

# Religious Travellers, Trading Organizations And The Circulation Of Useful Knowledge In Asia, Europe And North-Africa, C. 600 - 1800

Karel Davids

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## Introduction

In a diary of his travels in China in 839 en route to the court of the T'ang emperor, the Japanese Buddhist monk Ennin noted that he 'went to the estate of the Ting-chüeh-ssu [monastery] and saw the water-[powered] mill'.<sup>1</sup> Four centuries later, the Franciscan brother William of Rubruck in his narrative of his journey to the court of the Great Khan in Mongolia made by order of King Louis IX of France observed that 'the ordinary money of Cathay is a piece of paper made out of cotton, a handbreadth in width and length, and on [which] they stamp lines like Mangu's seal'.<sup>2</sup> At Haridwar in Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s, the Indian government set up a (temporary) family-planning exhibition and a clinic to spread knowledge on family-planning techniques to the thousands of pilgrims who flocked to the city each year. The rationale for this choice, a historian of Hindu pilgrimage centres pointed out, was that 'the large number of pilgrims who assemble at sacred places with no cost to the government (could) provide an inexpensive method for the dissemination of new ideas even to the remoter corners of the country'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's diary. The record of a pilgrimage to China in search of the law* (New York 1955), 267

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and letters of the Franciscan missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries* (London/New York), 171

<sup>3</sup> Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, *Hindu places of pilgrimage in India* (Berkeley 1973) 215.

What these examples from various times and places have in common, is that they illustrate the role of religious travelling in the circulation of 'useful' knowledge. The travellers who figure in these stories were men in holy orders or ordinary people who made a journey with a religious purpose. Although transmission of useful knowledge was not the prime object of their trip, it was nevertheless one of the effects that their travelling produced. And even if the knowledge in question could also have been communicated by different groups of people in other sorts of ways (for example by merchants, teachers or craftsmen through fairs, schools or training schemes), that does not alter the fact that religious men or people who travelled for religious reasons evidently acted as carriers of useful secular information, too. Studies of religious travelling may therefore be helpful in the reconstruction in the spatial circulation of useful knowledge.

For the period up to the nineteenth century, it is in my view even essential to take this phenomenon into account when investigating how and when useful knowledge spread from one part of the world to another. We should bear in mind that in this period useful knowledge was after all still to a large extent transmitted through the mobility of people. Moreover, many religious travellers were, like merchants, long-distance travellers. They did not merely remain in a local or regional orbit. In the course of their journeys, pilgrims, monks or missionaries frequently passed through many different countries and had the opportunity to get acquainted with a wide variety of cultures, economies, societies and natural environments. And the men in holy orders who set on distant journeys often belonged to the literate elite of their day. They were thus able, if they wished, to transmit their observations and experiences in writing, which could give these a wider circulation than if they were only communicated orally. But religious travelling was not restricted to elites. It involved different layers of the social hierarchy. Although it would go too far to regard pilgrims as a

cross-section of society, it is nevertheless true that they came from a variety of backgrounds. Common people could undertake a long-distance pilgrimage, too. For Muslims, this was perhaps even more valid than for Jews, Buddhists, Christians or people from other religious persuasions. Making a pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the duties of every Muslim believer. Before the rise of mass tourism<sup>4</sup>, religious travelling thus was for ordinary people probably the most frequent type of long-distance travelling.

This paper addresses the role of religious travellers in the circulation of useful knowledge in Eurasia and North Africa before 1800. Religious travellers are here regarded as one of the connecting links between different parts of Europe and Asia. Pilgrims, monks, missionaries, or clerics on a diplomatic mission could serve as carriers of useful knowledge between areas like Japan and China, China and India, India and Indonesia, Portugal and India, Persia and Yemen, China and Italy or Indonesia and the Low Countries. This statement should not be taken as a claim that religious travelling was the single most important factor in the circulation of knowledge in Eurasia (nor as an assertion that it was only relevant in these parts of the globe), but rather as a suggestion that this is a line of approach worth exploring, for the reasons set out above. What I intend to do in this paper, linking up with the pioneering work by Donald Lach and Edwin van Kley on Asia's impact on Europe<sup>5</sup>, is to put this approach into practice by analyzing how the circulation of knowledge through religious travellers actually functioned and to what extent and in what ways it changed when in the sixteenth century another medium emerged for the transmission of useful

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<sup>4</sup> On the relation between pilgrimage and tourism, see e.g. William H. Swatos and Luigi Tomasi (eds.), *From medieval pilgrimage to religious tourism: the social and cultural economic of piety* (Westport 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe* (Chicago/London 1965 - ), many volumes.

knowledge between Asia and Europe and on routes in Asia itself, namely the European trading organizations. In this context, the question will also be addressed, whether religious travelling and trading corporations functioned as alternative conduits for the circulation of useful knowledge or were, in reality, complementary systems. The focus will be on the long-distance travellers, both within Asia and between Asia, Europe and North Africa, between about 600 AD and the end of the eighteenth century. The first section of this paper will give a general outline of the patterns of religious travelling in this period and the changes therein. Section two discusses the relationships between religious travellers and European trading organizations. The third, and final, section, concentrates on the role of religious travellers in the circulation of useful knowledge.

### **Patterns of religious travelling**

The ways of religious travellers are varied. Much religious travelling takes place along beaten tracks. Pilgrims often follow standard itineraries to their destination, and so do missionaries once the pioneering phase in a new area of operation has passed. Clerics on a diplomatic mission use to keep to the customary routes as well. However, standard patterns of travelling can change over the years, as new centres of pilgrimage emerge, existing centres attract more visitors, new modes of travel appear or new areas of missionary activity are opened. And there are always religious travellers, such as the advanced guard of missionary orders, who do not follow the conventional tracks but plot a route of their own.

Although quantitative data on this subject before the nineteenth century are scarce, a few outlines of the changes in patterns of religious travelling can nevertheless be sketched. These changes related to the nodal points of travelling, to the system of routes as well as to the size

and composition of the groups of the travellers concerned. The pattern of religious travelling in Eurasia after c. 600 AD was, first of all, significantly affected by the spread of Islam. Thanks to the spread of Islam, an existing regional centre of pilgrimage in western Arabia, Mecca, grew into an attraction pole of global importance, and another centre that already enjoyed the status of a Holy City for Jews and Christians, namely Jerusalem, became a focal point for adherents of all the Abrahamic religions. New centres of pilgrimage with a special significance for particular groups of Muslims arose in Najaf, Karbala and other places. For Shiites, for example, a pilgrimage 'to Karbala and to other tombs of imams tended to be seen as an adequate substitute for that to Mecca itself, and a man was called a *hajji* who had been on such a pilgrimage, quite as freely as if he had been to the Ka'bah', Marshall Hodgson has written.<sup>6</sup> Along with the emergence of these centres of pilgrimage went the growth of flows of travellers on land routes in Asia, South-East Europe and North Africa and on sea routes in the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean.

The actual size of these flows in the course of time is not exactly known, but their importance can be glimpsed through a few scraps of evidence and some general observations in the literature on pilgrimage. A source from the late thirteenth century put the number of pilgrims arriving in Mecca by land and sea from the direction of Egypt at 40,000, with a similar number coming by caravan from the direction of Syria and Mesopotamia. For the sixteenth century, the yearly number of pilgrims coming from Cairo and Damascus has been estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 and 20,000 to 30,000, respectively. A modern estimate for the eighteenth century gives the number of pilgrims travelling by land from

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<sup>6</sup> Marshall Hodgson, *The venture of Islam*. vol. III. *The gunpowder empire and modern times* (Chicago/London 1974) 38.

