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Bento de Goës SJ (1562–1607) and his journey from India to China in search of Cathay (1602–1607) according to *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* by Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot SJ¹

Bento de Goës SJ (1562–1607) i jego podróż z Indii do Chin w poszukiwaniu kraju Katakaj (1602–1607) na podstawie *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* Tomasza Ignacego Dunina Szpota SJ

Abstract

The article describes the expedition of the Portuguese Jesuit Bento de Goës SJ undertaken between 1602 and 1607 from India to China in search of the land of Cathay and the purported Christian communities believed to exist there. The principal objective of the expedition was to

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verify a hypothesis advanced by Matteo Ricci SJ and other Jesuits active in China, namely that Cathay described in medieval sources were in fact one and the same political entity. Through this journey, Bento de Goës became the first European to travel overland from India to China via Central Asia, overcoming exceptionally formidable natural obstacles, including the Pamir and Karakoram mountain ranges. The results of the expedition confirmed the identification of Cathay with China, known in the European tradition also under the names Serica and Sinea, which was a finding with significant implications for European geography and perceptions of Asia. Travelling incognito through Persia and Afghanistan, Goës reached Suzhou on the Great Wall in 1606, where the identification of Cathay with China and of Cambaluc (Khanbaliq) with Peking was conclusively confirmed. He died there in 1607, probably from exhaustion or as a result of poisoning. Despite attempts by local Muslims to seize his body and documents, his companions ensured him a Christian burial, and fragments of his journal were subsequently delivered to Matteo Ricci. This expedition, known primarily from the works of Fernão Guerreiro SJ, and Matteo Ricci, is re-examined in the present article in the light of a description previously unused for this purpose, prepared by the Polish Jesuit Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot SJ, and preserved in his *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* (Jap. Sin. 102). Dunin Szpot's account was most probably based on Ricci's concise report of 1607, sent to Rome in at least two copies, via India and the Manila route. This brief account, now lost, is also attested in the testimony of Fernão Guerreiro, and Dunin Szpot's description may therefore constitute a second confirmed source deriving from that original account.

Keywords: Bento de Goës, Cathay, Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot, missions, Jesuits

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia wyprawę portugalskiego jezuitę Benta de Goësa SJ z Indii do Chin odbytą w latach 1602–1607 w poszukiwaniu kraju Kataj oraz mających tam się znajdować rzekomych wspólnot chrześcijańskich. Jej głównym celem była weryfikacja hipotezy Mattea Ricciego SJ, że Chiny i znany ze średniowieczny przekazów Kataj stanowią to samo państwo. Goës jako pierwszy Europejczyk przebył lądową drogę z Indii do Chin przez Azję Środkową, pokonując m.in. Pamir i Karakorum. Wyniki wyprawy potwierdziły utożsamienie Kataju z Chinami (znanymi w tradycji europejskiej również pod nazwami Serica i Sinea), co miało istotne znaczenie dla europejskiej geografii i obrazu Azji. Podróżując incognito przez Persję i Afganistan, Goës dotarł w 1606 roku do Suzhou przy Wielkim Murze, gdzie potwierdził identyfikację Kataju z Chinami oraz Chanbałyku z Pekinem. Tam też zmarł w 1607 roku, prawdopodobnie

z wycieńczenia lub w wyniku otrucia. Mimo prób przejęcia jego ciała i dokumentów przez miejscowych muzułmanów towarzysze zapewнили mu chrześcijański pochówek, a fragmenty dziennika przekazano Matteowi Ricciemu SJ. Wyprawa ta znana między innymi z dzieł Fernão Guerreiry SJ oraz Mattea Ricciego SJ została omówiona w niniejszym artykule w świetle dotychczas niewykorzystywanego w tym zakresie opisu sporządzonego przez polskiego jezuitę Tomasza Ignacego Dunina Szpota SJ znajdującego się w jego dziele *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* (Jap. Sin. 102). Opis Dunina Szpota opiera się zapewne na zwięzłym sprawozdaniu Ricciego z 1607 roku, przesłanym do Rzymu w co najmniej dwóch kopiach przez Indie i drogą manilską. Ta krótka relacja, dziś zaginiona, znana jest także z przekazu Fernão Guerreiro, a opis Dunina Szpota może być drugim potwierdzonym źródłem korzystającym z tego sprawozdania.

Słowa kluczowe: Bento de Goës, Kataj, Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot, misje, jezuiti

Introduction

Bento de Goës SJ (鄂本篤, 1562–1607), a Jesuit originating from the Portuguese Azores, gained renown for his overland journey from Agra to Chinese Suzhou (in Gansu, not to be confused with Suzhou near Shanghai). In 1602, he set out on an expedition in search of the land of Cathay. He was the first European to traverse the route from India to China across Central Asia. His mission was to resolve the question of Cathay's identity: whether it constituted the same political entity as China or should instead be understood as a distinct territory. Should the two prove to be separate countries, an additional objective was to locate in Cathay the numerous Christian communities that, according to various reports, were believed to exist there. His expedition demonstrated that Cathay – known from the accounts of medieval travellers such as Marco Polo and Ruy González de Clavijo – and China, identified in classical sources as *Serica* and *Sinae*, were in fact one and the same country. In this way, the thesis advanced by Matteo Ricci SJ (1552–1610) and other Jesuits residing in China – that Cathay and China were identical – was confirmed. This discovery significantly reshaped early modern conceptual geography and the contemporary perception of the world.

Apart from a few brief and incidental references in the letters of Jerónimo Xavier SJ (1549–1617), all reliable knowledge of Bento de Goës's journey to Cathay derives from the writings of Matteo Ricci and Fernão Guerreiro SJ (c. 1550–1617). Although Pierre du Jarric SJ (1566–1617) is

frequently cited as an authority on this subject, his account of Goës's expedition is entirely dependent on Guerreiro's narrative, which was published in English by Charles Herbert Payne.² Bento de Goës kept a diary in which he recorded the daily events of his journey. However, this document has not survived to the present day either in its entirety or in its original form. After his death, it was largely destroyed by Muslims in Suzhou, with only a few fragments preserved by his travel companion, an Armenian named Isaac. Isaac carried the salvaged notes to Peking, where he handed them over to Matteo Ricci. Based on these fragmentary materials and the Armenian's oral account, Ricci attempted to reconstruct the narrative of the journey as faithfully as possible, thereby becoming the principal source on Bento de Goës's mission. He included this account in his memoirs, which he began writing two years prior to death.³

These memoirs were translated from Italian and published in Latin by his fellow missionary, the Belgian Nicolas Trigault SJ (1577–1628), under the title *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu ex P. Matthaei Ricij eiusdem Societatis Commentariis*.⁴ Specifically, it is Book V, chapters XI, XII, and XIII of that work. For nearly three centuries, scholars relied on this text – whether in its Latin or French version – until, between 1911 and 1913, Pietro Tacchi Venturi SJ (1861–1956) published previously unknown manuscripts of Ricci.⁵ In the

2 *Jahangir and the Jesuits: with an account of the travels of Benedict Goës and the mission to Pegu, from the Relations of Father Fernão Guerreiro, S.J.*, trans. Charles Herbert Payne (London: Routledge, 1930), 119–182.

3 Cornelius Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603–1721*, with map and illustrations (Hauge: Martinus Nijhoff, 1924), 2.

4 *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu ex P. Matthaei Ricij eiusdem Societatis Commentariis*. Libri 5 ad S.D.N. Paulum 5. in quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges atque instituta & nouae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur. Auctore P. Nicolao Trigautio BELGA ex eadem Societate (Augustae Vind.: apud Christoph. Mangium, 1615), 544–569. An English translation of this work is also available, cf. Nicolas Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Mathew Ricci: 1583–1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953). Cf. also Matthieu Ricci, Nicolas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expédition chrétienne au royaume de la Chine, 1582–1610*, introduction par Joseph Shih; établissement du texte et annotations par Georges Bessière; tables et index par Joseph Dehergne (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer; Montréal: Bellarmin, 1978).

5 *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S. I.*, ed. Pietro Tacchi Venturi, vol. 1–2 (Macerata: Comitato per le Onoranze Nazionali, 1911–1913). Tacchi Venturi published both the letters of Matteo Ricci and his *Commentari della Cina*, the Italian manuscript previously known only through the expanded and edited Latin version prepared by Nicolas Trigault (*De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas*). However, Tacchi Venturi's lack of knowledge of Chinese made it necessary to produce a new, more rigorously prepared critical edition, which was undertaken by Pasquale M. d'Elia SJ (1890–1963). This edition, known as *Fonti Ricciane*, appeared in the 1940s: *Fonti ricciane; documenti*

early seventeenth century, the Anglican clergyman Samuel Purchas (c. 1577–1626) also published (in 1625) the monumental work *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, an extensive collection of travel accounts that can be regarded as a continuation of Richard Hakluyt's (c. 1552–1616) *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. In his work, Purchas devoted a section to the description of Bento de Goës's journey. Purchas, acting as editor and compiler, was, however, frequently criticised for his lack of editorial precision, inconsistency, and even unfaithfulness to the original sources.⁶

The article is based on a critical analysis of the manuscript source *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* by Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot, preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI). This source contains an account of Bento de Goës's mission and has not previously been used in studies of the expedition.⁷ The narrative of Dunin Szpot is compared with the accounts of Fernão Guerreiro, Matteo Ricci and with the later historiographical tradition. The research method employed consists of a comparative analysis of texts situated within a broad historical, geographical, missionary, and ideological context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, allowing both the factual course of the expedition and its significance in the debate over the identity of Cathay and China to be assessed.

