

Brockey, Liam Matthew. *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia*. Cambridge (Massachusetts), London: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 2014, 515 pp. ISBN: 978-0-674-41668-0.

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How was the Society of Jesus governed outside Europe, particularly in regions like Asia, whose distance severely limited fluid communication with Rome? This is the question at the heart of Liam M. Brockey's study of the Jesuit André Palmeiro and the role he played as the Order's Visitor in the Indian Ocean region over the course of almost twenty years, from 1618 to his death in 1635. The history of early modern missionary work is probably one of the areas of historiographical research which has progressed most over the past twenty years, thanks to profound theoretical and methodological revisions. Alongside the complete renewal of Jesuit studies, these changes have allowed us to overcome outdated panegyric readings and to produce instead a more nuanced understanding of the missionary phenomenon. In the 1990s, the pioneering works of scholars like Luce Giard, John O'Malley, Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Antonella Romano paved the way for a new generation of historians in this field and particularly in the field of the Jesuit mission; Liam Brockey is undoubtedly a member of this generation. His works on the Jesuit presence in China during the modern era² have helped drive forward a field of research that has become far more visible in historiography over the past few years. Other contributions in this area have been provided by scholars such as Ronnie Hsia, Noël Golvers, Pascale Girard, Florence Hsia, and, once again, Antonella Romano.

The present study fits into this field of research, but takes a wider look at the Asian world as a whole. It thus offers a complete overview of the Jesuit presence in the Indian Ocean and East Asia region during the first third of the seventeenth century, and of the problems that the Society faced in various places where it was active, from Ethiopia to the Kingdom of Tonkin and to Japan. Brockey studies this phenomenon through the figure and perspective of the Portuguese Jesuit André Palmeiro. Palmeiro is almost unknown and has barely been studied, but he is shown to have been a tireless writer of letters and travel accounts, and, due to his post in the region, a key actor for those analyzing Jesuit

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² In particular, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1574-1724*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007.

missionary activity in the Indian Ocean in a period when there was no shortage of transformation and change. The Order's apostolic strategies in such places were never fully defined during the sixteenth century. Faced with traditional historiography, which has framed the Jesuit mission through the experience of the sixteenth century and the legacy of Francisco Xavier, Matteo Ricci and Alessandro Valignano, Brockey's study manages to show us a less static reality, in which the methods and strategies used by the Jesuits continued to be negotiated, contested and redeveloped. In this context, the figure of the Visitor, armed with a range of powers delegated to him by the Superior General, would naturally arise as a crucial player in attempts to shape missionary activity. His job was to guarantee its effectiveness without endangering the foundations of Jesuit identity. Valignano's determining role in this process during the final decades of the sixteenth century is well known; Palmeiro's, while far less prominent in historiography, was nevertheless just as important.

As Brockey states in the introduction, the portrait he offers us in this study is one which brings together three aspects of Palmeiro's character. First, that he was a member of a religious congregation like the Society of Jesus, characterized by its emphasis on intellectualism and education, but even more so by its well-known missionary engagement. The Jesuits' presence in Asia and the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the seventeenth century was the result, furthermore, of the links which they had established with the Portuguese crown from 1540 onward. The Order thus benefited from royal support for setting up a whole network of colleges and establishments which served as the missions' centers; but it also had to play its part in the Empire's own projects. Second, Brockey highlights Palmeiro's status as an administrator. His post as Visitor, so common in the Order's bureaucratic practices as an instrument of control, took on a particular significance in the Asian context. The distance from Rome made the post, to all intents and purposes, a permanent one, and set him up as a figure with wide-reaching powers who essentially represented the Superior General, to whom he reported and with whom he kept in direct and constant communication. Among various roles, he was tasked with mediating and pacifying the conflicts which arose at the heart of Jesuit communities. Most importantly, he had to inspect the spiritual, apostolic, governmental, material and personal aspects which affected the way in which the Order's provinces functioned; he had to make sure they fitted the Constitutions and the spirit of the Society. Finally, in his study of André Palmeiro, Brockey takes into account a personal dimension, presenting his subject as someone who was extremely curious and had a great ability for observing the places he

lived in and visited. At the same time, he had a sense of pragmatism which, faced with idealism and rather more “visionary” enterprises, compelled him to seek what was possible at all times.