Damascus to Mecca at somewhere between 20,000 and 60,000.<sup>7</sup> Michael Pearson has calculated the flow of people making the *hajj* by sea or land from India in the period between c.1500 and 1800 at some 15,000 per year.<sup>8</sup> How many Shiites made the pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala, or travelled by sea from Mesopotamia and Persia to Jiddah, the port of Mecca, before 1800 is not known. Suraiya Faruqi surmised that the number of Muslims travelling from Persia to Najaf and Karbala was much larger than those completing the journey to Mecca.<sup>9</sup> However, the number of those who wished to make the *hajj* was certainly not negligible. In the 1650s 5,000 to 10,000 pilgrims travelled by sea from Basra to Jiddah.<sup>10</sup>

As far as long-distance religious travelling by Buddhists and Hindus in the period before 1800 is concerned, quantitative data are not yet available at all. The few extant travel accounts nevertheless show beyond doubt that such travelling by Buddhists *did* occur. The journey made by the Buddhist monk Ennin from Japan to China was as a long-distance trip by no means an exceptional event. Several Buddhist monks from India made a pilgrimage to Wu-t'ai Shan (the mountain range with the Five Terraces) in Shanxi, China, in the late seventh century.<sup>11</sup> This very site was visited by Ennin in the 830s as well.<sup>12</sup> Chinese monk-pilgrims since about 200 AD travelled by land to India, 'to seek instruction in Buddhist teachings, find scriptures, and visit famous sites sanctified by the life of the Buddha'. The most illustrious of these, Hsüan-tsang, spent sixteen years on his trip and stay in India (629-645) and left an extensive account

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<sup>7</sup> M.N.Pearson, *Pious passengers. The Hajj in earlier times* (London 1994) 50-53.

<sup>8</sup> Pearson, *Pious passengers*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Suraiya Faruqi, *Herrscher über Mekka. Die Geschichte der Pilgerfahrt* (Munich 1990) 184.

<sup>10</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas. The Indian Ocean world of the seventeenth century* (Armonk/London 2002) 44, 78 note 130; the figure is probably per year (although Barendse does not explicitly say so)

<sup>11</sup> Richard Schneider, 'Un moine Indien au Wou-t'ai chan. Relation d'un pèlerinage', *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie*, 3 (1987) 27-39, esp. p.31.

<sup>12</sup> Reischauer, *Ennin's diary*, 211-215.

of his journey.<sup>13</sup> Given the subsequent shift in the centre of gravity of Buddhism from India and China to Nepal, Tibet, Japan and Southeast Asia, the pilgrim traffic between Japan, China and India probably became less frequent from about the thirteenth century onwards, but it may have intensified in other areas. And due to Imperial patronage of 'Lamaist' Buddhism since the sixteenth century, China *did* attract pilgrims from Mongolia and Tibet.<sup>14</sup> In South Asia, cities like Gaya, Benares or Allahabad already enjoyed a status as 'all-India places of pilgrimage' before 1200, as distinct from the numerous pilgrim shrines of regional or local importance that could be found all over the country. However, the rise of these sites as pre-eminent centres of long-distance Hindu pilgrimage apparently did not begin until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A crucial factor in this development is said to have been the consolidation of Mughal power and the ensuing expansion of communications.<sup>15</sup>

The flow of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land and other places in the Middle East (such as Mount Sinaï and various sites in northern Mesopotamia) which started in the second century AD<sup>16</sup>, continued after the Muslim conquest of Palestine and Syria in the mid-seventh century. McCormick has found that the numbers of pilgrims travelling from Italy, the Carolingian Empire, England, Ireland and Spain to the east in the later eighth and ninth century increased; the majority of them appear to have been ecclesiastics. The most remarkable change in the pattern of travelling occurred in the routes: 'Sometime between c.753/76 and

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel Beal (ed.), *Buddhist records of the Western World*, 2 vols.. (London 1906) ix-xx, Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, 'Introduction' in : idem (eds.), *Pilgrims and sacred sites in China* (Berkeley 1992) 1-38, esp. 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, 'Introduction', 20.

<sup>15</sup> C.A.Bayly, 'From ritual to ceremony. Death ritual and society in Hindu north India since 1600', in: J.Whaaley (ed.), *Mirrors of mortality* (London 1981), 154-186, esp. pp.161-163.

<sup>16</sup> E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460* (Oxford 1982) esp.3-4 and chapters 3 and 4.

800/25. Western travellers aiming at points beyond Constantinople abandoned the ancient Byzantine route and *began to travel east through the Islamic world* (italics by McCormick). Pilgrims from the west now preferred the route through Egypt to the route through the Byzantine empire.<sup>17</sup> The Crusades did not spell a major break in Holy Land pilgrimage from Western Europe either. After Jerusalem and the other holy places from the late twelfth century onwards reverted under Muslim rule, Christian pilgrims continued to flock to the east. Some of the Christian holy sites within the city of Jerusalem were actually wholly or partly left in possession of various groups of Christian clergy (Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, Franciscan monks).<sup>18</sup> The flow of Christian pilgrims travelling to holy sites in Palestine did not begin to slacken until the sixteenth century. An increasing number of Christians who visited the Holy Land since then did so merely as 'one stage in a larger itinerary across the Levant', as F.E.Peters put it. These visitors were merchants rather than pilgrims.<sup>19</sup> Long-distance pilgrimage in Europe itself, especially to Rome and Santiago de Compostella, meanwhile continued unabated.

While pilgrim traffic from Europe to the Holy Land decreased, however, a new group of regular Christian travellers from the west emerged in Asia, namely Catholic missionaries. Although Christianity reached India at an early date and missionaries from Europe visited India several times between about 1290 and 1350<sup>20</sup>, Catholic missionaries did not become a common appearance in Asia until the Portuguese

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<sup>17</sup> Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European economy. Communications and commerce, A.D. 300-900* (Cambridge 2001) 151-173, esp.172-173

<sup>18</sup> F.E..Peters, *Jerusalem. The Holy City in the eyes of chroniclers, visitors, pilgrims, and prophets from the days of Abraham to the beginnings of modern times* (Princeton 1985) 369, 423, Diana Webb, *Medieval European pilgrimage c.700-c.1500* (Basingstoke 2002) 28.

<sup>19</sup> Peters, *Jerusalem*, 510, F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca. The typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York) 44.



established themselves on the Indian coast about 1500 and the Spanish reached the Philippines from Mexico a few decades later. The majority of these newly-arrived missionaries were members of the 'regular clergy', i.e. they belonged to one of the religious orders founded in the Middle Ages with the aim of spreading the Faith by teaching and preaching, such as the Franciscans, the Dominicans or the Augustinians or to one of the new orders that emerged in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century as part of the Catholic Reformation, notably the Society of Jesus, the Capuchins, the Discalced Carmelites and the Lazarists. One of the pioneers of this missionary effort, the Jesuit Francis Xavier, came to enjoy such a reputation of holiness (confirmed by his canonization in 1622) that his tomb in Goa soon became the site of a new centre of pilgrimage for Catholics from all over Asia.<sup>21</sup>

The activities of Catholic missionaries outside Europe were initially set up under the patronage of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, which meant that the protection and financial support of the churches overseas had been entrusted by the Pope to the Kings of Portugal and Spain. Clerics were sent to Asia (or the Americas) either under the *Padroado* of the King of Portugal or under the *Patronato* of the King of Spain.<sup>22</sup> The ecclesiastical hierarchy was ordered along similar lines. Newly formed dioceses in Asia were either made subordinate to the metropolitan see in Goa (erected in 1558) or to the archbishopric in Manila (established in 1595). The territorial organization of religious orders was fashioned to this division of authority between the Iberian powers as well. The Jesuit provinces of Goa (North India), Malabar (South India), China and Japan (Southeast Asia), for example, were under the jurisdiction of the

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<sup>20</sup> Dauril Alden, *The making of an enterprise. The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its empire, and beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford 1996), 43.