Presence in historiography

It appears that, in Polish historiography, no one has yet undertaken the task of presenting the life and achievements of Bento de Goës, while the foreign literature on this subject is fairly extensive. A brief summary of this remarkable traveller and Jesuit's journey can be found in the work

originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579–1615), ed. and annotated by Pasquale M. d'Elia under the patronage of the Reale Accademia d'Italia, vol. 1–3, *Edizione nazionale delle opere edite e inedite* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1942–1949). The sections concerning Bento de Goës are found in vol. 2, 391–445, and vol. 3, 152–154.

6 Between 1905 and 1907, Samuel Purchas's works were reprinted in twenty volumes. Cf. "The report of a Mahometan Merchant which had bene in Cambalu: and the troublesome travell of Benedictus Goës, a Portugall Jesuite, from Lahor to China by land, thorow the Tartars Countreyes, A.D. 1598," in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes in Twenty Volumes*, ed. Samuel Purchas, vol. 12 (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1906), 222–238.

7 Thomae Dunin-Szpot, *Historiae Sinarum Imperii*; Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Jap. Sin. 102, ff. 149v-151v.

Décadas da Ásia, published at the end of the eighteenth century by the Portuguese historian Diogo do Couto (1542–1616).⁸ The first modern scholar to emphasise the significance of Bento de Goës’s activities was the German geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859).⁹ The popularity of the Portuguese Jesuit increased after the publication, in 1866, of excerpts from Trigault’s work dedicated to his journey. These excerpts were included in one of the volumes of a collection of medieval European and Arabic travel accounts on China and Central Asia, edited by the Scottish orientalist and geographer Henry Yule (1820–1889) and published by the British scholarly organisation, The Hakluyt Society.¹⁰ Following in his footsteps, the French Jesuit Joseph Brucker published an article that helped revive interest in the topic, particularly in Portugal, where the memory of de Goës had almost entirely faded.¹¹ During this period, when the German geologist, geographer, cartographer, and China researcher Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905) first coined the term *Seidenstraße* (“Silk Road”) in 1877 to describe the famous trade route connecting Europe with Asia, known today as the Silk Road, he also mentioned Bento de Goës in one of his works.¹² Subsequently, the Dutch Jesuit Cornelius Nicolaas Petrus Wessels (1880–1964) published *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603–1721 in 1924*, which included extensive information on Bento de Goës, supported by a wide range of source documentation.¹³ In the following years, studies on de Goës began to appear more widely, including works by Louis Pfister SJ (1833–1891),¹⁴ Henri Bernard-Maitre

8 Diego do Couto, *Decada Décima*, Dos feitos...em quanto governaram na India Fernão Telles, Francisco de Mascarenhas e Duarte de Menezes, Parte ultima, Livro V, Cap. VII (Lisboa: Na Regia Officina Typografica, 1778), 492–498.

9 Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde von Asien*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Gedruckt und verlegt bei G. Reimer, 1832), 218 ff., 322 ff., vol. 2, 437 ff., vol. 5, 391 ff., 422 ff., 503 ff.

10 *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, ed. and trans. Henry Yule, Vol. 2 (London: the Hakluyt Society, 1866), 529–596. A new edition of Yule’s work, amended by Henri Cordier: *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, ed. and trans. Henry Yule, vol. 4: *Ibn Batuta – Benedict Goës – Index*. New edition, revised throughout in the light of recent discoveries by Henri Cordier (London: the Hakluyt Society, 1916), 169–254.

11 Joseph Brucker, “Benoît Goës, missionnaire voyageur dans l’Asie centrale,” *Revue Études* 6, vol. 3 (1879): 589–612, 678–695.

12 Ferdinand von Richthofen, *China. Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien*, vol. 1 (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1877), 666–670.

13 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 1–42.

14 Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine, 1552–1773*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1932), 95–102.

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SJ (1889–1975),¹⁵ Felix Alfred Plattner SJ (1906–1974),¹⁶ Eduardo Brazão (1907–1987),¹⁷ Armando Cândido,¹⁸ George Bishop,¹⁹ Hui-Hung Chen²⁰ as well as on works about Ricci, such as a book by Vincent Cronin.²¹ A further scholarly contribution is the study by Henri Hosten SJ (1873–1935), which publishes translations of selected excerpts from letters and works related to Goës, including texts by Nicolas Trigault and Francisco de Sousa.²² Importantly, Bento de Goës is included in the *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, whereas Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot – whose work is analysed here – is unjustly absent from this key Jesuit reference work.²³ His figure is, however, noted in a brief entry in the *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*,²⁴ and in the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*.²⁵

15 Henri Bernard-Maitre, *Le frère Bento de Goës chez les musulmans de la Haute-Asie* (Tientsin: Procure de la Mission de Sienshien, 1934).

16 Felix Alfred Plattner, *Jesuiten zur See: der Weg nach Asien: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Entdeckungen* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1946); an English edition, see *ibidem*, *Jesuits Go East*, trans. Lord Sudley, Oscar Blobel (The Newman Press: Westminster, 1952), 135–150.

17 Eduardo Brazão, *Em demanda do Cataio: a viagem de Bento de Goës à China (1603–1607)* (Lisboa: Agência-Geral do Ultramar, 1954).

18 Armando Cândido, *Exaltação de Bento de Gois* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1962).

19 George Bishop, *In Search of Cathay: The Travels of Bento de Goës, S.J., 1562–1607* (Anand, Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1998).

20 Hui-Hung Chen, “de Goës, Bento, SJ (1562–1607),” in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits*, general editor Thomas Worcester, associate editors Megan C. Armstrong, James Corkery, Alison Fleming, Andrés Ignacio Prieto (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 338–339.

21 Vincent Cronin, *The Wise Man From the West* (New York: Image Books, 1957).

22 Henri Hosten, “Some Notes on Bro. Bento de Goes, S. J. (1583–d. 1607),” *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 23 (1927): 137–140.

23 John Correia-Afonso, Nancy M. Gettelman, “Goës (Góis), Bento de,” in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús: biográfico – temático*, ed. Charles E. O’Neill, Joaquín M. Domínguez, vol. II: Costa Rossetti – Industrias (Madrid; Roma: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Institutum Historicum, 2001), 1765–1766.

24 “Goes, Benoit,” in *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, ed. Carlos Sommervogel, nouvelle édition, part I: *Bibliographie* (par Augustin et Aloys de Backer), part II: *Histoire* (par Auguste Carayon), vol. 3: *Desjacques–Gzowski* (Brussels: Oscar Schepens; Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1892), 1529–1530.

25 John W. Witek, “Goes, Bento de,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, assistant editor Robert T. Coote (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 246–247.

Biography of Bento de Goës

Bento de Goës was born at the end of July 1562 in Vila Franca do Campo on the island of São Miguel in the Azores archipelago and was baptised on 9 August 1562.²⁶ At around twenty years of age, shortly after travelling to India in 1583, he entered colonial service as a soldier. After a turbulent period of life, he underwent a sudden moral and spiritual transformation and, abandoning his former way of life, requested admission to the Society of Jesus. According to both historical sources and hagiographical tradition, Bento de Goës led, for a time, a life not befitting a Jesuit brother, until – as legend has it – in 1583 he experienced a religious vision in a church in the village of Colachel, in the Travancore region (southern India).²⁷ This event reportedly prompted his decision to join the Society of Jesus, which formally took place in February 1584 at the Jesuit College in Goa, then the principal point of departure for missionary expeditions to various regions of Asia. From there, Jesuits were sent to Agra and Delhi to the court of the Great Mughal, to Abyssinia, the Moluccas, and to China and Japan. After two years of study and religious formation, he temporarily left the college and travelled to Hormuz. In 1588 he returned to Goa, continued his formation, and adopted the Jesuit name Bento de Goës.²⁸ Dunin Szpot refers to Bento de Goës as a *temporal coadjutor*, that is, a lay brother.²⁹ What distinguishes brothers in the Society of Jesus is that they commit themselves to service without pursuing priestly ordination. Similar to spiritual coadjutors, they also do not take the solemn fourth vow of obedience related to mission.³⁰ On

26 A hypothesis concerning Bento de Goës's original surname, which was allegedly *Luis Gonçalves*, emerged through the work of José de Torres. This claim was based on, among others, a baptismal record from 1562 in Vila Franca do Campo. However, the absence of confirmation of this identification in Jesuit sources, together with the silence of contemporary authors, weakens the credibility of this hypothesis, and an examination of parish registers has failed to yield conclusive evidence. See José de Torres, *Bento de Góes, pequenos quadros românticos* (Ponta Delgada: Instituto Cultural de Ponta, 1851).

27 Hosten, "Some Notes on Bro. Bento de Goes," 138–140.

28 Luther Carrington Goodrich, "Bento de Goës," in *Dictionary of Ming biography, 1368–1644*, eds. Luther Carrington Goodrich, Zhaoying Fang, vol. 1 (New York–London: Columbia University Press, 1976), 472–473.

