
Book Reviews

Asia

Liam Matthew Brockey. *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780674416680. \$39.95.

In *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia*, Liam Brockey presents a biography of André Palmeiro, a Jesuit administrator instructed to inspect all Jesuit missions in Asia between 1617 and 1635. Brockey's work is divided into two parts: in part one Palmeiro's early years in Portugal and his first two terms as a visitor of Jesuits missions in South Asia are examined, while part two deals with Palmeiro's time as a visitor of the East Asian missions. The names of these two parts, "Inside the Empire" and "At Empire's Edge," hint at not only the religious and physical challenges Palmeiro faced when inspecting the Jesuits' extensive network, but it also indicates the difficult task of traveling within and beyond the ever-changing confines of the Portuguese colonial empire in Asia. As such, Brockey has brought to life a key character in the negotiation between the Portuguese colonial state and the Society of Jesus: the visitor. While Brockey acknowledges that Palmeiro's travels are "the defining theme", he shies away from calling his study global, as this is often a misrepresentation of the daily realities and mentalities of "early moderns." Instead, Brockey's focus is on carefully drawing out Palmeiro's corporate Jesuit identity.

In the book's prelude and introduction, Brockey describes the tasks and position of a visitor: Palmeiro inspected the Asian missions and the missionaries' strategies to strengthen a coherent "spirit" and corporate identity. This spirit and identity were obviously defined by the Society's centre, Rome, and the visitor was given extensive powers to oversee all temporal and administrative matters while at the same time acting as "a peacemaker" for any disagreements regarding the religious observance of Jesuits.

Brockey zooms in on Palmeiro, a pragmatic administrator, and diplomat, because, while Palmeiro may escape the attention of both historians and the larger public, he was a major figure in shaping the early modern missions in Asia (5) and arguably closer to the core of the Society's identity. Brockey's biography eschews the focus and stereotypes associated with earlier studies on either the heroic, innovative, strangely modern, or scheming Jesuit. A refocus and call for more studies on pragmatic Jesuits who chose to be a face in the crowd may indeed be more in line with the historical reality of the Jesuits during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but Brockey none the less starts his story on a rather dramatic note: the repression of Japanese Christians and Jesuits in Japan during the 1630s. In the first pages, *The Visitor* zooms in on Cristóvão Ferreira, the Jesuit who abjured Christianity under torture. Ferreira's first question after another Jesuit sent from Macao managed to get through to him was: how is André Palmeiro?

After this dramatic introduction, the first part of the book recounts Palmeiro's entry into the Society, his slow rise through the ranks, and his training as a visitor. Even as he reached the rank of professed Jesuit, few traces remain to illustrate Palmeiro's life. This makes sense

because Palmeiro was not supposed to be “distinguishable from the mass of his brethren” (49), in step with the Society’s corporate identity.

As soon as Palmeiro reaches Goa, he is presented as the man responsible for resolving crises often caused by excessive missionary zeal or ego. While inspecting the Jesuit missions in South Asia, Palmeiro is confronted with various conflicts of factional strife, linked to the oversized egos of three fathers: Antonio Rubino, Alberto Laerzio, and Roberto Nobili. While all three were Italian, Brockey argues that it is time “to move beyond clichés about national character” (103), especially since, if this conflict is analysed along national lines, the Portuguese are almost invariably depicted as close-minded, xenophobic, and intellectually mediocre (102). Instead, Brockey argues that the core of the conflict is the manifestation of charisma against pragmatism. While Brockey’s argument is well-founded and convincing, it is important to keep in mind the blurry lines of the (semi-)colonial environment the Italians were working in. As the precise lines of Portugal’s colonial authority were debatable and since the edge of the empire was never far, it was perhaps not a surprise that the schism between different factions of Jesuits ran along lines of nationalistic feelings. However, Brockey’s representation of a clash between excessive proselytizing zeal on the Italian part and Palmeiro’s more pragmatic approach is without a doubt an in-depth analysis of missionary expansion strategies: a zealous missionary was not per se a great leader able to govern ever-expanding missions with little resources. Just as in his 2007 work, Brockey repeats that the Jesuits in Asia were not handpicked but rather a disjointed collection of dispensable men (160). If the Society had sent more “made men” with experience as leaders in the European Jesuit colleges like Palmeiro to the missions, it may have produced better leaders.

The issue of the different degree of colonial influence in India versus East Asia prepares the transition to part two. Brockey reassures the reader that Palmeiro was not an administrator with “lash in hand”, but more of a diplomat. His careful behaviour corresponds to East Asia’s political context where only one node, Macau, is in Portuguese hands, and Brockey is quick to signal that even this control is completely at the mercy of the Ming and then the Qing empires. Within the East Asian missions, the unfolding tragedy in Japan (referred to in the Prelude) was the most substantial crisis which made “all other enterprises sideshows” (201).

Time and again Brockey’s meticulous research unravels Palmeiro’s confrontation with one Gordian knot after the other: rarely, if ever, did Palmeiro rush to judgment (219), but rather proved to be a problem-solver aided by his calm of being a “made man” in addition to the refreshing perspective of an outsider. Meanwhile, Brockey also convincingly develops Palmeiro’s character: he is not all pragmatic, but will occasionally, even in documents that he knew would have a wider circulation, express his desire to be a passionate missionary (273). In conclusion, Brockey has produced a well-written, meticulously researched biography of the type of Jesuit, a visitor, of which we needed more scholarly analysis.

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R.S. Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 320 pp. ISBN: 9780674049079. \$32.50.

The title alone of R.S. Sugirtharajah’s wide-ranging, thoughtful book is a provocation. For the most part, the history of Christianity in Asia has been told as one of transmission from Europe to Asia. Scholars have focused on how Western missionaries, as agents of Western