<sup>21</sup> A.N. Khanna, *Pilgrim shrines of India* (2003), 211-213.

<sup>22</sup> About this organization, see Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one (Chicago/London 1993) , part I chapter II, and Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, chapter 10.

Portuguese Assistancy, the province of the Philippines under that of Spain. In the seventeenth century, the papacy asserted its control over missionary activities outside Europe by erecting a permanent central agency to promote and direct efforts to propagate the faith, the Congregation *Propaganda Fide*, in 1622. Through this agency, the papacy did not only try to oversee activities within the orbit of the *Padroado* and *Patronato*, but also established mission posts or (titulary) bishoprics in areas which remained outside the political reach of the Iberian powers, or had slipped from their grasp, such as Malabar, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. In doing so, the Congregation relied more on 'relatively young mission orders with no long-standing privileges or commitments' like the Discalced Carmelites or the Capuchins than on the well-established orders of the Jesuits, Dominicans or Augustinians.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the papacy entered into a kind of alliance with the King of France in the form of its co-sponsorship of *La Société des missions étrangères*, founded in Paris in 1664. The *Missions étrangères* was not a religious order, but a society of secular priests and lay brothers under the jurisdiction of the French ecclesiastical hierarchy, which aimed to spread the Faith overseas by sending out missionaries and training indigenous clergy.<sup>24</sup>

How many Catholic missionaries have been active in Asia before 1800? Estimates of the numbers of missionaries from the main religious orders working in the Portuguese *Padroado* in Asia between about 1550 and 1750 are given in Table 1. Table 2 presents an overview of the number of Jesuits known to have been sent from Portugal to Asia between 1600 and the middle of the eighteenth century. In the Spanish *Patronato*, Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits crossed in increasing numbers from the Americas to the other side of the Pacific from about

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<sup>23</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 223-224, 227

<sup>24</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 229-232.

1580 onwards, Around 1600, the number of regular priests and lay brothers working in the Philippines had reached almost 400, including fifteen Jesuits. The ranks of the Society of Jesus swelled with the arrival of another 272 missionaries from across the Pacific in the first half of the seventeenth century. In the peak year 1643, the Philippine province numbered 133 Jesuits.<sup>25</sup> As for the *Missions étrangères*, it is known that between 1660 and 1700 one hundred missionaries were sent to Asia,<sup>26</sup>

Table 1. Number of missionaries in the main religious orders active in the Portuguese *Padroado* in Asia, c.1550-1750

<u>Year</u>	<u>Jesuits</u>	<u>Friars</u>			
		<u>Total</u>	<u>Franciscans</u>	<u>Dominicans</u>	<u>Augustinians</u>
c. 1550	45			13	
1560	120				
1572	205				12
c. 1590	385		200		
1600	460	c. 750			99
c.1610	550			310	155
c.1620	535		c.400		
1630		c. 1100	c.400		c.280
c.1670	c.370				
1700	c.350		280	Lower than 310	143
c.1730	c.310				
c.1750	c.310				

**Source:** Alden, *The making of an enterprise*, 46, Appendix D, Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 136-144

<sup>25</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 201-202, 206

<sup>26</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 231

Table 2 Number of Jesuits sent from Portugal to the provinces in Asia, c.1600-1760

Period	Number sent to Asia
1600-19	274
1620-39	205
1640-59	190
1660-79	131
1680-99	247
1700-19	231
1720-39	251
1740-59	240
Total	1769

**Source:** Alden, *The making of an enterprise*, 204, 583

The geographical origins of this particular category of religious travellers were more variegated than the formal relationship with the crowns of Portugal, Spain or France might suggest. The recruitment area of the religious orders that sent missionaries to Asia encompassed a large part of Catholic Europe. The Society of Jesus again provides the most extensive data. A view at the origins of the leading lights of the Jesuit mission in Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth century gives already an inkling of the Society's multinational background: Francis Xavier came from the Basque country, Alessandro Valignano from the Kingdom of Naples, Matteo Ricci from the Papal States, Adam Schall von Bell from Cologne, Ferdinand Verbiest from western Flanders. For the Portuguese Assistancy, Dauril Alden calculated the figures presented in table 3. In the Spanish *patronato*, the king in the late seventeenth century

allowed the Jesuits to recruit as many as a third of their members from outside Spain.<sup>27</sup>

Table 3 Share of non-Portuguese among Jesuits sent from Portugal to provinces in Asia, 1540-1750

Period	% non-Portuguese	Of whom:			
		Spanish	Italian	German	Other*
1541-1580	45.1	28.3	12.4	0.0	4.4
1581-1640	36.2	4.4	26.8	0.9	4.1
1641-1706	24.0	0.0	15.2	3.8	4.5
1707-1750	22.7	0.4	12.2	8.5	0.7

**Source:** Alden, *The making of an enterprise*, 268

\* includes Austrians, Poles, Flemings, Swiss, Irishmen and Englishmen

However, the share of nonwhites in the religious orders remained quite small. The reach of their activities was much more global than its membership. Asians were barred from entry as priests in the Society of Jesus in the Portuguese Assistancy in 1579. The Philippine province did not permit them to join the priesthood either. Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians adopted a rule to that effect, too. These barriers were in practice seldom lifted. In 1651, only one of the 41 Jesuit priests in the province of Japan was of Japanese birth. Among the 94 priests working in China in 1739, no more than eighteen were Chinese (including eleven Jesuits). The Franciscans in India had admitted ‘only six or seven Indians’ before the 1660s.<sup>28</sup> To some extent, this exclusion policy was typical of religious orders in Iberian territories rather than for the Catholic Church at large. By the end of seventeenth century, the secular clergy in Goa was increasingly recruited from Asians. The *Propaganda Fide* and the *Société*

<sup>27</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 207.

<sup>28</sup> Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, 263-266,

*des missions étrangères* aimed to stimulate the growth of an indigenous clergy from the very start. In Vietnam, which remained outside the reach of the Iberian powers, they actually managed to train a large number of native priests.<sup>29</sup>

The make-up of a group of Catholic missionaries in a given country in Asia at any particular time thus could be extremely varied, even if all of them were loyal to Rome and most of them hailed from Europe. China in 1700 represented perhaps the most extreme case. Among the estimated 120 priests working in the Chinese empire at the time were 60 Jesuits, 29 Franciscans, 8 Dominicans, 6 Augustinians, 2 Lazarists and 15 seculars, mostly from the *Missions étrangères*. By country of origin, they could be divided into Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, Frenchmen and Germans.<sup>30</sup>

Compared with the Catholic missionary organizations, the importance of Protestant religious travellers, who began to arrive in Asia on vessels of the Dutch or English East-India companies after 1600, was much more restricted. Although the actual number of Protestant ministers or lay preachers reaching Asia was by no means small (the total number of ministers and preachers sailing on VOC-ships to Asia between 1602 and 1799 amounted to 617 and 2022, respectively)<sup>31</sup>, the range of their travelling was not very wide. Their chief concern was the spiritual care of Company servants at sea or in forts and factories in Asia rather than the propagation of the Christian faith among Asian peoples. In so far as Protestant preachers seriously tried to make converts, they directed their efforts mainly at native Catholics in a few places that the VOC had captured from the Portuguese, notably the Moluccas and Sri Lanka.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 144, 223-226, 293, 296.