The study is set out in two main parts. The first focuses on Palmeiro’s activity at the heart of the Portuguese Empire in Asia, focusing on Goa and the territories around the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Bengal where the Portuguese were present. The second part looks at the period Palmeiro spent in Macau, within the borders of the Empire, dealing with the problems which surrounded the Jesuits’ missionary projects in China, in the Japanese archipelago and in Southeast Asia. Naturally, therefore, Brockey structures the book around Palmeiro’s own biography: firstly, as Visitor in the provinces of Malabar (1618-1621) and India (1621-1626), and then later as Visitor in the province of Japan and in the vice-province of China (1626-1635). But this structure also underlines how missionary practice differed between areas under the control/influence of a power like the *Estado da Índia* and areas where there was no such control/influence. In the latter case, the presence of Jesuits and missionaries had no imperial support, and thus their ability to act was strongly dependent on the will of local rulers.

Indeed, the convergence of the Society’s interests with those of the Empire is made clear throughout the study. However, it is particularly important in the first part, most specifically when analyzing the period that Palmeiro spent in Goa, where – as Brockey points out—he was part of colonial power circles and managed to establish close links with the Viceroy, Francisco da Gama. Furthermore, his experience across a region as extensive as the Jesuit province of India offered him a more “imperial” vision of the Society’s role in the Indian Ocean and in Asia more generally. Brockey draws attention to the diplomatic aspect of enterprises like the Jesuit mission at the Moghul court, where the Society acted as a crucial line of communication between the Moghul Empire and Goa, or the Jesuits’ presence in Ethiopia in the first third of the seventeenth century. There is no doubt that, by collaborating with Portuguese power structures, the Jesuits received favors, which were vital to maintaining their status in the Portuguese-Asian political and religious world. However, their involvement in Portuguese imperial structures also brought with it confrontation with other actors. This study, in fact, accurately highlights some of the questions which led to the biggest controversies of the day, from the jurisdictional disputes with the Bishop of Cochin about the missions on the Pearl Fishery Coast and the debts of the College of Colombo, to the suspicions which the archbishops of Goa and Cangranore

had about Nobili's strategies, and to the recurrent disputes with the other religious orders that competed in the field of missionary work and for the glory of martyrdom.

Beyond the external factors which determined Palmeiro's actions, his tenure as Visitor and administrator was largely shaped by internal factors and the Order's own interests. Here, Brockey provides an accurate analysis of the various spiritual and material problems which the Jesuits faced at that time, and of the solutions which Palmeiro attempted to enforce, demonstrating the difficult balance which he had to establish at times between the stance transmitted from Rome and the realities of local missions. Therefore, he stresses Palmeiro's role in defining the very strategy of the Order in the Asian world. He maintained a presence in areas which had been subject to Jesuit apostolic activity for a significant time; but, at the same time, he explored new territories for missions. Brockey refers, for example, to António de Andrade's expedition in 1624 to the Himalayas. Above all, however, particular emphasis is placed on the boost which missionary activity received under the auspices of Palmeiro himself in Southeast Asia (Tonkin, Siam, Cochinchina, Hainan), which had hitherto barely been explored by Catholic missionaries. In reality, bringing these regions within the Jesuits' geographical and missionary purview was the alternative to the volatile situation in which the formerly successful mission in Japan had been mired since 1614. One of the most serious problems which the Society encountered in this period was related to exactly that: the end, the final moments, of Japanese Christianity. Since the Society had become a clandestine mission marked by persecution and martyrdom, Brockey underlines the growing pessimism among exiled brothers and Jesuit superiors in Macau about the future of this missionary enterprise. Now all that remained was to attempt to bring comfort to the handful of brothers who were still there, and to preserve the memory of those who had been martyred, by promoting their causes to the authorities in Rome.

