

Liam Matthew Brockey

The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. x + 515. Hb, \$ 39.95.

Rather than the biography of a man, Liam Matthew Brockey's substantial volume (442 pages of narrative text) is a study of "how the Society [of Jesus] functioned outside of Europe" (19) in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The figure of the visitor [*visitor*] was particularly important to every Jesuit mission, and anybody familiar with Jesuit history is no doubt acquainted with the towering figure of the Italian Alessandro Valignano, visitor general for all Asian missions between 1573 and 1606. Valignano is credited with setting the Jesuit missions on a new path through his organizational skills and his understanding of local conditions and customs, to which the Jesuits accommodated to an unprecedented degree during his tenure, especially in East Asia.

Brockey sheds light on the career of another visitor, the Portuguese André Palmeiro (1569–1635), who held the position a decade after Valignano, first in India, then in East Asia, from 1617 until his death in 1635. In spite of being "a major figure in the early seventeenth century's Jesuit enterprises" and thus deserving of "a larger place in the Society's history, and more generally, that of Christianity in Asia" (5), Palmeiro has remained unknown to all but a small circle of specialists. Through a close reading of Palmeiro's reports and letters to his superiors in Europe, Brockey opens up vistas onto the far-flung Jesuit missions of maritime Asia, from Mozambique to Goa, from Malabar to Tonkin and Cochinchina, from Macao to Beijing, and, ultimately, to Japan.

The book is divided in two parts: "Inside the Empire" (here, "empire" stands for Portugal and its Estado da Índia) and "At Empire's Edge." The five chapters of "Inside the Empire" offer the context needed to understand the role of a visitor within the Jesuit order and Portuguese history as well as the activities of Palmeiro as visitor from 1617 to 1625. During this period, he interacted with governmental and ecclesiastical structures from Lisbon to South Asia. Once in India, Palmeiro first conducted an extensive visitation of the troubled and almost bankrupt province of Malabar (headquartered in the southwestern port of Cochin, and comprising the Coromandel Coast, the island of Ceylon, and outposts as far as Bengal, Burma, Malacca, and the Moluccas). In Cochin, he encountered "a clutch of oversized egos" (103) among the Jesuits, divided into Portuguese and Italian factions; he tried to bring order by enforcing the Society's universal rules, and by asking the general to reprimand those resistant to disciplinary and institutional procedures. He also visited the inland Madurai mission, an experiment in accommodation to Brahmanism led by Roberto de Nobili and outside the territories subject to the Estado da Índia—

and thus a source of great tensions within the Society and with the Portuguese ecclesiastical establishment in India (108–12). In spite of his initial doubts, Palmeiro became convinced that Nobili's methods were acceptable, and defended him before the hostile bishop of Cochin, the archbishop of Goa, and the Goan Inquisition. The visitation of the province of Goa, home to the viceroy and the archbishop primate of the East Indies, as well as several well-endowed Jesuit foundations, was quite a different affair. The province comprised several colleges and residences along the northwestern coast of India, a detachment at the Mughal imperial court, and a smattering of small outposts in the Indian Ocean all the way to Mozambique, including an important mission at the imperial court of Ethiopia. Especially in the city of Goa, powerful personalities, within and without the Society, posed a challenge to the visitor's authority. Palmeiro made certain enemies, cultivated the favor of the viceroys, and ultimately won some praise for his equitable measures towards his subordinates and his attempts to broker peace with the other orders on issues ranging from real estate expansion to religious precedence. He also gathered information on the African missions from deputies he had dispatched there, so that he could take appropriate measures to assist the Jesuit bishop secretly sent as Latin patriarch of Ethiopia.

The second part, "At Empire's Edge" (also five chapters), focuses on Palmeiro's residence in East Asia between 1626 and his death in 1635: his primary work in Macao, as well as his inspection tour to Beijing. East Asia was at the "edges of empire," in the sense that there (except for Macao) the patterns of Jesuit community life were no longer those of Europe and of Portuguese colonies. China, Japan, Tonkin, and Cochinchina were all independent states, not subject to Portuguese power, and their Jesuit communities were often very small. Here, missionaries had to adapt to local circumstances, no longer bound to colonial political and ecclesiastical authorities as they were in India. Only obedience to the Society, represented by the visitor, kept them connected to the universal church and the *padroado* system.