<sup>30</sup> R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The world of Catholic renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge 1998) 192, Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 266

<sup>31</sup> Johan de Niet, *Ziekentroosters op de pastorale markt 1550-1880* (Delft 2006) 39-40.

<sup>32</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 269-291.

## Religious travellers and European trading organisations

As Pearson's study on the *hajj* from India has shown, the coming of the Portuguese around 1500 did not spell a major break in the existing pattern of religious travelling in the Arabian Seas. Although the Portuguese initially had the ambition to block all Red Sea traffic, including the Mecca pilgrimage, entirely they soon switched to a system of passes, joined with custom duties, which meant that any ship with pilgrims sailing to or from India that was provided with the required Portuguese documents could proceed unhindered.<sup>33</sup> The appearance of the Dutch and English trading companies in Asian waters around 1600 did not hamper the pilgrim traffic either. The companies normally did not obstruct the passage of these religious travellers. At the end of the seventeenth century, the VOC under pressure of Mughal Aurangzeb every year even provided two convoy vessels to protect the state pilgrim ships and Gujarati merchantmen en route to the Red Sea against attacks by European pirates.<sup>34</sup> When the Company itself in 1704 in an attempt to force the Mughal authorities to pay a large outstanding debt started to seize ships from Surat and Hindustan, the captains of the blockading fleet were expressly instructed to refrain from any violence against 'Moorish priests, pilgrims and females', for fear of embittering the 'entire Moorish nation'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pearson, *Pious travellers*, 87-106, esp.102.

<sup>34</sup> H. Terpstra, *De Nederlanders in Voor-Indië* (Amsterdam 1947) 100-104, H.W. van Santen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Gujarat en Hindustan, 1620-1660* (Leiden 1982) 61-62, A. Das Gupta, 'Gujarati merchants and the Red Sea Trade, 1700-1725', in: B..Kling and M.N. Pearson (eds.), *The age of partnership. Europeans in Asia before Dominion* (Honolulu 1979), 123-158 esp. pp. 124-126, Naim R. Farooqi, 'Moguls, Ottomans, and pilgrims: protecting the routes to Mecca in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *The International History Review*, X, 2(1999) 198-220, esp.209-210, Karel Davids, 'Navigeren in Azië. De uitwisseling van kennis tussen Aziaten en navigatiepersoneel bij de voorcompagnieën en de VOC, 1596-1795', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegegeschiedenis*, 9 (1990) 5-18, esp.5-7, Pearson, *Pious travellers*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, 11 vols. (The Hague 1960-2004), vol.VI, p. 320, letter Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 30 November 1704. A similar

Moreover, the VOC at times became involved in the *hajj* traffic in an active way, namely by carrying pilgrims itself. In 1661, for instance, the Dowager Queen of Bijapur travelled to the Red Sea aboard a Dutch ship.<sup>36</sup> Transport on Company vessels was not only available to high-placed persons. Pilgrims from Persia in the 1670s could travel on VOC ships from Gombroon (Bandar Abbas) to Mocha, or back, at a fare of 80 to 126 *guilders* (or 2 – 3 ½ *toman*) a head. If ‘a pretty penny could be earned with carrying a fair number, i.e. 4, 5 to 600 pilgrims or more from Gombroon to Mocha’, so the governors in Batavia informed the director of the trading station in Gombroon in 1676, one of the (four) big ships that would be sent to Persia each year could be used for that purpose. A year later, plans were even made for the transportation of 1,000 pilgrims.<sup>37</sup> Although the fare charged for this trip by the VOC was considerably lower than the tariff paid by pilgrims who crossed by sea from Basra to Jiddah in the 1650s ( 8 – 15 *toman*)<sup>38</sup>, the demand from religious travellers nevertheless did not meet the expectations of the trading company.<sup>39</sup> Plans for transportation of pilgrims from Persia are in the general correspondence of the VOC no longer discussed after 1680. The main cause of the disappointing result was probably that the Company simply proved to be unable to maintain a regular service.<sup>40</sup> Its ships more than once failed to appear on time in Gombroon, which might disrupt the whole schedule of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Asian shipping presumably provided a much more predictable service. In 1679, the governors of the VOC in

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retaliatory action had been taken in 1649; at that occasion, too, the pilgrims had been left at peace, see Pearson, *Pious travellers*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Pearson, *Pious travellers*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> *Generale missiven*, vol..IV, p. 124, letter Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 30 september 1676, idem, p.204, letter Gourverneur-Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 24 november 1677.

<sup>38</sup> Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, 44; the rate of exchange between guilders and toman in the 1670s slightly differed from that in the 1650s (36 guilder s resp. 40 guilders per toman) cf. Barendse, p. 502 and *Generale missiven*, vol..IV, p.204.

<sup>39</sup> *Generale missiven*, vol.IV, p.300, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 13 February 1679.



Batavia themselves observed that one of the reasons why the port of Aceh (at the northern tip of Sumatra) attracted so much people from the eastern parts of the Indonesian archipelago was precisely the fact that ‘the frequency of Moorish shipping [to this port] often provided the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to Mecca’.<sup>41</sup> To what extent English private shipping from the fifties onwards fulfilled a role in this pilgrim traffic as well<sup>42</sup>, remains to be investigated.

Relations between trading organizations and other categories of religious travellers, especially missionaries, became closer than in the case of pilgrims. In a stimulating article published a few years ago, Steven Harris has argued that a religious organization like the Society of Jesus and a trading company such as the Dutch East-India Company, despite all their obvious differences, still can be fruitfully compared from the point of view of the problems they faced with regard to ‘personnel management’ and the methods they developed to cope with these challenges<sup>43</sup>. As long-distance corporations, both the Society of Jesus and the VOC had to devise ways ‘to keep their members healthy, motivated, and loyal when stationed in remote and often hostile environments’ and in reply, sought, among other things, to gather ‘similar kinds of natural knowledge’, notably in botany. The structural resemblance in organisational challenges thus led to a similar strategy in the collection and dissemination of knowledge.

As far as the circulation of knowledge is concerned, I would suggest that Harris’s argument could be taken one step further. Religious

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<sup>40</sup> Examples of these problems in *Generale missiven*, vol.IV, pp.181 and 232.

<sup>41</sup> *Generale missiven*, vol. IV, p.331, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 11 December 1679.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Persians, pilgrims and Portuguese: The travails of Masulipatnam shipping in the Western Indian Ocean, 1590-1665’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22 (1988) 503-530, pp. 525, 527 on the rise of English private shipping on the routes to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

<sup>43</sup> Steven J. Harris, ‘Long-distance corporations, big sciences, and the geography of knowledge’, *Configurations*, 6 (1998) 269-304, especially 285-300.

organizations and trading corporations, which starting from a base in Europe established a presence in many parts of Asia, were not only corresponding phenomena, but also complementary entities. They supported, supplemented and influenced each other in various ways. European religious orders and trading corporations operating in Asia did not merely offer alternative circuits for the circulation of useful knowledge. They formed in fact complementary systems. These two types of organizations were clearly interconnected in the field of communication facilities and in the performance of trading operations.