29 Jap. Sin. 102, ff. 150r.

30 Temporal coadjutors, more commonly known as brothers, are Jesuits who participate in the mission of the Society of Jesus. Cf. Jonathan Stott, "Brothers," in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits*, gen. ed. Thomas Worcester, assoc. eds. Megan C. Armstrong, James Corkery, SJ, Alison Fleming, and Andrés Ignacio Prieto, and asst. ed. Henry Shea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120.

several occasions Goës was encouraged to undertake theological studies with a view to priesthood, but out of humility he consistently refused.³¹ In 1594, he was assigned to the third Jesuit diplomatic-missionary mission to the Mughal Empire, led by Jerónimo Xavier, the nephew of St. Francis Xavier.³² The purpose of the expedition was to reach the court of Emperor Akbar the Great in Lahore, where Bento de Goës arrived on 5 May 1595 and gained the favour and trust of the ruler³³. By 1598 he was already residing at the Mughal court in Lahore, and in 1601 Akbar entrusted him with a diplomatic mission to Goa. Although Goës was not a man of formal education, his familiarity with the Mughal court and Kashmir, his proficiency in Persian, and his exceptional prudence and practical abilities led to his being entrusted with the mission to search for Cathay.³⁴ By early 1602 he had already returned to Agra, where he prepared for the expedition on which he set out on 29 October 1602.³⁵

Cathay, Cina, Sinica, Serica and European travels to East Asia before the sixteenth century

To properly understand Bento de Goës's activity in Asia, it is necessary to situate it within the broader context of Portuguese expansion and early modern geographical knowledge. From the late fifteenth century, Portuguese maritime exploration, culminating in Vasco da Gama's voyage to India in 1498, opened direct sea routes between Europe and Asia and gradually extended toward China. Key strategic bases, including Goa and Malacca, facilitated further expansion, and by the mid-sixteenth century the Portuguese had established a permanent presence in Macau (1557),

31 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 7.

32 Akbar invited the Jesuits to his court on three occasions: the first mission lasted from 1580 to 1583, the second took place in 1591, and the third began in 1594, initiating a longer Jesuit presence at the Mughal court. The purpose of these invitations was to gain knowledge of Christian doctrine through religious disputations and the reading of books, although Akbar's motivations also had a clearly political dimension. See Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, "Akbar the Great (1542–1605) and Christianity: Between Religion and Politics," *Orientalia Christiana Cracoviensia* 3 (2011): 75–89.

33 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 10–11.

34 Correia-Afonso, Gettelman, "Goës (Góis), Bento de," 1765.

35 Ricci, as well as many scholars who rely on his account, gives the incorrect date of 6 January 1603. See: *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 2, 396.

thereby creating a new framework for contacts between Europe and the Ming Empire.³⁶

The discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco da Gama revolutionised maritime transport, yet the journey from Lisbon to Goa – and onward to Macau and Japan – remained long, dangerous, and highly dependent on seasonal winds. Initially, Portuguese ships sailed along the African coast, keeping close to land, but over time, with improved knowledge of Atlantic currents and wind patterns, they began to venture westward, leading to the accidental discovery of Brazil by Pedro Álvares Cabral. The voyage to Goa usually lasted five to seven months, and since ships departing Portugal in spring typically reached India in autumn, it was not possible to safely continue on to Macau. Travellers therefore had to wait until the following spring for favourable winds. As a result, the journey from Lisbon to Macau took approximately two years, and to Japan as long as three.³⁷



Map no. 1. The map illustrates the principal route of the Portuguese maritime network linking Lisbon with India and China in the early modern period. Its design is inspired by maps created by Jerzy Paszenda SJ for the Polish edition of Felix Alfred Plattner's *Jesuiten zur See*. Author: Piotr Bukański (Ignatianum University in Krakow, 2026).

36 The literature on this subject is extensive and multifaceted; therefore, there is no need to review it in detail here. I confine myself to indicating selected works of a reference nature, see Charles Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire: 1415–1825* (New York: Knopf, 1969); Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (New York: Longman, 1993).

37 Plattner, *Jesuits Go East*, 49, 56, 60–61.

In light of these logistical difficulties, contemporaries considered whether it might be possible at least to shorten the journey by travelling overland from India to China. Yet this proved difficult because geographical knowledge remained limited. Early modern understanding of Asia still relied largely on Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia*, which described China as a vast region known under two names: Serica and Sinae. The first, Serica (Greek *Σηρική*, "the land of silk"), inhabited by the Seres (Greek *Σήρες*, "the people of silk"), was reached by land via the Silk Road. Sinae (or Qin/Sin), derived from the name of the first imperial dynasty in Chinese history – the powerful but short-lived Qin dynasty (221–206) – was accessed by sea and located at the eastern extremity of the inhabited world, south of Serica.³⁸ In the thirteenth century a third designation, Cathay, appeared in European sources, though its relationship to Serica and Sinae remained unclear. This uncertainty was further reinforced by reports of Nestorian Christian communities in Central Asia and China and by the medieval legend of Prester John, believed to rule a Christian realm somewhere beyond the Islamic world in Asia.

Latin Europe developed a sustained interest in Central and East Asia in the thirteenth century, following the expansion of the Mongol Empire across Eurasia.³⁹ This expansion brought both military confrontation with Europe and new opportunities for contact, leading to diplomatic missions such as that of John of Pian di Carpine (1245–1247) and later journeys by William of Rubruck. At the same time, merchants from Italian city-states travelled to China via Central Asia under the conditions of the Pax Mongolica.⁴⁰ After Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty (1271) and moved the imperial capital to Khanbaliq (Peking), Europe gained more detailed knowledge of Asia through travellers such as Marco Polo. His account, along with later commercial manuals such as Pegolotti's *Pratica della Mercatura*, provided important information about routes to Cathay and its capital.⁴¹

38 Samuel N. C. Lieu, "From Qin (Ch'in) to Cathay: Names for China and the Chinese on the Silk Road," *The Medieval History Journal* 27/1 (2024): 20–21.

39 The literature on this topic is substantial, and there is no need to cite it here. Reference is instead made to monographic studies addressing this broad issue; see, for example, the works of Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London–New York: Routledge, 2018).

40 Rachewiltz, 84–124.

41 Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936), 21–23, 41.

Missionaries were sent to China not only to convert non-Christians but also in response to reports – especially those by Marco Polo – of Christian communities in Cathay and the legend of Prester John. Identifying these locations became an important element of missionary strategy, aimed at locating the supposed “lost Christians” of Inner Asia.⁴² Accounts by travellers such as John of Pian di Carpine, William of Rubruck, and Odoric of Pordenone confirmed the presence of largely Nestorian communities, with whom Franciscans maintained contact. This led to the establishment of a Catholic presence in China, including the appointment of John of Montecorvino as Archbishop of Khanbaliq in 1307, which continued under Mongol patronage until the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368.⁴³

The name Cathay was unknown in Europe prior to the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, after which it came to denote the Mongol-controlled regions of northern China. Derived from the Khitan people, the term persisted in European geographical terminology long after their political decline. It remained widely used in late medieval and early modern Europe, appearing on maps such as the Catalan Atlas and Fra Mauro’s world map, and shaping the expectations of explorers like Christopher Columbus and John Cabot.⁴⁴ Knowledge of Cathay in late medieval Europe became increasingly fragmentary, based on sporadic reports such as those of Ruy González de Clavijo and Johann Schiltberger. Although some additional descriptions were provided by authors like Niccolò Conti and Josaphat Barbaro, these relied largely on second-hand information, allowing imagination to shape the image of this distant land. Clavijo’s account is particularly noteworthy: during his mission to Timur’s court (1403–1406), he encountered envoys of the Chinese emperor and referred to Cathay and its capital in terms reflecting contemporary geographical uncertainty. He further claimed that the ruler of Cathay had embraced Christianity, a statement indicative of contemporary European fantasies about a Christian East.⁴⁵ His words align with

42 Davor Antonucci, “Marco Polo nella letteratura missionaria dei secoli XVI–XIX,” in *Marco Polo. Storia e mito di un viaggio e di un libro*, a cura di Samuela Simion et Eugenio Burgio (Roma: Carocci editore S.p.A., 2024), 367–368.

43 Caesaris Baronii, *Annales ecclesiastici*, denuo excusi et ad nostra usque tempora perducti ab Augustino Theiner, vol. XXIII (1286–1312) (Parisii: apud Victorem Palmé, 1870), 403.

44 Karl A. Wittfogel, Feng Chia-Sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 36 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 2; Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1, 216.