Palmeiro initially spent much of his energy dealing with the recent crisis of the Japanese mission, persecuted by the Tokugawa shogunate, and with the large influx of Jesuits who had fled Japan for Macao. He tried to send some men back *incognito*, as well as money and letters to those who had remained as underground missionaries. For a while, it seemed that the situation was improving. In 1628–29, he thus felt able to travel from Macao to Beijing, then stopping to visit the lower Yangzi region, where most Christians were concentrated. Palmeiro wanted to understand the limited progress in conversions in the Ming empire, and to mediate between the China vice-province and the Japan province over the "accommodation" strategy towards Confucian termi-

nology and rituals, a source of heated debate and conflict at the time and later. Brockey devotes many pages to Palmeiro's itinerary across China in the company of a small Portuguese embassy, discussing both issues of governance and the visitor's impressions of the land and its customs. He then allots a chapter, "Challenging Accommodation," to analyzing a series of reports Palmeiro sent to the superior general after his return to Macao. Palmeiro issued a set of regulations for the Chinese vice-province, accepting the established use of native dress and ritualized conduct towards Chinese elites, but also intimated that this should not compromise the vows of poverty and chastity. He recommended restraint in the use of "curious" conversations on sciences and the arts, the exchange of gifts, and participation in banquets. He challenged certain 'accommodationist' ideas, in particular what he saw as a false equivalence between the moral principles and religious practices of Christianity, and those of Chinese traditions. He weighed in on the terminological disputes over the name of God in Chinese, authorizing only the term "Lord of Heaven" [*Tianzhu*]. Brockey sees these interventions on matters of practice as an implicit criticism of several aspects of accommodation, although tempered by the visitor's pragmatism and prudence.

His visitation concluded, Palmeiro shifted his attention to economic matters, and a broader strategic vision for East Asia. To support the mission (increasingly under financial strain as a result of the Japanese persecution and Dutch competitors to the Portuguese), an independent and reliable source of income was necessary. The visitor approved the purchase of local vessels in the Society's name, and employed them in trading porcelain, silks, and other goods between China and Southeast Asia, creating a true Jesuit commercial enterprise, a tradition that continued into the eighteenth century. This enterprise, in addition to supporting the Chinese and Japanese provinces, encouraged the expansion of missions in Southeast Asia, especially Tonkin and Cochinchina. Palmeiro became "a minor potentate [...] as head of his own trading company and leader of a diplomatic corps [...] received at [...] courts across Southeast Asia" (336).

The relative success in Southeast Asia was counterbalanced by a tragic denouement in Japan: scores of priests and Christians died at the hands of Tokugawa officials, while the abjuration of the Jesuit superior Cristóvão Ferreira dealt a tremendous blow to the Society's reputation. This is a well-known story. Palmeiro would not live to see the worst, but did prepare his successor, the veteran of the China mission Manuel Dias the Elder, feeling that his health was declining. After Palmeiro's death, Dias worked to sustain the Chinese enterprise, rather than to reinvest in the lost cause of Japan.

The volume singles out two institutional contexts: the internal organization of the Society of Jesus and the political, economic, and ecclesiastical functions of the Jesuits within the Portuguese empire in maritime Asia (during the period of the Habsburg unification of Spain and Portugal between 1580 and 1640). In spite of this institutional emphasis, however, the narrative never strays too far from Palmeiro, whom we come to know, page after page, as a mature, affable, and yet firm superior, with the patience to listen to resolve complex clashes of personalities, the intelligence to understand local conditions before acting, the prudence to rein in the indiscreet zeal of some of his subordinates in India, and the courage to overcome the timidity of his colleagues in China.

The narrative thus alternates between the impact of the Jesuit order, as an institution, in Portugal, the Estado da Índia, and Asia (including colorful reconstructions of public processions, communal devotions, penances, scandals, ecclesiastical skirmishes, political alliances, and economic enterprises), and the deeds and personality of Palmeiro himself. This pattern reflects Brockey's double aim of offering a history of the important institutional role of a visitor within the Society and of the Portuguese assistancy, and an account of the formation, spirituality, and style of governance Palmeiro absorbed as an individual over the years. In other words, his development as a "manager of men."

Palmeiro studied at the Jesuit *Colegio de Santo Antão* in Lisbon, entered the Society at age fifteen in Coimbra, where he was a professor for many years, and was finally named rector of the college of Braga. In 1617, at age forty-nine, Superior General Muzio Vitelleschi selected Palmeiro as visitor for the East Indies, but there is unfortunately no documentation as to his reasons. Brockey calls it "a mystery" (80), and conjectures that the new Portuguese assistant in Rome, Nuno Mascarenhas (Palmeiro's friend and former rector in Coimbra), suggested his name for the position. Since, "[i]ronically, the position of visitor in the overseas provinces, although more important within the Jesuit hierarchy, was less prestigious than the rank of provincial in Europe" (80–81), Palmeiro might have seemed a good enough candidate as visitor in the Indies, but not for other responsibilities in Portugal. He was a respected academic in Coimbra and punctilious in his observance of the Society's rules, but had only a short administrative experience as rector at Braga. To become a provincial would have required many more years of rectorship, an unlikely path for Palmeiro, given his age and academic background. His theological expertise, on the other hand, qualified him to weigh in on the missionaries' experiments in India and East Asia. One wonders if, as missionary superiors often lamented, and as Palmeiro himself remarked in 1623, the best men were kept in Europe and only "ordinary men" were sent overseas: regarded as a loss to their original provinces, and growing cold from laxity and pastoral difficulties (161). Brockey's lionizing of

Palmeiro, however, seems to validate the general's choice of this particular man as anything but "ordinary." An alleged glowing endorsement from his Coimbra colleague, the famed theologian Francisco Suárez, seems to confirm Palmeiro's reputation: "He is certainly a great man; he is second to no one in Portugal" [*magnus sanè vir, nemini in Lusitania secundus*]. (We find this sentence in a funerary eulogy written by Giovanni Battista Bonelli in Macau in 1635, cf. Brockey, p. 81; as well as in a *menologium* of the Portuguese Jesuits by Antonio Franco, *Annus gloriosus Societatis Jesu in Lusitania* [Vienna, 1720], 188.)