Religious organizations and trading companies helped each other in maintaining their communication lines in Asia and between Europe and Asia. While missionaries or clerics on a diplomatic mission normally sailed on Portuguese or Spanish ships (or later, on French East-Indiamen) to reach Asia, they were quite oecumenical in their choice of means of transport once they had arrived there. Apart from using their own feet (missionaries were great walkers<sup>44</sup>) or hiring or buying carriages when travelling on land, they called on a wide range of facilities when making voyages by sea between China, Japan, South-East Asia, India and Mesopotamia, or back to Europe. The Society of Jesus was the only religious order to command a small fleet of its own. The college of Macao, for instance, in the 1630s possessed two junks and held shares in several other ships and the province of Japan, the vice-province of China and a former governor of the province of Goa in the 1740s jointly owned the *não* *S. Pedro e S. João*, which completed a number of trips between Lisbon and Asia.<sup>45</sup> However, considering that such in-house provisions were rare and that the number of Portuguese, Spanish or French ships plying

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<sup>44</sup> In the 1650s, for example, the Jesuits Franciscus de Rougemont and Philippus Couplet travelled from India to India, by sailing across the Bay of Bengal and then crossing Siam on foot, see M. Neijens, 'Twee brieven van pater Philippus Couplet S.J., missionaris in China, en diens betrekkingen tot de Oost-Indische Compagnie', *Studia Catholica*, 3 (1926/27) 35-51, p.40-41.

<sup>45</sup> Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, 531

between ports in Asia for a long time remained quite small, missionaries often made use of Asian or European private shipping or travelled on a vessel of the Dutch East-India Company.<sup>46</sup> Without these alternative means of transport, missionary activities across such a wide area could hardly have been sustained for long. For mail traffic to Europe, religious organizations to some extent relied on the services of trading companies as well. Letters from Jesuits in Asia, for instance, were sometimes conveyed to Europe by ships of the VOC.<sup>47</sup>

Trading companies, in their turn, were aided by religious organizations in important ways. None of the European trading organizations active in Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries namely dared to rely solely on maritime links to maintain communications between their establishments in Asia and the central offices in Europe. From the point of view of speed, sending mail overland through Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria had a clear advantage over dispatching it by ship around the Cape of Good Hope. In a best-case scenario, a letter sent from Surat to Amsterdam via Bandar Abbas, Basra, Aleppo and Venice could reach its destination in about three and a half months, whereas a shipment along the sea route took at least eight months.<sup>48</sup> Now, European missionaries in the Persian and Ottoman empires were of crucial importance for maintaining the overland

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<sup>46</sup> Examples in J. Barten, 'Hollandse kooplieden op bezoek bij concilievaarders', *Archief voor de Geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland*, 12 (1970) 75-120, pp. 86-88, *Generale missiven*, vol. V, p. 590, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 9 February 1693, idem, vol. VI, p. 463, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 15 December 1706, idem, vol. VII, p.270, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 15 January 1717, idem, p.394, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 15 January 1719, Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 232.

<sup>47</sup> Neijen, 'Twee brieven', 35, Barten, 'Hollandse kooplieden', 86-88, John Wills, 'Some Dutch sources on the Jesuit China mission 1662-1687', *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, 54 (1985) 267-293, esp. p.270, *Generale missiven*, vol. V, p.46, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 13 December 1686, idem, vol. VI, p.464, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 15 January 1707.

messenger services of the Dutch, English and French East India companies (and the Estado da India, for that matter). Along with Armenian merchants, French consuls or local traders, Carmelite mission posts fulfilled a vital role in transmitting reports and messages of European trading organizations to and from Asia. For mail traffic on the route between Isfahan, Basra, Baghdad and Aleppo, in particular, the VOC could not dispense with the services of the Carmelites.<sup>49</sup> However, the role of convents of religious orders was not restricted to that of a simple post office. Thanks to their long-standing presence in these surroundings, these missionaries had built up an intimate knowledge of local culture and conditions that could not easily be matched by the transient representatives of the trading companies. They could therefore act as valuable intermediaries between the visiting agents of European companies and local traders and authorities. Passing through the city on a mission to India on behalf of the French East-India Company *abbé Carré* in 1672 remarked that the French Carmelites in Basra, 'being the only permanent Franks' in town, 'kindly help the other European nations trading in the East by sending on packets and dispatches from Europe and India', adding: 'they thoroughly understand the methods and ways of the Turks and Arabs whom they employ for all the needs and services required by Frankish travellers and traders in these parts'.<sup>50</sup>

Religious orders and trading companies also encountered each other, and to some extent collaborated, in the performance of trading operations. On the one hand, religious orders were not averse to trading themselves. Although Dauril Alden's recent, painstaking inquiry into the

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<sup>48</sup> Perry Moree, *'Met vriend die God geleide'.* *Het Nederlands-Aziatisch postvervoer ten tijde van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Zutphen 1998) 49.

<sup>49</sup> René Barendse, 'The long road to Livorno. The overland messenger services of the Dutch east India Company in the seventeenth century', *Itinerario*, 12 (1988) no..2, 25-43, p.30-34..

<sup>50</sup> *The travels of abbé Carré in India and the Near East 1672-1674*, 3 vols. (Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, XCV, XCVI, XCVII, London 1947-1948), vol.I, 86

organizational and economic foundations of the overseas activities of the Society of Jesus has disproved the inflated claims of some historians about the Society as the 'world's first multinational corporation' or as a 'gigantic association which (sought to) control the world's principal trades'<sup>51</sup>, it was nevertheless true that this religious order soon after the beginning of its missionary expansion overseas engaged in various forms of commercial and financial activities. Jesuits based in Macao participated in the silk trade between China and Japan up till the 1610s and they traded independently or jointly with Macaonese merchants in sandalwood from the Lesser Sunda Islands and in textiles, metals, foodstuffs and other goods with Siam and Vietnam. Their colleagues in India became involved in the trade in diamonds, pearls and bezoar stones. In seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century, investments in loans and annuities became an important source of revenue for the Society's Asian provinces.<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1660s, half of the income of the vice-province of China derived from the issue of sea loans.<sup>53</sup> However, the scale and yield of these activities never reached massive proportions. For the Jesuits, however, these activities were not an end in itself. Profit maximization was not their aim. Commercial and financial operations merely served to generate additional revenue – next to subventions, legacies and income from landed property - to enable the Society to carry out its religious functions. The position of this religious order was in this respect not unlike that of Christian pilgrims in Europe or Muslim pilgrims in Asia, who sometimes were prepared, too, to carry on some trading in order to pay for long-distance journeys.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, 551 and 668, quoting Charles Boxer and Magalhães Godinho, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, 533-544, 563-567.

<sup>53</sup> Alden, *Making of an enterprise*, 563.

<sup>54</sup> Webb, *Medieval European pilgrimage*, chapter 3, Pearson, *Pious passengers*, chapter 6 and 7, esp., 142.,

Trading companies on the other hand sometimes drew benefit from the inside knowledge of members of religious orders in the conclusion of commercial transactions. A Portuguese Jesuit in Cochin, for example, in 1707 assisted the English East-India Company in the purchase of pepper.<sup>55</sup> The French consul in Smyrna at the time enjoyed an edge over his Dutch and English competitors in decision-making about investments in silk, by receiving early information about the quantities of silk arriving in the emporium of Tabriz from French Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries who were long established in this city.<sup>56</sup> The warning issued by the first secretary of the *Propaganda Fide* in the late 1630s that missionaries should not act as the political, diplomatic or commercial agents of their homelands was evidently not always heeded in practice.<sup>57</sup>

### **Religious travellers as carriers of knowledge**

Religious travelling could be relevant for the circulation of useful knowledge because pilgrims, monks, missionaries or clerics on a diplomatic mission could act as carriers of all kinds of useful information. For many religious travellers in history, however, this function can only be assumed or inferred rather than proven, because their journeys have not left a paper trail in the form of a written or printed travel narrative. The lack of documentary records of individual journeys is much more common in the case of travelling by Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus than in that of travelling by Christians. The fame of Ibn Battuta's account of his travels throughout the Islamic world and China between 1325 and 1354, which

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<sup>55</sup> *Generale missiven*, vol. VI, p.501, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 30 November 1707.