45 Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, edición, introducción y notas de Francisco López Estrada (Madrid: Castalia, 1999), 261, 315.

the widespread belief in the existence of a powerful Christian ruler in the East – the legendary Prester John – who was thought to govern a vast empire, initially located in India and later in Mongolia, Ethiopia, or even in the Caucasus, as suggested in the testimony of the Dominican archbishop John III of Sultāniyya.⁴⁶

A new phase in relations with China began with the Portuguese navigators, whose search for a maritime route to India opened a new chapter in Eurasian contacts. After 1368, however, Christian presence in China declined under the Ming dynasty, and direct relations with Europe were interrupted for over a century. They were restored only in the early sixteenth century, although papal activity during this period was largely limited to symbolic measures, such as the appointment of John III of Sultāniyya as apostolic administrator of Khanbaliq in 1410.⁴⁷ Between 1514 and 1517, the Portuguese reached China by sea, and in 1557 established a permanent trading settlement in Macau. Their presence was initially met with suspicion and hostility, which gradually diminished with the arrival of the Jesuits. Through a strategy of cultural accommodation, the Jesuits adapted Christian teaching to Chinese intellectual traditions, gaining both converts and broader acceptance. At first, Europeans in China did not associate familiar place names such as Peking or Canton with those found in medieval sources. Only deeper inland exploration led to the identification of China with Cathay. In 1596, Matteo Ricci formulated the thesis that the two were identical, a view he confirmed after settling in Peking in 1598 and subsequently communicated to Europe and India.⁴⁸ At the same time, reports reaching the Jesuits in India – particularly from Jerónimo Xavier in Lahore – described Cathay as a powerful empire with a large urban network and a significant Christian population, reinforcing the urgency of resolving the Cathay–China question.⁴⁹

46 Łukasz Burkiewicz, “The visit of the Dominican John III of Sultāniyya, bischofe von Persya, an envoy of Tīmūr and Mīrān Shāh to the Teutonic court in 1407,” *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 31/4 (2025), 83–126.

47 Raymond Loenertz, “Eveques dominicains des deux Armenies,” *Archivium Fratrum Praedicatorum* 10 (1940): 267–268.

48 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 6.

49 Jarric, *L'histoire*, vol. 2, 576–578.

The expedition of Bento de Goës to China in the account of Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot

In recent years, several studies have been devoted to the life and scholarly output of the Polish Jesuit Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot SJ, examining in detail both his biography and the structure and significance of his works preserved in the Roman Archive of the Society of Jesus.⁵⁰ Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot was born in 1644 or 1645 in Podlasie, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and entered the Society of Jesus in Vilnius in 1664. After completing his philosophical and theological studies, as well as engaging in pedagogical work at several Jesuit colleges, including those in Vilnius, Warsaw, and Pińsk, he was ordained a priest and served as both a teacher and prefect of a college. In 1688 he was summoned to Rome, where from 1689 until the end of his life, for a period of twenty-four years, he served as a penitentiary at St. Peter's Basilica. In addition to his spiritual duties, the authorities of the Society entrusted him with the task of searching for and collecting materials in the Roman archives relating to the history and missions of the Jesuits in China, and subsequently of writing works on this subject. He died in 1713. His manuscripts constitute valuable and still insufficiently exploited sources for research on the history of Jesuit missions in China. Previous scholars studying the travels of Bento de Goës have not made use of the account of his journey preserved in one of the manuscripts of Dunin Szpot, held in the Roman Archive of the Society of Jesus. This work, *Historiae Sinarum Imperii, Pars II (Sina evangelica luce sub imperatoribus sinis illustrata), Liber 2*, contains a description of the evangelisation of the Middle Kingdom during the Ming dynasty (up to 1644).⁵¹

The narrative of Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot opens with the information that Matteo Ricci received a letter from Niccolò Pimenta SJ stating that Brother Bento de Goës had been sent in search of Cathay. The decision to undertake this mission arose from the conviction of

50 For a detailed biographical entry on Dunin Szpot, cf. Łukasz Burkiewicz, Andrzej Wadas, „Życie i dzieło Tomasza Ignacego Dunina Szpota SJ (1644–1713) oraz jego wkład w etnografię nowożytnych Chin”, *Perspektywy Kultury* 49/2 (2025): 337–358; Janusz Smołucha, Gościwit Malinowski, Andrzej Wadas, Łukasz Burkiewicz, “Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot, SJ,” in *Etnoznawcy. Portal wiedzy o dorobku polskiej etnografii*, ed. Katarzyna Ceklarz, Anna W. Brzezińska, Joanna Koźmińska, Damian Kasprzyk, et al., *etnoznawcy.pl*, 14 June 2025; Robert Danieluk, „Konfesor i pióro: Tomasz Ignacy Szpot Dunin, polski historyograf jezuickiej misji w Chinach”, in *Iesuitae in Polonia – Poloni Iesuitae. Piśmiennictwo łacińskie czasów nowożytnych*, ed. Jarosław Nowaszczuk (Szczecin: “Volumina.pl”, 2017), 75–108.

51 Jap. Sin. 102, ff. 149v–151v.

Jesuits stationed in Agra – based on reports from Muslim informants – that numerous Christians lived in Cathay. Ricci, however, repeatedly explained that Cathay was nothing other than China and that the names Cathay and Cambalu were merely older designations that had remained in use. Despite these explanations, as Dunin Szpot emphasised, zeal in bringing aid to the supposed Christians led many to place greater trust in rumours than in Ricci's arguments.⁵²

As Dunin Szpot describes, the expedition was to be undertaken with the consent of the king of Portugal and at his expense in January 1603. There was no doubt regarding his integrity and generosity, and it was expected that he would successfully accomplish the mission entrusted to him and bring it to a favourable conclusion. Disguised as a merchant and travelling in the company of traders, he embarked on the journey with great courage. After six months of travel, however, he was abandoned in Kabul by his companions, who refused to proceed further. Of the entire group, only one companion remained with him: an Armenian named Isaac, who had been assigned to accompany Bento de Goës by Akbar the Great himself. After traversing steep mountain passes, snow-covered valleys, and dense, impenetrable forests, Bento de Goës reached Yarkand, the capital of the Kingdom of Kashgar, where he was compelled to remain for a year. A group of merchants he had joined earlier in Lahore – numbering 450 armed men – refused to continue beyond the borders of Kashgar because Tatar brigands controlled the routes. In Yarkand, Bento adopted the Persian name Abdullah, meaning “servant of God”, to which he added a byname signifying “Christian”. Dunin Szpot emphasised that during his journey the Portuguese missionary endured extraordinary persecution at the hands of Muslims who, driven by deep hostility toward Christians, repeatedly attempted to take his life. Only divine protection, in which he placed complete trust, delivered him from these dangers. He was frequently invited by local rulers, most notably Muhammad Khan, the king of Kashgar, to engage in religious disputations with Muslim scholars. Although he did not succeed in converting them from the Qur'an, he compelled them to concede that Christian law was good. Attempts to persuade him to convert to Islam through flattery and promises were resolutely rejected, as he declared that he would sooner give his life than renounce Christ.⁵³

52 *Ibidem*, ff. 149v-150r.

53 *Ibidem*, f. 150r.



Fig. 1. Bento de Goës during his journey through the remote regions of Central Asia. Author: Andrzej Zaręba (Ignatianum University in Krakow, 2025).

After leaving Yarkand, Bento arrived in the city of Chalis, ruled by the son of the king of Kashgar. There, in the presence of the prince, he again debated scholars of the Qur'an and defended Christian doctrine so effectively that the prince openly acknowledged the force of his arguments. As Dunin Szpot noted, however, hostile scholars soon began plotting against his life, which forced him to remain in the city for three months.⁵⁴ Upon his departure from Chalis, the benevolent prince issued letters of safe conduct guaranteeing him secure passage to Camus, the last city of the Kingdom of Kashgar on the route to Cathay. At Bento de Goës's explicit request, the name Abdullah retained the addition *Isai* ("Christian"). An elderly cleric present on this occasion, moved by his courage, placed his cap on the ground and, through tears, exclaimed that Bento de Goës was "a man who keeps the faith", since he had openly confessed it among his enemies. He then rendered him the highest marks of respect. Equipped with letters of safe conduct, Bento de Goës left the caravan and continued his journey with the faithful Armenian Isaac, torn between sorrow

54 *Ibidem*, ff. 150r-150v.

at discovering that the sought-after Cathay was in fact China and joy at the thought of meeting Father Matteo Ricci.⁵⁵

At this time, Matteo Ricci already knew from envoys of Muslim rulers that Bento de Goës had reached the vicinity of the Great Wall of China. These envoys, preparing to return from Peking to their homelands, provided Ricci with a detailed description of the traveller; in particular, the envoy of the king of Kashgar also mentioned the gifts Bento de Goës had presented to the ruler. Deeply moved by this news, Ricci anxiously awaited confirmation that his confrere had entered Chinese territory. Meanwhile, after five months of travel from Chalis, Bento de Goës reached the settlement of Chaicuon at the foot of the Great Wall, where he waited twenty days for permission from the governor of Shaanxi Province to cross the border. Once permission was granted, he reached the city of Suzhou after a single day's journey. There he was assigned a place of residence and forbidden to travel further into the country. This occurred at the end of 1605, less than three years after his departure from Agra. From Suzhou, Bento de Goës wrote a letter to Father Matteo Ricci and sent it to Peking.⁵⁶

Because the letter was written in European script and addressed to “Fr. Matteo Ricci” – a name unknown in Peking and throughout China, where he was known as “Li Mateu” – the messenger did not know to whom it should be delivered. At the same time, numerous merchants and embassies from Muslim rulers arrived in Peking bearing tribute for the Chinese emperor. When Ricci questioned them about Bento, it emerged that many knew him, yet were unable to provide information, as the name “Bento” meant nothing to them; they knew him exclusively as “Abdullah Isai”. Greater success followed with a second letter, sent three months later by a converted Muslim. He kept his promise and, despite the hardships of a winter journey from Shaanxi to Peking, delivered the letter to Ricci in November 1606.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, in Suzhou, Bento de Goës – exhausted by the hardships of travel, material deprivation, and spiritual suffering, and likely further weakened by poison administered by Muslims – was approaching the end of his life. After receiving his letter and obtaining permission from the Tribunal of Rites (*Tribunal Rituum*), on 11 December 1606 Matteo Ricci dispatched João Fernandes. Fernandes, a novice of the Society of Jesus born in China, was supplied with funds and letters of recommendation.

