perceived as dealing with Ricci’s World Map published in China in 1584, 1600, 1603 and 1608. Quotations said to be from Pomponius Mela or Herodotus are recognized as impossible. Many other footnotes are filled with pertinent references taken from classic or scholastic sources with an almost identical treatment of the subject described in the text. Nevertheless, Rodrigues’s Chinese picture is above all an extremely well informed one, imposing a deeper inquiry into his modern readings.

For instance, it is hard to believe that the figures he provides for the troops placed on the northern frontier might have been suggested by his travels up and down China or that his comments on the image of Chinese carts with sails might have arisen from European reports known by heart. While reading carefully
what Rodrigues has to say about Liampó (Ningbo), one is surprised with the similarities it presents with João de Barros’s Terceira decada da Asia.31 Much of his portrait of the provincial administration contains several paragraphs that match almost word by word with Gaspar da Cruz’s Tractado das cousas da China or with a connected book such as González de Mendoza’s Historia de China.32 The apparent contradiction existing between a broad use of Ricci’s letters and other Jesuit inquiries and what looks like a general dismiss of Matteo Ricci-Nicolás Trigault, De Christiana Expeditione apvd Sinas, Augsburg, 1615, should be investigated (after all, Trigault returned to Macao in 1619). It should also be investigated how Rodrigues might have selected a large amount of information from Chinese sources like Luo Hongxian’s Guang Yutu.

After this edition prepared by Michael Cooper, the first two essential books of the Historia da Igreja do Japão by Fr João Rodrigues were finally made available in a highly accessible manner. At the same time, this English version of Rodrigues’s remarkable contribution to cultural history reminds us once again that the publication of the complete Portuguese manuscript is still to be done. This project has to include the Segunda parte da historia eclesiastica de Iapam,33 corresponding to the extant history of the Japanese mission, although knowing that it borrows most of its contents from João de Lucena’s História da vida do padre Francisco Xavier (Lisbon, 1600) and from the manuscript Historia da Companhia de Jesus by Sebastião Gonçalves (c. 1614). Besides the autograph Bispos da Igreja do Japam, there still exists in Madrid an unfinished manuscript by Rodrigues titled Breve aparato para a historia de Japam melhor se entender,34 and its contents corresponds more or less to the general description of Asia that introduces the Historia. If possible, an additional comparison between the Ajudá text and a copy of Rodrigues’s Historia once located in the hands of the antiquarian bookstore Isseidó in Tokyo should be tried.35 Finally, this editorial project must integrate both the third section of the Arte grande, in which Rodrigues deals with Japanese poetry, history, linear measurements, ranks of Buddhist monks, letter writing, and a list of emperors, and the similarly extraneous information contained in Books II and III of his Arte breve. This time we trust it will not take another century to accomplish this long-awaited work.

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