This book is indeed a picture of the Society outside of Europe as Brockey intended, but it is equally the reconstruction of a "baroque persona." (This expression has been most famously used as the English title of a collection edited by Rosario Villari, *Baroque Personae* [University of Chicago Press, 1995], original Italian edition, *L'uomo barocco* [Bari: Laterza, 1991]; the essay on the "missionary" was penned by Adriano Prosperi). Brockey clearly loves his subject, and translates several passages extolling Palmeiro's religious virtues, missionary zeal, dietary austerities, corporal penances, disregard for pomp, prudence, and strict observance of the Society's rules. At times, the reliance on contemporary sources written to edify and eulogize produces a truly "baroque effect," one which Brockey embraces in his translations of quasi-hagiographic texts, but that also extends to his own writing. Brockey's prose is beautiful, and clashes of personality, theological tiffs, and political intrigues are explained and contextualized in a language that is precise, rich, and nuanced. At times, however, more concision, and restraint in using arcane or slightly condescending expressions ("plebeian" for "popular" or "commoner"; "mandarin" for "Chinese official"), and over-imaginative metaphors, would have lightened the page. Brockey would have benefitted from following his own citation of the Jesuit rhetorician Cipriano Suárez: "Just as the moderate and timely use of metaphors makes speech clear, so a repeated use both confuses and induces boredom" (307).

Yet, this could well be seen as a stylistic experiment: by re-creating a linguistic rhythm that evokes the devout, solemn, and flowery prose of seventeenth-century texts, the narrative transports us back in time not only through the reconstruction of facts and thoughts, but also through their very language, albeit in translation. Gory descriptions of the torments of the Japanese martyrs (especially 403–408), or the conclusion titled "A Baroque Death," based on Bonelli's detailed account of Palmeiro's agony, give us a sense of what contemporaries prized in memorializing members of religious orders: their corporal suffering, their spiritual austerity, and their exemplary final hours. In the conclusion, Brockey makes an excursus on the representations of a good death in contemporary paintings, and how Bonelli's account was "constructed along similar lines" (419). Several pages dwell on Palmeiro's final hours, and a coda

shows how his dying exhortations to his successor prophetically assigned primacy to the China mission and the new avenues in Southeast Asia over the doomed Japan mission. The effect that Brockey creates is, indeed, highly baroque: the book ends in a tragic, yet triumphal tone, with the death of Palmeiro in 1635 as a sort of prologue or premonition of the “death of the Society of Jesus” in the Portuguese domains in 1759. This is all tinged by a nostalgia for the heroic and expansive phase represented by Palmeiro. Even if Brockey assures us that “there is no need to celebrate the march of the faith among the non-Christian lands beyond Europe” (20), the book, and especially the conclusion, left me with an impression of regret and longing for the great “old Society” and its “global” ambitions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Historiographically, Brockey is critical of the common fallacy of seeking in Jesuit history “communion with imagined historical precedents for the genius of the modern age,” relying on clichés about the Jesuits, rather than seeing them as individuals (18–19), as well as applying the trendy paradigm of globalization to their undertakings. He asks in conclusion whether the global Jesuit activities and their consciousness were indicative of “a decisive turn toward a modern understanding of the world,” and he responds in the negative (429). “It was not the world that became more interconnected because of the Jesuits; rather, it was the Society that, owing to the limitations of communication in early modernity, became more thinly stretched as it spread across the world [...]. So if the Jesuits’ world – that is, their early modern network and their mission churches – offers a glimpse of the trailhead of globalization, it was one that led to a series of dead ends.” He goes on to examine what he calls “dinosaur” missions (Ethiopia, inland South Asia, and so on), doomed to extinction after flourishing beginnings, and transformed into “fossils” that offered valuable lessons for a changing geopolitical climate. Nonetheless, he also recognizes that the smaller scale of later missions permitted “an intensity of pastoral activity that perhaps ensured their survival” (437). I would add that, if 1759, or 1773, brought to an end the Jesuit missions in maritime Asia, this was not the death toll for the native communities of Christians they established. In fact, their survival into the present, in spite of so many changes and the momentous “modernization” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is a testimony to the cultural persistence of *longue durée* processes, and vindicates an anthropological view of religion and culture as ever-changing, and yet anchored in the past. Brockey’s book is a splendid statement of the difference with the past, and yet also of what connects us to it.

Eugenio Menegon

Boston University

emenegon@bu.edu

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00202007-07