55 *Ibidem*, f. 150v.

56 *Ibidem*.

57 *Ibidem*, ff. 150v-151r.

He was accompanied by a Christian familiar with the region who, upon reaching Xi'an, stole half the money and fled, leaving Fernandes alone. The missionary nevertheless continued his journey and arrived in Suzhou at the end of March 1607, almost entirely without means of support.⁵⁸

On the eve of Fernandes's arrival, Bento de Goës dreamed that someone had been sent from Peking to seek him. The following morning he sent his faithful companion, the Armenian Isaac, to look around the market. When Isaac learned that a traveller from the capital had arrived, Bento awaited the visitor with joy. The meeting with João Fernandes – who spoke his native Portuguese, having been born in Macau, and conveyed greetings from Ricci – filled him with profound emotion. With tears in his eyes, he raised his hands to heaven and said: “Now, Lord, you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word...”. Despite his best efforts, João Fernandes was unable to provide the sick man with adequate care: the city lacked Chinese physicians and medicines, and the Muslim doctors who had previously poisoned him inspired no trust. Eleven days after the envoy's arrival, Bento de Goës died, retaining a reputation for extraordinary virtue, such that even Muslims referred to him as “a saint according to the Christian law”.⁵⁹

After Bento de Goës's death, Muslims divided his possessions and burned his manuscripts, including his travel diary, which contained a detailed account of the expedition, as well as records written in Persian documenting their obligations to him; these were destroyed in order to eliminate evidence. Attempting to bury his body in their own cemetery, they sought to retain it, but João Fernandes and Isaac managed to recover it, place it in a wooden coffin, and bury it elsewhere. Subsequently, the Muslims began to persecute them, attempting to enslave Isaac and threatening João Fernandes over demands for the return of Bento de Goës's belongings. They ultimately resolved to eliminate them and, unable to do so themselves, bribed a corrupt governor, who ordered both men imprisoned.⁶⁰

João Fernandes spent four or five months in prison. Despite the hostility of the corrupt governor and the Muslim community, he maintained dignity and perseverance, which enabled him to secure freedom for himself and Isaac and to recover part of the property that had earlier been concealed. Borrowing money from a friend, he set out on the return journey and reached Peking at the end of October 1607. When Isaac

58 *Ibidem*, f. 151r.

59 *Ibidem*.

60 *Ibidem*.

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regained his strength, Matteo Ricci provided him with funds for travel to the Mughal Empire. From Macau he proceeded to Goa and then to Agra, where he rejoined his community as an eyewitness to events that definitively confirmed that the sought-after Cathay and China were one and the same country.⁶¹

In Dunin Szpot's account, the expedition of Bento de Goës emerges as a heroic testimony of faith and perseverance which – despite persecution, betrayal, and the missionary's ultimate death – led to the unequivocal confirmation that Cathay and China were the same country. Combining the missionary dimension with a dramatic narrative of travel and near-martyrdom, as Dunin Szpot presents it, this account situates Goës's fate within the broader history of the providential development of Jesuit missions in the Middle Kingdom.

Comparison of the accounts of Fernão Guerreiro and Matteo Ricci with that of Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot SJ

The account of Tomasz Ignacy Dunin Szpot concerning the journey of Bento de Goës should be considered alongside the two previously known sources on this expedition, namely, the accounts of Fernão Guerreiro and Matteo Ricci. Neither Dunin Szpot nor Guerreiro ever travelled to Asia, and both functioned as editors and compilers of materials sent to Europe from Jesuit missions. Guerreiro based his work on two sources:

1. Letters sent by Goës during his journey from Lahore to Yarkand and during his stay in that city.⁶²
2. A report by Ricci, prepared at the end of 1607 in two copies: the first was sent to the Provincial of India, with instructions to

61 *Ibidem*, f. 151v.

62 Letters of Goës: 1. Letter written from Lahore on 30 December 1602 to the Vice-Provincial of Goa Nuno Rodrigues SJ (1539–1604) concerning his departure for Cathay. 2. Another letter, written in Lahore on 24 February 1603, addressed to Jerónimo Xavier. 3. Letter written before 30 March 1603 (undated), sent from the route between Lahore and Yarkand to Manuel Pinheiro SJ (in response to correspondence received from him). 4. Letter written from Yarkand on 2 February 1604 to Jerónimo Xavier. See *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, trans. Payne; for English translations of the first three letters, see pp. 129–131, 131–133, and 133–134; for a more extensive discussion of the fourth, see 135–149; for bibliographical information on the letters, see: Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 1529–1530.

Cornelius Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603–1721*, with map and illustrations (Hauge: Martinus Nijhoff, 1924), 2.

forward it via Portugal to the Superior General of the Society in Rome; and the second was likewise sent to Rome via the Vice-Provincial of Japan and then through New Spain, that is, along the Manila route linking the Philippines with Spanish America (in both cases, the original has not survived).⁶³

Ricci refers to the existence of this report in letters sent from Peking to Rome: first in a letter addressed to Girolamo Costa SJ, dated 8 March 1608⁶⁴; then in another letter of the same date addressed to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva⁶⁵; and finally in a letter of 22 August 1608, also addressed to Acquaviva.⁶⁶ In this correspondence, Ricci reports that he had prepared, in Portuguese (with the intention of translating it into Italian upon its arrival in Europe), a detailed account of Goës's entire expedition and the circumstances of his death. This account was then sent to Jesuit superiors by two communication routes, indicating that at least two copies of the report existed. It constituted one of the most important sources on Goës's expedition, as it was written immediately after the events described, when memory of them was still fresh.⁶⁷

Matteo Ricci, however, based his account primarily on the surviving fragments of Goës's journal and on the oral testimony of the Armenian Isaac. All indications suggest that Ricci was unfamiliar with the letters of Goës used by Fernão Guerreiro. Moreover, it appears that the surviving fragments of the journal, recovered from Muslims in Suzhou, concerned mainly the final stage of the expedition, which further shaped the character of his narrative. As a result, Ricci was able to describe the last part of the journey in much greater detail, whereas he presented its earlier stages more concisely, relying exclusively on Isaac's unreliable memory, which proved less useful the further back it extended. Guerreiro, for his part, did not yet have access to Ricci's later *Commentarii* (completed in 1610 and published in 1611) and most likely relied on Ricci's earlier, now lost report of around 1607, supplementing it with four of Goës's letters. Consequently, Guerreiro's account of the Lahore – Yarkand section is considerably more detailed, whereas the part concerning the route from

63 Charles Herbert Payne, "Introduction," in *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, xxv.

64 Matteo Ricci, *Lettere (1580–1609)*, ed. Piero Corradini, a cura di Francesco D'Arelli, prefazione di Filippo Mignini, con un saggio di Sergio Bozzola (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001), 461–463, lettera 48 (Peking, 6 March 1608).

65 *Ibidem*, 473–480, lettera 49 (Peking, 6 March 1608).

66 *Ibidem*, 482–485, lettera 50 (Peking, 22 August 1608).

67 *Ibidem*, 485.

Yarkand to Suzhou, based on Ricci's report, is markedly more concise in character.⁶⁸

Matteo Ricci's account of the causes and circumstances surrounding the dispatch of Bento de Goës's expedition is, in its essential points, very close to the description presented by Dunin Szpot, although significantly more detailed.⁶⁹ On the basis of a broader body of sources, it is known that after leaving Agra on 29 October 1602, Goës reached Lahore on 8 December 1602.⁷⁰ Ricci, however, gives the date of departure as 6 January 1603, which is a piece of information repeated by Dunin Szpot, who more generally indicates January 1603 as the moment of departure for Cathay. This clearly suggests that neither Dunin Szpot nor Ricci was familiar with the content of the letters sent by Goës during his journey.⁷¹ Given the scope of the present study, further discussion will be limited to an outline of the route taken by Goës. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first concerns the journey from Lahore to Yarkand, while the second covers the stay in Yarkand and the subsequent route from that city to Suzhou, where Goës died.

The analysis may therefore begin with an outline of the first stage of Goës's journey. It led from Lahore towards Kashgar, to which caravans departed only once a year. This departure did not occur earlier than 24 February 1603 and most likely took place toward the end of Lent in that year, that is, around 30 March.⁷² The subsequent route, leading through Athec (Attock) and the mountainous regions of Afghanistan to Kabul, was difficult and dangerous. It passed through Passaur (Peshawar) and Jalalabad, and travellers had to contend both with harsh conditions and with the threat posed by bands of robbers.⁷³ At this stage of the journey, Goës recorded information about the little-known population of the Kafirs inhabiting a region referred to by the Jesuit as Caferstam (Kafiristan). This mountainous area, located northeast of the Kabul valley between the Kunar River and the Hindu Kush range, was inhabited by a community that strongly guarded its independence. Surrounding Muslims referred to them as Kafirs ("infidels"), although they were more commonly known as the Siah-Posh, a name derived from the black colour of their clothing.⁷⁴

68 Payne, "Introduction," xxi–xxvi.

69 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 391–399.