<sup>56</sup> Barendse, 'The long road to Livorno', 26.

<sup>57</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III book one, 226.

started out as an ordinary pilgrimage to Mecca<sup>58</sup>, should not blind us to the fact that narratives on the *hajj* or journeys to Jerusalem, Najaf, Karbala or other Muslim holy places, based on the experiences of the pilgrims themselves, are exceedingly rare before 1800. Accounts by pilgrims making the *hajj* from India in the Mughal period, for example, are almost non-existent.<sup>59</sup> Muslim accounts of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages were not written by pilgrims but by other sorts of travellers.<sup>60</sup> Narratives by Buddhist monks or pilgrims of their travels to holy places in China or India are not wanting, as the examples of Ennin, Hsüan-tsang and others attest, but they were not particularly abundant either. Travel accounts by Hindu pilgrims appear to have been even rarer. Surinder Bhardwaj in fact had to combine data from a treatise from Hindu sacred literature with information given in accounts by Buddhist and Muslim travellers to be able to compile a survey of Hindu places of pilgrimage in India between the seventh and sixteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

As for Christian travellers, accounts by pilgrims, monks or clerical envoys of travels to the Holy Land or other destinations have been preserved from the fourth century AD onwards. It was in part precisely because of the presence of such sources that Michael McCormick was able to trace 669 individual travellers (envoys, pilgrims, officials, merchants, missionaries etc.) in the Mediterranean and its hinterland in the period between c.700 and 900.<sup>62</sup> This flow of narratives by religious travellers in Christendom continued unabated throughout the medieval and early modern periods. While some of these accounts at the time did not circulate outside the circle of family, friends or fellow monks of the

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<sup>58</sup> Ross E. Dunn, *The adventures of Ibn Battuta. A Muslim traveler of the 14th century* (London 1986) 27-29, 65-81; Ibn Battuta made another *hajj* after his return from China and India, see 274.

<sup>59</sup> Pearson, *Pious passengers*, 9-10.

<sup>60</sup> Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, 44.

<sup>61</sup> Bhardwaj, *Hindu places of pilgrimage in India*, 73-79.

<sup>62</sup> McCormick, *Origins of the European economy*, 123-125, Appendix 1 and 4.

author himself, many *did* reach a wider public, either in the form of a separate publication or in an indirect way, by being included or digested in a publication by somebody else. The *Evagatorium* by the Dominican monk from Ulm, Felix Fabri, for example, which described his two journeys to the Holy Land in the 1480s, appeared in an abridged German version (the *Pilgerbuch*) in the 1550s.<sup>63</sup> The 'history of the Mongols' by the Franciscan friar John of Plano Carpini, based on his observations as a papal envoy to the court of the Great Khan in 1245-1247, was soon after its completion incorporated into the popular *Speculum historiale* by Vincent of Beauvais.<sup>64</sup> William of Rubruck's account of his trip to Mongolia in the 1250s was not published, but his observations were partly digested into the *Opus maius* by Roger Bacon, who knew his story at first hand.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, pilgrims like Felix Fabri who wrote an account of their own journey to the Holy Land, were often perfectly acquainted with narratives that had appeared in the past, or with pilgrim books produced by contemporaries.<sup>66</sup>

After about 1500, the sheer volume and extent of circulation of documentary records on religious travelling by Christians in Eurasia massively increased. The key factor in this change was of course the expansion of missionary activity in Asia, aided to some extent by the collaboration with trading companies and facilitated by the spread of literacy and the growth of the printing industry in Europe. All the major European religious organizations that deployed activities overseas set up a system of regular reporting on the state of affairs of their missionary efforts in various regions and the conditions and contexts in which their operations were carried out and they frequently saw to it that at least part

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<sup>63</sup> Wieland Carls (ed.), *Felix Fabri, Die Sionpilger* (Berlin 1999) 59-61.

<sup>64</sup> Dawson, *Mongol mission*, xv-xviii, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Dawson, *Mongol mission*, 88.

<sup>66</sup> Herbert Feilke, *Felix Fabris Evagatorium über seine Reise in das Heilige Land. Eine Untersuchung über die Pilgerliteratur des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Bern 1976) 7-9, Carls (ed.), *Felix Fabri*, 12-19.



of these records were made available to a wider audience as well. Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, the *Propaganda Fide*, the *Mission étrangères* and especially the Society of Jesus were all very active in this regard.<sup>67</sup> The range of action of their organizations in Asia and the diversity of the geographic origins of their members in Europe (discussed above) ensured that this particular group of religious travellers had access to a wide spectrum of information and could communicate its experiences, observations and findings to a variety of publics. The networks of the European missionary organizations in Asia together spanned not just the key positions and lines of communication in the Portuguese and Spanish areas of operations (such as Goa, Macao, Diu, Chaul, Damão, Bassein, the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Philippines) but also numerous places, regions and routes in East, Southeast and South Asia (China, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Siam, Malacca, Aceh, Pegu, Bengal, Sri Lanka, Malabar) as well as in Persia and Mesopotamia, where the Iberian powers could never claim any sort of political, military or economic control at all, or before 1670 lost whatever control they once had to Asian rulers or to European trading companies. Back in Europe, knowledge gathered by missionaries in Asia, was not only studied, ordered and stored in central agencies in Lisbon, Seville, Madrid, Rome or Paris, but quickly spread to many other parts of the Continent as well. Letters, reports, histories or travel accounts composed by missionaries in Asia often became rapidly and widely available in Europe in both Latin and vernacular editions.<sup>68</sup> Together with data collected by administrators and merchants, such printed records produced by travellers of religious organizations formed a veritable gold mine of information for anyone in Europe who wanted to know something about some part of Asia. When Isaac Vossius, for instance, who ranks as one of the most universal

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<sup>67</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III, book one, 301-305.

scholars of the seventeenth century, wanted to get reliable knowledge on subjects like the geography of Asia or the intricacies of astronomy, navigation and shipbuilding in the overseas world, he turned to the *China Illustrata* by Athanasius Kircher, the *Novus atlas sinensis* by Martino Martini, the *Hydrographie* by Georges Fournier or the *Almagestum* and *Geographia et hydrographia reformata* by Giovanni Battista Riccioli (Jesuits to a man), which, jointly with works like the *Litterae Jesuitorum ex lapponica missae ab anno 1549 usq. ad annum 1571 ad fratres in Europa*, the *Annales indiquées de l'an 1587 envoyées par les Jésuites à leur Général* and the edited letters of Francis Xavier formed part of his huge private library.<sup>69</sup>

However, even when individual travels were not (or rarely) recorded in manuscript or print, religious travellers still could fulfil a role in the circulation of useful knowledge. Knowledge gathered in the course of travelling could after all also be transmitted orally or by demonstration. Whether this sort of transmission actually took place, is of course difficult to prove, but it can to some extent be inferred from the pattern of religious travelling discussed above. The sheer range and scope of the revolution in agriculture (involving crops, farming practices, implements as well as irrigation systems) that affected the whole Islamic world from Spain and the Maghreb, to India and Transoxiana between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD, strongly suggests that the spread of the habit of pilgrimage must have played a crucial role.<sup>70</sup> The confluence of large numbers of people from every part of the Muslim world and all walks of life along a limited number of routes to a few central places in the Middle East must

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<sup>68</sup> See for instance Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III, book four (Chicago/London 1993), 1983-1984, on Jesuit letterbooks.