The Jesuit missionaries were a subject of particular and continued concern and worry for André Palmeiro, whose role as Visitor naturally made him an "administrator of men". In this regard, Brockey underlines, on the one hand, his mediating role in the various disputes which arose at the heart of Jesuit communities. Of particular note is Brockey's analysis of the internal strife which faced the brothers of the Province of Malabar in the 1620s. Deep divisions arose between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Italian Jesuits, with the latter growing in both number and power. There was no shortage of people ready to contest the Italians' control over the College of Cochin and several other missions, but many questioned the methods of evangelization practiced by certain fathers, such as

Roberto Nobili, whose policies of accommodation in Madurai pitted him against Gaspar Fernandes and other Jesuits, and provoked strong criticisms outside the Society. Nobili, furthermore, fitted a particular type of missionary, which, as Brockey points out, posed a persistent problem to the Order's strategies. Men such as António de Andrade, Antonio Rubino, Alberto Laerzio, and Nobili himself, were characterized by their strong charisma, their almost visionary nature and a spirit which pushed them to try to emulate the apostles in everything they did. At the highest levels of missions and colleges, these men often aroused controversy, and, more importantly, contrasted with the necessary pragmatism that Palmeiro believed should guide all those engaged in government. In his correspondence with Rome, he made this problem of leadership which affected the Jesuits' provinces in Asia very clear, demanding time and again that government responsibilities should be given to mature subjects rather than to figures who had been crowned with a halo of apostolic heroism.

Of all the issues which André Palmeiro faced in his role as Visitor, Brockey places special emphasis, naturally, on the debates about the policies of accommodation that marked Jesuit apostolic practice in Madurai, China and Japan. In this sense, his analysis of Nobili and the controversy to which his methods gave rise allows him to bring to the fore Palmeiro's own "conversion". In contrast to his initial position, Palmeiro recognized that many of Nobili's initiatives were harmless; but, in turn, he cast a skeptical eye over the efficacy of such policies, given the small number of conversions they achieved, and he warned that certain practices posed a danger to preserving Jesuit identity. His experience in Madurai was undoubtedly decisive in his later perception of the missionary methods developed in China. There, the issue took on different overtones, and it is therefore unsurprising that Brockey dedicates a whole chapter to analyzing Palmeiro's position after his journey around China from Canton to Peking in 1628-1629, a journey which allowed him to see first hand the reality of the missionary endeavor begun by Matteo Ricci in the 1580s and the policies of accommodation which Ricci had developed at that time. Here, Brockey begins by underlining the specificity which the so-called *metodo soave* took on in this context, where the Jesuits, all but stripped of religious elements, presented themselves as intellectual equals of the Chinese *literati*. He also recalls some of the historiographical commonplaces on the subject, the result of an often rather rushed analysis: from the emphasis given to Ricci's supposed "modernity", presenting him as a tolerant, knowledgeable man, open to dialogue, and secularizing him to the detriment of his missionary work, to the caricature of his detractors and the insistence on a "national"

viewpoint which put the Jesuits from Italy in the “accommodation” camp and those from the Iberian Peninsula in another one (Niccolò Longobardo, João Rodrigues and Álvaro Semedo are just three examples who show that this was not the case). Above all, Brockey situates the problem within the context of 1629 and in terms of the debate that was brewing at that time at the heart of the Order. After more than thirty years, the shortage of converts was forcing them to rethink their strategies: in Palmeiro’s view, they needed to overcome obstacles like xenophobia, institutional uncertainty and missionary isolation; to reconsider whom the Jesuits should be targeting their energies toward; to analyze to what extent they should adopt the habits of the learned Chinese in order to assure their protection and how far they should change their Christian message and behavior to fit Chinese cultural and devotional norms. In essence, as Brockey makes clear, the issues arising from policies of accommodation at the mission in China, as well as the answers which Palmeiro attempted to formulate, were about Jesuit identity. At its heart, this question was whether the missionaries should or should not be identified as the Jesuits they were, that is, as Europeans linked to a religious order which sought to convert the Chinese to Christianity.

Beyond the larger issues, such as what methods should be used for evangelization, this work consistently shows us a Visitor who was concerned with apparently less important concerns, from administrative details (like the search for an alternative route to Ethiopia) to economic matters (like the Society’s involvement in new commercial routes with Southeast Asia, which would entail the loss of trade with Japan). Over the course of the broad overview which Brockey provides, it is regrettable that we do not hear more about other religious actors who also had a significant presence in Asia. Bringing such figures into consideration would provide a more nuanced view of the predominant position that is often attributed to the Jesuits. In any case, Brockey’s study does not only bring us closer, through the figure of André Palmeiro, to Jesuit spaces in the Indian Ocean and to the problems and changes which the Order faced there during the first third of the seventeenth century. It also constitutes, without any doubt, a major contribution to the understanding of how an international religious congregation such as the Society of Jesus found in the Visitor an instrument for governing those communities that were most distant from the Roman center.