70 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 14; *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 129–131.

71 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 401; Jap. Sin. 102, ff. 149v.

72 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 402, n. 3.

73 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 14.

74 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 403.

Goës's account most likely constitutes one of the earliest surviving references to the existence of this community of ancient origin.⁷⁵

After more than six months of travel, the caravan reached Kabul, where two of Goës's companions left the expedition, leaving him accompanied only by Isaac, mentioned earlier in connection with Dunin Szpot's account. The dangers encountered on the way discouraged many travellers from continuing, forcing those who remained to undertake an eight-month halt in order to replenish the significantly depleted ranks of the caravan.⁷⁶ After joining a new caravan bound for Central Asia, a more easterly route was chosen, which was more difficult but also more direct, across the Hindu Kush, most likely via the Parwan or Bajgah pass, leading through Charikar to Parwan, the most advanced frontier outpost of the Mughal Empire, where imperial authority was already largely nominal.⁷⁷ This crossing, regarded in the sources as particularly demanding, involved a complex system of smaller passes preceding the main section of the route.⁷⁸

The caravan then undertook a twenty-day crossing through the mountains to Aingaram, followed by a further fifteen-day march to the region of Calcia, whose inhabitants – according to Ricci, drawing on Goës's account – were fair-skinned and resembled Flemings.⁷⁹ The route continued through Gialalabath (possibly Aliabad on the Kunduz River) and the war-ravaged Talhan (Talikhhan), from where, via Badakhshan, the travellers reached Ciarciunar and then followed the upper course of the Amu Darya (Padsh) through a narrow and dangerous valley. Gradually ascending towards the Pamir highlands, the caravan reached Serpanil (Sir-i-Pamil), then crossed the region of Sarikol and the Ciecilalith pass (identified with Chichiklik), continuing along the Tangitar River and along a difficult river route to Jacorich (Yakka-arik), finally arriving in Yarkand in November 1603.⁸⁰

Ricci's account of time and distance is burdened with numerous inaccuracies, resulting from ambiguities in the manuscript and misinterpretations of the data; an example is the unrealistic duration he assigns to the journey from Attock to Peshawar. A comparative analysis with other

75 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 15.

76 *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 151.

77 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 405.

78 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 16.

79 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 406.

80 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 407–412; Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 16–24; *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 152.

sources, especially Goës's letters, allows for a partial correction of these errors and confirms that Goës kept more precise records of distances in his journal, noting, among other things, the traversal of 102 *kos* (corresponding to the same number of Italian miles).⁸¹

A comparison of Dunin Szpot's account with those of Ricci and Guerreiro reveals a clear reduction in topographical detail. Unlike them, he does not provide specific stages of the route or the names of intermediate localities, limiting himself to a general outline of the journey from Kabul to Yarkand. Whereas the accounts of Ricci and Guerreiro, especially those drawing on Goës's letters, enable the reconstruction of the course of the expedition, Dunin Szpot's description is synthetic and narrative in character, lacking geographical precision. He also makes no mention of Goës's eight-month stay in Kabul.

Turning now to the second part of Goës's journey, from Yarkand to Suzhou, it should be noted that his stay in Yarkand lasted approximately one year and unfolded in a tense atmosphere marked by religious disputes accompanying his appearances at the court of Muhammad Khan, ruler of Kashgar.⁸² At the same time, the dissolution of the earlier caravan and the specific organisation of trade required the formation of a new expedition under the formal authority of a representative appointed by the ruler of Kashgar. Caravans travelling to China functioned as tributary missions, constituting the only permissible means of crossing the imperial borders.⁸³ Due to the prolonged negotiations concerning the formation of a new caravan, Goës visited Khotan (Hotan), located in the oasis of the same name southeast of Yarkand. There, Bento de Goës granted a loan of 600 gold coins to the mother of the king of Khotan, who was also the sister of the ruler of Kashgar, after she encountered financial difficulties while returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca. In return, it was agreed that the sum would be repaid in stone from Khotan – known among the Chinese as *yu*, in antiquity as jasper, and in modern mineralogy as nephrite – long highly valued in the East, especially in China, where it was believed to possess special properties.⁸⁴ This was of considerable importance to Goës, as the stone constituted a valuable commodity in trade along routes leading to China.⁸⁵ Dunin Szpot does not mention Goës's stay in Khotan, but he does record the disputes conducted with

81 *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 133–134.

82 *Ibidem*, 152.

83 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 21–25.

84 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 414–416; Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 27.

85 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 26–27.

Muslims in Yarkand, including those held at the court of Muhammad Khan. Guerreiro, in turn, does not mention the visit to Khotan, limiting himself to a brief reference to Goës's encounter with the "Lady from Mecca"; nor does he record the disputes with Muslims during Goës's year-long stay in Yarkand.⁸⁶

Eventually, the caravan was formed, and Goës set out with it toward the kingdom of Chalis, located east of Kashgar, having obtained a safe-conduct permitting travel to that country while concealing the fact that his true destination was Cathay. He chose the northern route, leading through the oasis cities of Aksu, Kucha, Turfan, and Hami, from which he then crossed the desert and entered Chinese territory. Ricci provides a full list of the localities through which Goës travelled, although many of them are small settlements that cannot now be identified with certainty, even with the aid of detailed maps.⁸⁷

After twenty-five days, the caravan reached Aksu, where the young ruler, a cousin of the king of Kashgar, received Goës favourably after he had presented gifts. Following a fifteen-day stop caused by waiting for other members of the expedition and a series of official visits, the journey resumed. The caravan then proceeded to Kucha, where it remained for a month due to exhaustion and difficulties related to transport. Twenty-five days after leaving the oasis, and despite tensions with Muslim clerics, Goës reached Chalis, a small but well-fortified town situated on the main caravan route.⁸⁸ In Chalis, the reception by the Muslim ruler, a relative of the king of Kashgar, was initially unfavourable. However, the presentation of travel documents and gifts enabled Goës to continue his journey. During a nocturnal religious disputation attended by the ruler and Muslim scholars, Goës engaged in a theological debate, which concluded with the ruler acknowledging that Christians, too, were true believers, which was interpreted as a distant echo of earlier Nestorian communities in Central Asia.⁸⁹

86 *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 152–153.

87 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 421.

88 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 424–425; Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 34.

89 Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 35.



Fig. 2. Bento de Goës in Suzhou. Author: Andrzej Zaręba (Ignatianum University in Krakow, 2025).

Due to difficulties in assembling the caravan, Goës remained in Chalis for a further three months, after which he obtained permission to continue his journey independently. During this time, he encountered merchants from Cathay, who informed him of the presence of Jesuits in Peking, thereby strengthening his conviction that Cathay and China were one and the same state. He then travelled via Puccian, Turfan, and Hami, reaching the latter fortress on 17 October 1605, from where, after a short stop, he set out across the Gobi Desert.⁹⁰ After arriving at Jiayuguan (Chaicuon) and obtaining permission from the authorities of Gansu province, for which he waited twenty-five days, Goës reached Suzhou at the end of 1605.⁹¹ Travel along this section was particularly dangerous due to Tatar incursions and harsh climatic conditions.⁹² In Suzhou, Goës once again received confirmation of the presence of European missionaries in Peking. His first letter to Matteo Ricci did not reach its destination. Only a subsequent letter, sent in 1606, contained an account of the journey, emphasising its dangers and lack of commercial profitability, as well as a request for assistance in reaching the capital.

90 *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 154.

91 *Ibidem*, 155; Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 35–38.

92 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 426–427.



Map no. 2. The map illustrates the route of Bento de Goës in comparison with the journeys of Johann Grueber SJ (Peking to Smyrna, 1661–1663) and Niccolò Gianprijamo SJ (Peking to Moscow, 1721). Its design is inspired by maps created by Jerzy Paszenda SJ for the Polish edition of Felix Alfred Plattner's *Jesuiten zur See*. Author: Piotr Bukański (Ignatianum University in Krakow, 2026).

A comparison of this route with the account presented in Dunin Szpot's work reveals clear differences in the level of detail. The Polish Jesuit does not mention the numerous localities recorded by Ricci, limiting himself to a brief reference to the journey through Chalis and to the arrival at Chaicuon, where, according to his account, Goës waited twenty days for permission to enter China,⁹³ whereas Ricci gives a period of twenty-five days.⁹⁴ Dunin Szpot's narrative is clearly synthetic in character and offers limited possibilities for reconstructing the route, identifying locations, or analysing topographical details. The final stage of Goës's expedition, however, is described by Dunin Szpot in greater detail and shows close agreement with Ricci's account, containing the largest number of elements consistent with the Italian Jesuit's narrative. For this reason, I do not repeat here those passages that have already been discussed in the earlier analysis of the Polish Jesuit's account.

93 Jap. Sin. 102, f. 150v.

94 *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 3, 428.