<sup>69</sup> Karel Davids, 'De wijde horizon van een kamergeleerde: Isaac Vossius (1618-1689) en de zeevaart' in: Paul Hoftijzer and Theo Verbeek (eds.), *Leven na Descartes. Zeven opstellen over ideeëngeschiedenis in Nederland in de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (Hilversum 2005) 26-38, esp. 33-34.

have considerably eased the circulation of useful knowledge. The relationship between the expansion of Islam, the diffusion of the practice of pilgrimage and the spread of 'new discoveries and new inventions' has been more or less explicitly assumed by Marshall Hodgson, Andrew Watson and Ross Dunn.<sup>71</sup>

Given the purpose of their journeys, accounts, reports, letters or histories composed by pilgrims, monks, missionaries or clerics on a diplomatic mission were normally more informative on the religious experiences of their authors or on the relevance of their activities and observations for religious organizations than on the state of affairs in the surrounding world as such. If 'useful knowledge' – following Ian Inkster<sup>72</sup> – is conceived as knowledge that is 'brought to bear' upon a technical problem and its solution, then information on useful knowledge in these sources is mostly supplied sparingly and almost by chance rather than abundantly and on purpose. Religious travellers were after all not primarily technological reporters. Moreover, the records of their travels were in accordance with the tacit or formal rules of the genre often cast in a particular format, with all the topoi and stylistic devices that went with it, rather than being composed in a detached, open-minded fashion.<sup>73</sup> Having said that, I would nevertheless submit that these sources not seldom actually *did* convey 'useful knowledge', because religious travellers in the course of their journeys, whether intentionally or not, happened to encounter people or to make observations in foreign places that provided information on ways in which other cultures or societies

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<sup>70</sup> Andrew Watson, *Agricultural innovation in the early Islamic world* (Cambridge 1983), part one.

<sup>71</sup> Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. II, *The expansion of Islam in the middle periods* (Chicago/London 1975) 567, Watson, *Agricultural innovation*, 92-93, Ross E. Dunn, 'International migrations of literate Muslims in the Later Middle Period: The case of Ibn Battuta', in: Ian Richard Netton (ed.), *Golden roads. Migration, pilgrimage and travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam* (Richmond 1993) 75-85, esp. p. 76-77.

<sup>72</sup> Ian Inkster, 'Notions of URK', paper GEHN Conference at Kaohsiung, May 2006.

perceived their environment and went about in solving technical problems - and did not fail to record these encounters or observations in their letters, accounts, reports of histories.

The manner in which such information was supplied varied markedly, ranging from casual remarks via extended descriptions to systematic expositions. Ennin's mention of the water-powered mill on the estate of the Ting-chüeh-ssu monastery or William of Rubruck's observation on the peculiar sort of money in Cathay are examples of the former. More extended descriptions can for instance be found in the monk-pilgrim Hsüan-tsang's account of travels in India in the seventh century:<sup>74</sup>

“ The earth being soft and muddy, the walls of the towns are mostly built of brick or tiles. The towers on the walls are constructed of wood or bamboo; the houses have balconies and belvederes, which are made of wood, with a coating of lime or mortar, and covered with tiles. The different buildings have the same form as in China: rushes, or dry branches, or tiles, or boards are used for covering them. The walls are covered with lime and mud, mixed with cow's dung for purity”

“The garments [of the people] are made of *Kiau-she-ye* (kauśêya) and of cotton. *Kiau-she-ye* is the product of the wild silkworm. They have garments also of *Ts'o-mo* (kshauma), which is a sort of hemp; garments are also made of *Kien-po-lo* (kambala) which is woven from fine goat-hair; garments are also made from *Ho-la-li* (karâla). This stuff is made from the fine hair of a wild animal: its is seldom this can be woven, and therefore the stuff is very valuable, and its regarded as fine clothing”

“With respect to the different kinds of wine and liquors, there are various sorts. The juice of the grape and sugar-cane, these are used by the Kshattriyas as drink; the Vaiśyas use strong fermented drinks; the Śramaṇs and Br âhmaṇs drink a sort of

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<sup>73</sup> See for example the literary analysis of Fabri's pilgrim's book by Feilke, *Felix Fabris Evagatorium*.

<sup>74</sup> Beal (ed.), *Buddhist records of the Western World*, vol.I, 74-75, 89.

syrup made from the grape or sugarcane, but not of the nature of fermented wine”

In the 1490s, pilgrim Arnold von Harff from Cologne travelling through Egypt en route to the Holy Land reported what he saw along the river Nile not far from Rosetta:

“In these towns there grow many reeds or canes from which sugar is made. They have in each town a large building in which they prepare the sugar in this manner. They cut the cane, which is very sweet, down to the ground, and cut it into little pieces about the length of a finger or less. These they throw it into a great wide stone vessel, in which is a large mill stone for grinding, which oxen turn round on the lower mill stone, so that the stone grinds the sugar quite small. They then take the ground canes and empty them into a great long kettle holding nine or ten pails full, and light a fire underneath, so that it is seethed as they seethe saltpetre in our country, and skim off the top which they pour into tubs or barrels. This is called sugar honey, with which in this country all kinds of food are cooked, since they have no butter, which melts on account of the great heat. What remains at the bottom of the kettle they empty into pointed tubes where they let it cool. This settles and becomes the sugar loaf which is brought to our country in great quantities”<sup>75</sup>

Pietro della Valle from Rome, who like Ibn Battuta started out his travels to the East as a pilgrim (and therefore called himself *pellegrino*), reported in his letters from India in the 1620s not just about religious practices but also on a prosaic subject like water supply:

“that country is in some parts so scarce of water, many cities and inhabited places have no other but the rain-water gather’d in these great cisterns which are so capacious that one of them suffices a city for a whole year and more: and it not onely affords drink to men and animals but also they wash their clothes and

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<sup>75</sup> Malcolm Letts (ed.), *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, knight from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, which he accomplished in the years 1496 to 1499* (Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, XCIV, London 1946) 99.

beasts in it when occasion requires, and make use of it to all purposes.. (....) The cistern or lake of Suràt hath a great trench adjoyn'd to it on one side, long, large, and deep, over which certain small bridges are built; and it falls into another less cistern a good way off, which though but small here comparatively, would yet be a very large one in our parts; 'tis built with many sides of stone like the former, as also the banks of the trench are"<sup>76</sup>

Systematic expositions on 'useful knowledge' by religious travellers can more frequently be found since the expansion of the activity of European religious orders in Asia after about 1500. The reason for this increase was not only that religious organizations operating far from their base in Europe, as Steven Harris has argued, had to devise ways 'to keep their members healthy' and therefore sought, among other things, to gather various sorts of natural knowledge, but also that these organizations because of the very purpose of their presence in Asia – viz. propagation of the faith - were exceedingly interested in any information about foreign cultures, economies, societies and natural environments that be conducive to the realization of that aim and that the membership of these organizations, to a higher degree than an ordinary body of religious travellers, was composed of literate, articulate and well-educated people. All this was especially true for a singularly disciplined, determined, goal-directed order like the Society of Jesus. The most extensive, systematic surveys of 'useful knowledge' in China and Japan in the seventeenth century could be found in publications by Jesuit missionaries. The works by Nicholas Trigault, João Rodrigues and Alvaro Semedo, which were based both on their own observations and on the massive amount of information gathered by numerous other priests and brothers who had laboured 'in the vineyard of the Lord', contained not just