In this context, the limited topographical precision of Dunin Szpot's account should not be interpreted as a weakness of the source. On the contrary, it reflects a different narrative intention. Unlike Ricci and Guerreiro, whose accounts allow for the reconstruction of the route, Dunin Szpot did not aim to provide a detailed geographical description. His narrative emphasises above all the spiritual dimension of the expedition, presenting it as a testimony to perseverance, missionary zeal, and the hardships associated with evangelisation in Asia. Consequently, Goës's journey appears not so much as a geographical endeavour but rather as an *exemplum* of missionary endurance, shaped in accordance with the broader aims of Jesuit historiography. In this light, the particular character of Dunin Szpot's work as a whole can also be explained: it was not intended as a precise geographical account, but as part of a narrative highlighting the meaning and significance of Jesuit missionary activity.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Dunin Szpot's account is factually less detailed than those of Ricci and Guerreiro. In its description of the route and distances covered, it remains clearly limited and is decidedly less precise than the narratives of both these authors. It also reproduces the chronological errors present in Ricci's account, suggesting that Dunin Szpot drew on his work, most likely the short report sent from China at the end of 1607. This is further confirmed by the similarly limited range of information concerning the route from Yarkand to Suzhou, also visible in Guerreiro's account. Consequently, the section devoted to Goës's expedition in Dunin Szpot's work constitutes – after Guerreiro's account – a secondary testimony to the original form of Ricci's narrative of this journey. In the present study, a different dating has also been proposed from that adopted by most scholars. Whereas the majority following Ricci, identify 1603 as the beginning of the expedition, I propose instead the year 1602, when Bento de Goës left Agra in October, toward Lahore and further north.

Goës, who died on 11 April 1607 in Suzhou at the age of 45, belonged to the group of Western missionaries who succumbed to illness at a relatively young age after entering China.⁹⁵ He was also the first European

95 Many Western missionaries died of illness at a young age after arriving in China. See: Tang Kaijian, *Setting Off from Macau. Essays on Jesuit History during the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, Jesuit Studies vol. 5 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2016), 81, n. 166.

to traverse Central Asia overland in a documented journey, overcoming some of the continent's most formidable geographical barriers, including the Pamir and Karakoram ranges. His expedition is considered by many scholars to be one of the most significant exploratory achievements of the early modern period, comparable in difficulty and importance to Marco Polo's thirteenth-century journey. Unlike Marco Polo, however, Goës traveled through territories that were far more politically fragmented and often controlled by Muslim authorities hostile to Christians. He was also the first traveler since the Venetian to attempt to connect the routes linking South Asia with China overland – a feat he accomplished at the beginning of the seventeenth century, nearly three hundred years after Polo's journey. Notably, a comparable expedition would not occur until the nineteenth century, despite later travelers having access to more advanced navigational tools and survival resources. Despite the significance of his journey, Bento de Goës remains a relatively underappreciated figure in historiography, including Portuguese historiography, particularly in the context of narratives about the Age of Discovery. This is evidenced, for example, by the absence of commemorative events in continental Portugal on the four-hundredth anniversary of his death (2007), with the only celebrations taking place in his hometown of Vila Franca do Campo in the Azores.⁹⁶

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⁹⁶ Since 1907, the main square in Vila Franca do Campo has been named after Bento de Goës, and in 1962 a bronze monument dedicated to this Jesuit explorer was unveiled on the square.

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Appendix

F. Benedicti Goës S. I. expeditio ad quaerendum Cataium⁹⁷

VIII. (1.) Haec dum agebantur in Provincia Quantum, Riccius accepit literas ex Indiis Orientalibus à P. Nicolao Pimenta nuncias expediti F. Benedicti Goës Lusitani ad quaerendum Cataium, de quo Patres Soc: Iesu, Agrae Metropli Mogoris in Apostolico munere residentes ab Impostoribus quibusdam Saracenis, non distinguuntibus quantum intersit inter Christianos et Idololatrās, didicerant, illud totum esse Christianum, aequè plenum Ecclesiis et Sacerdotibus ac Regna Europae. Monuerat bis tervè suis Epistolis Riccius Patres in Indiis [aparat: del. manentes et suprascriptum tes] manentes: Cataium idem esse cum Sina, nec aliud in Orbe inveniri Cataium et Cambalū praeter sex Provincias Septemtrionales Sinae et Pekinum; ita olim ab antiquis vocata: quae vocabula apud Persas, Mogores et alias gentes populosque Occidentales Sinis hucusque perennabant. Nihilominus nimium credulus

The expedition of Brother Bento de Góis of the Society of Jesus in search of Cathay

VIII. (1.) While these events were unfolding in the province of Guangdong, Ricci received a letter from the East Indies sent by Father Niccolò Pimenta, informing him that Brother Bento de Góis, a Lusitanian, had been sent on a mission to search for Cathay. The Jesuit Fathers engaged in missionary work in Agra, the capital of the Mughal Empire, had learned about him from certain Saracen impostors – who failed to distinguish between Christians and idolaters – that the entire region was Christian, full of churches and priests, just like the kingdoms of Europe. Ricci had warned the Fathers in India two or three times in his letters that Cathay was in fact the same as China, and that apart from the six northern provinces of China and Peking there is no other Cathay or Cambalu. These are the names once used by the ancients, and these terms remained in use among Persians, Mughals, and

97 Jap. Sin. 102, ff. 149v-151v.

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zelus iuvandi Christianos in Cataio plus fidei dedit [p. 150r] Mahometanis dicentibus quam Riccio scribenti.

other Western peoples down to the present day. Nonetheless, an overly eager zeal to assist the [150r] Christians in Cathay led many to place more faith in the words of Mohammedans than Ricci's words.

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Quare cum Regis Catholici consensu, expeditus fuit sumptibus Regiis à P. Nicolao Pimenta Anno 1603 in Ianuario Benedictus Goës Coadiutor temporalis Soc: Iesu, vir annorum ferè quadraginta, olim in seculo Regis Catholici magnanimus miles: de cuius vitae morumque integritate et magnitudine animi non ambigebatur, quin deducturus esset commissum sibi laborem, felici successu ad finem desideratum. Sumptâ itaque Benedictus specie Mercatoris, in comitatu et Societate plurium Mercatorum, magno animo agressus est illud iter, eodem animo prosecuturus illud usque ad murum magnum Sinarum; nisi post exactos sex menses itineris à suis comitibus, ultra prosequi suum iter nolentibus, in Cabul Civitate [aparat: deletae tres suprascriptae litterae] desertus fuisset.

In the year of Our Lord 1606, the 34th year of the Wanli reign

Accordingly, with the approval of the Catholic king and at royal expense, Father Niccolò Pimenta dispatched Bento de Góis in January 1603. He was a Temporal Coadjutor in the Society of Jesus, around forty years old, and as a laymen he was formerly a valiant soldier in the service of the Catholic king. Regarding his moral integrity and magnanimity there was no doubt that he would carry out his mission successfully and bring it to its desired conclusion. Disguised as a merchant and traveling with a company of fellow traders, Bento set out on his journey with great courage, and he would have continued in this same spirit all the way to the Great Wall of China if, after six months of travel, he had not been abandoned in the city of Kabul by his companions, who refused to continue the journey any farther.

Pericula Benedicti et disputationes cum Mahometanis in Itinere versus Cataium

Ex tot Sociis solus ipsi comes ulterioris viae remansit Isaac Armenus quidam [aparat: p.c. quidam], qui cum Agrae coniugem liberisque haberet, et iussu Achabar Regis Mogorum socius itineris ipsi assignatus esset, fidelissimè illi, omnium periculorum eius et laborum particeps, usque ad extremum servivit. Cum hoc ex montium asperitatibus, vallium nivibus, et silvarum difficultatibus eluctatus, pervenit in Iarcan metropolim Regni Cascar, et ibidem coactus fuit unum annum morari; quòd societas Negotiatorum, cui se coniunxerat proficiscenti ex Civitate Lahor Mogorum, ultra fines regni Cascar, quantumvis numeraret suos quadringentos quinquaginta viros armatos, noluerit iter suum prosequi, ob Tartarorum maiori numero itinera obsidentium latrocinia. Assumpsit ille

The perils faced by Bento and his debates with Mohammedans on the journey to Cathay