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<sup>76</sup> Edward Grey (ed.), *The travels of Pietro della Valle in India, from the old English translation of 1664 by G. Havers* (Hakluyt Society, LXXXIV, LXXXV, 2 vols, London

surveys of the history, politics and society of these Asian empires (and the vicissitudes of the Jesuit missions), but also included lengthy discussions on such subjects as husbandry and material culture and presented generally laudatory accounts of the state of the 'liberal and mechanical arts'.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as Harris put it, 'every so often' a Jesuit traveller or sedentary scholar attempted 'to weave together the observational, natural, instrumental and textual threads feeding into his own local world in order to produce a new statement about the shape, structure, and operation of the natural world'.<sup>78</sup> Thus, 'useful knowledge' collected from Asia could be incorporated into new general surveys or synthetic views of the natural world produced in Europe. Great synthesizers from the Society of Jesus in mid-seventeenth century Italy were Giovanni Battista Riccioli and Athanasius Kircher.<sup>79</sup> The sheer range, cohesion and amount of detail that could be found in such works produced by members of Catholic missionary organizations were before the eighteenth century not matched by the few surveys of Asian societies and cultures published by Protestant preachers active in territories controlled by European trading companies. The description of Malabar and Coromandel published in 1672 by Philippus Baldaeus, who in the 1650s and 1660s had worked as a minister in VOC settlements in South

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1892) 33. Cf. on Della Valle and the influence of his travel account Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III, book one, 380, 651-660.

<sup>77</sup> Matteo Ricci /Nicholas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expedition chrétienne au royaume de la Chine 1582-1610*, ed. Georges Bessière (1978, originale dition in Latin Augsburg 1615), esp. 76-149, Michale Cooper (ed.), *João Rodrigues's account of sixteenth-century Japan* (Hakluyt Society, third series, vol.VII, London 2001), esp. chapters 1,2, 7 and 8, Alvaro Semedo, *Relazione della grande monarchia della Cina* (Rome 1643), esp. 5-74.

<sup>78</sup> Steven J.Harris, 'Mapping Jesuit science: The role of travel in the geography of knowledge', in: John W. O'Malley *et al.* (eds.), *The Jesuits. Cultures, sciences, and the arts 1540-1773* (Toronto 1999) 212-240, esp..227.

<sup>79</sup> Alfredo Dinis, 'Giovanni Battista Riccioli and the science of his times', in: Mordechai Feingold (ed), *Jesuit science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge Mass.2003) 195-224, Paula Findlen, 'Scientific spectacle in Baroque RomeL Athanasius Kircher and the Roman College Museum', in idem, 225-284.

India and on Sri Lanka, was even heavily dependent on manuscript and printed works composed by Jesuits (including Kircher).<sup>80</sup>

Knowledge gathered by religious orders reached European trading organizations, too, either in printed or manuscript form or through direct contacts between missionaries and company servants. The interconnections between religious organizations and trading corporations in the maintenance of communication links and the performance of trading operations also multiplied the opportunities for the exchange of 'useful knowledge' on board ship or in places like Surat, Malabar, Batavia or the Cape of Good Hope, which were frequented both by religious travellers and by employees of the European trading companies. Trading companies were in this respect for a long time much more dependent on religious organizations than the other way around. When the Jesuit Martino Martini, for instance, in 1652 en route from Macao to Europa arrived in Batavia, he provided the governor-general and council of the VOC with precise information on the commercial and political conditions in China and showed them a description and atlas of the empire that he had recently completed.<sup>81</sup> Having travelled to Amsterdam aboard a Dutch East-Indiaman, he brought out this *magnum opus* as part 6 (*Novus atlas sinensis*) of the world atlas published by the firm of Joan Blaeu, who also served as hydrographer and examiner of pilots of the Chamber of Amsterdam of the VOC.<sup>82</sup> And it were French Jesuits (travelling to Siam and China) who in 1685 for the first time rather accurately determined the

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<sup>80</sup> Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol.III, book two, 911-912, 1063-1064, Philippus Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende ryken, en het machtige eyland Ceylon* (Amsterdam 1672).

<sup>81</sup> *Generale missiven*, vol.II., p.606-607, letter Gouverneur Generaal en Raden to Heren XVII, 24 December 1652.

<sup>82</sup> Barten, 'Hollandse kooplieden', 86-87, B. Szczésniak, 'The seventeenth century maps of China. An inquiry into the compilations of European cartographers', *Imago Mundi*, 13 (1956) 117-136.



longitude of the Cape of Good Hope, by observing the satellites of Jupiter in the Company's garden in Cape Town.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Religious travellers in the period between about 600 and 1800 acted as carriers of useful knowledge in Europe, Asia and North Africa. This paper has discussed the extent of the network of religious travelling that spanned these parts of the globe from c. 600 AD onwards, the size and regularity of the flows of travellers and the ways in which these travellers conveyed this sort of information. After about 1500 the relationship between religious travelling and the circulation of useful knowledge changed in several respects. Among religious travellers between Europe and Asia, the share of missionaries belonging to religious organizations significantly grew. With the growing share of this particular category of travellers - as distinct from pilgrims, monks and clerics on a diplomatic mission - the volume and extent of circulation of documentary records on religious travelling by Christians in Eurasia and the frequency of systematic expositions on useful knowledge massively increased, too. Moreover, the early modern period saw the emergence of interconnections between religious orders and trading companies in the field of communication facilities and the performance of commercial operations, which further helped to sustain the circulation of useful knowledge. Thanks to the rise of the missionary organizations, the flow of knowledge from Europe to Asia increased as well, although the

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<sup>83</sup> Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des pères Jésuites envoyés par le Roy aux Indes & à la Chine, avec leurs observations astronomiques & leurs remarques de physique, de géographie, d'hydrographie & d'histoire* (Paris 1686) 51-60, Florence Hsia, 'Jesuits, Jupiter's satellites and the Académie Royale des Sciences', in: O'Malley *et al.* (ed.), *The Jesuits*, 241-257 esp. p.241-247..

‘usefulness’ of this knowledge as perceived from Asian countries at the time still remained somewhat small.<sup>84</sup>

The relative importance of religious travellers in the circulation of knowledge in Eurasia and North Africa before 1800 compared with that of other groups can as yet not be established. It is equally not yet feasible to determine the impact of their role as carriers of ‘useful knowledge’ on economic development or on the growth of the ‘knowledge economy’. These issues can only be resolved (if ever), when the circulation of knowledge in this period in Eurasia and North Africa as a whole has been more extensively reconstructed and analyzed. Although the role of religious travelling in this process since the nineteenth century probably weighs less heavily than before, whereas the importance of other ways of transmission has increased, this does by no means imply that this role has vanished. The very changes in communication that made possible the rise of alternative ways of transmitting useful knowledge after all also eased the making of long-distance pilgrimages, as Chris Bayly has pointed out.<sup>85</sup> The practice of pilgrimage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reached a larger scale than ever before. Pilgrims to Mecca, Benares or Rome now number in the millions instead of in the thousands. The opportunities for diffusion of useful knowledge by face-to-face contacts between people from different countries and backgrounds, thanks to religious travelling, thus have greatly increased. And the story about the family-planning exhibition and clinic in Haridwar in the 1960s mentioned in the introduction of this paper has shown that this remarkable fact did not go unnoticed by other parties than religious travellers themselves.

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<sup>84</sup> See Kent Deng, ‘Movers and Shakers of Knowledge in China during the Ming-Qing Period’, paper GEHN Conference at Kaohsiung, May 2006.

<sup>85</sup> C.A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world 1870-1914. Global connections and comparisons* (Oxford 2004), 351-356.