Of all his companions, only one remained on the road ahead – a certain Armenian named Isaac. This man, who had a wife and children in Agra and had been assigned to accompany Bento by order of the Mughal emperor Akbar, served him faithfully to the end, sharing all his dangers and hardships. After struggling his way across steep mountains, snow-covered valleys, and dense, impassable forests, Bento reached Yarkand, the capital of the kingdom of Kashgar. There, he was compelled to remain for a year. The merchant group he had joined in Lahore – numbering 450 armed men – refused to proceed beyond the borders of Kashgar due to Tatar bandits, who, being more numerous, controlled the roads. He adopted the Persian name Abdullah, meaning “servant of God”, to which he added a Persian

sibi Nomen Persicum Abdulah, significans Mancipium Dei, eique addiderat cognomen, quod Christianum linguâ Persicâ dicebat: quibus cum facta ipsius responderent, mirum est, quantis persecutionibus ob eam causam involutus fuerit à Mahometanis in eo itinere; qui ex odio innato contra Christianos, saepiùs tentaverunt eum vitâ privare nisi Divina Protectio, in qua tota spes eius erat, ipsi in omnibus periculis praesto adfuisset. Non rarò à diversis Regibus et Principibus invitatus fuerat ad disputandum [p. 150v] de fide cum Mahometanis eorum sacrificulis, praesertim verò a Mahamedhan Rege Cascaris: cum quibus tanto spiritu disputando conflixit [aparatus: p.c. conflixit]; ut licet eorum obstinatum in suo Alcorano tendo voluntatem non perfrerit, confessionem tamen veritatis expresserit, Legem videlicet Christianam esse bonam: et ne hoc ipso viderentur esse victi, adiungerent: nec suam esse malam; beatamque fore, si Mahometes haberet tales suos praedicatores, et encomiastas, qualis ipse esset Christi. Et fuit unus audacior ex his sacrificulis, qui factò [aparatus: p.c. factò] consilio cum suis, ausus fuerat, precibus et promissis ingentibus, cum ratio deesset, illum interpellare ut Nomen Mahometo daret. Verum Benedictus, non ignarus, quid actum fuerit in eo Consilio, Subversorem incipientem loqui, ita confudit, ut statim obmutuerit, debueritque prae confusione recipere ad suos; qui aliud responsum dandum à Benedicto non expectabant, quam protestationem, malle se in minutissimas partes concidissine, quam Christum eiusque amorem deserere. Ex Iarcan profectus Benedictus venit in Urbem Chalis, cui praeerat Filius ex alio thoro Regis Cascaris; coram quo iterum ventum est ad conflictum cum Doctoribus Alcorani, quos ita argumentis pressit Benedictus, ut Princeps quidem approbaverit omnia, quaecunque ille disputando pro Lege Christi dixerat contra Mahometanam Sectam, Doctores autem impii insidiari eius vitae coeperint; ut idcirco tres menses in ea Civitate morari debuerit.

epithet meaning “Christian”. His conduct reflected the name, and he endured extraordinary persecution throughout the journey at the hands of Mohammedans. Driven by their deep-seated hatred of Christians, they repeatedly attempted to take his life. Only Divine protection, in which he placed all his trust, delivered him from these dangers. He was often invited by various kings and princes to engage in religious debate with Mohammedan clerics, especially by Muhammad Khan, the King of Kashgar. Bento argued with such fervour that, although he did not break their stubborn adherence to the Qur’an, he compelled them to admit that Christian law was good. To avoid appearing defeated, they would add that their own law was not bad either, and would be blessed if Muhammad had preachers and defenders like Bento was for Christ. One particularly bold cleric, after consulting with others, tried to persuade Bento to profess himself for Mohammed, using flattery and grand promises – having run out of arguments. But Bento, aware of the scheme, so utterly confounded the man at the outset of his speech that he fell silent and had to retreat to his colleagues dumbfounded. They awaited no other reply from Bento than his declaration that he would rather be torn to pieces than abandon Christ and His love. Departing from Yarkand, Bento arrived in the city of Chalis, ruled by a son of the king of Kashgar from another woman. There, once again he debated with scholars of the Qur’an in the prince’s presence and pressed them so effectively with arguments that the prince openly endorsed everything Bento said in defence of Christian doctrine against the sect of Muhammad. However, the impious scholars began plotting [150v] against his life, and Bento had to remain in the city for three months.

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Discedentem à Civitate Chali comitatus est ille humanus Princeps Literis suis patentibus ob securitatem in eo maximè periculoso itinere, usque ad Camus Civitatem ultimam Regni Cascar, versùs Cataium. In quibus dandis cum Princeps rogasset, An nomini ipsius Abdullah adiungendum esset Isai quod significat Christianum? affirmavit Benedictus, dixitque se cum his nominibus profectum esse Agrà Mogorum Metropoli, et velle ire in Cataium. Quo audito, quidam senex è sacrificulis adstantibus Principi obstupuit, et deposito suo in terram pileo, lacrymans exclamavit: O vere iste est Miserman, scilicet Observator suae Legis! Audistis confessionem, quà coram Nostro Principe in medio nostrì, quos scit esse non solum contrariae sed etiam inimicae suae Legi, religionis, declaravit se esse Christianum! Quid huic simile faceremus nos inter Christianos? negaremus forsitan, nos ne quidem cognoscere nostrum Mahometem? Hoc dicto, caput pileo cooperuit, magnisque demonstrationibus venerationis et reverentiae ad ritum nationis honoravit Benedictum. His literis munitus non amplius attendit Gões ad comitatum Mercatorum lentè se moventium. Solus cum suo Isaac Armeno commisit se itineri per viam duobus affectibus agitatus, uno maestitiae, quòd aliud Cataium non invenerit, quàm Sinam, quam in Urbe Chali didicerat vocari Cataium, altero laetitiae, quod tandem aliquando visurus et salutaturus esset P. Mattheum Riccium: verum alia, quam ille desiderabat circa illum fuit Divina dispositio.

In the year of Our Lord 1606, the 34th year of the Wanli reign

When he departed from Chalis, the friendly prince provided him with safe conduct letters for his security on the particularly perilous journey to the city of Camus, the last settlement in the kingdom of Kashgar on the route to Cathay. While issuing the letters, the prince asked whether the name Abdullah should be followed by 'Isai', meaning 'Christian'. Bento confirmed, saying that under these names he had left the Mughal capital of Agra and intended to proceed to Cathay. Upon hearing this, an elderly cleric standing near the prince was struck speechless. Placing his cap on the ground, he exclaimed through tears, "Indeed, this is a *Miserman* – a man who keeps his faith! You have heard his confession, declaring himself a Christian in the presence of our prince, here among us, knowing that we are not merely of a different religion, but enemies of his! Would we do the same among Christians? We might even deny that we know our Muhammad!" With these words, he replaced his cap and, in accordance with the customs of his people, honoured Bento with the highest signs of reverence and respect. Armed with these letters, de Góis no longer concerned himself with the slow-moving caravan of merchants. He set out on his own with his Armenian companion Isaac, torn between two emotions: sorrow at discovering that he would find no other Cathay than China, which he had learned at Chalis was called Cathay, and joy at the prospect of finally seeing and greeting Father Matteo Ricci. Yet Divine providence had something different in store for him than what he had hoped.

Benedictus Goës in Sina Cataium invenit

(2.) Iam Riccius intellexerat ex Oratoribus Mahometanorum Principum, Pekino reditum in suas Patrias parantium, qui minutim coram illo descriperant Benedictum, praesertim ille qui Regis Cascar fuit, qui etiam recensuit, quae ab illo munera Regi Cascar oblata fuerint, eum esse propius in itinere Muro magno Sinarum. Idcirco sollicitus erat, ut quam primum posset certior fieri de eius ingressu in Sinam. Interea Benedictus exactis in itinere à Civitate Chali ad Murum

Bento de Góis finds Cathay in China

(2.) Ricci had already learned from envoys of Mohammedan princes that Bento had reached the vicinity of the Great Wall of China during his journey. These envoys were preparing to return from Peking to their homelands and had personally provided Ricci with detailed descriptions of Bento, especially the envoy from the King of Kashgar, who also described the gifts Bento had presented to the king. Ricci was therefore eager and anxious to receive confirmation of Bento's

Sinicum quinque mensibus venit ad Oppidum Chaicuon dictum ad murum magnum situm, in quo exspectavit diebus viginti facultatem intrandi à Prorege Provinciae Xensi. Quâ habita intravit in Sinam, et unius diei itinere pervenit ad Sucheu Urbem, quam ipsi Prorex assignaverat, vetito ulteriore [aparat: a.c. ulteriori] in Sinam progressu, ultimis diebus anni 1605 tertio scilicet anno nondum finito, ex quo commiserat se itineri Agrâ Mogorum. Scripserat ille Sucheo ad P. Riccium, quamprimum poterat, habere commoditatem, misitque literas Pekinum:

entry into China. Meanwhile, after a five-month journey from the city of Chalis to the Great Wall, Bento arrived at a settlement called Chaicuon, located at the Wall, where he waited twenty days for official permission from the governor of Shaanxi province to enter China. Once granted, he crossed into China and, after a one-day journey, reached the city of Suzhou, which the governor designated for him and forbade him from traveling further inland. This occurred in the final days of 1605, with the third year since he had committed himself to the journey from Mughal Agra not quite concluded. From Suzhou, Bento wrote to Father Ricci as soon as he had the opportunity and sent the letter to Peking.

Ricci de illo sollicitudo

sed quia ea Epistola Europaeo Characterere exarata [aparat: p.c. exarata] fuit, et nomen, et nomen illi inscriptum P. Matthaei Riccii qui Pekini et per Sinam Li Mateu vocabatur, Pekini ignotum, qui eam Pekinum tulerat, nescivit ad quem spectaret. Sub idem tempus pervenerant Pekinum multi negotiatores cum suorum Principum Mahometanorum, ut illis mos est, Oratoribus, veluti Tributum Imperatori Sinarum ferentibus: ex quibus cum Riccius quaesivisset nuncium aliquod de Benedicto, licet plerique eum cognoscerent, nesciebant tamen dare rationem, quòd Benedicti nomen ipsis ignotum esset, sed Abdullah Isai duntaxat, quo nomine ille utebatur inter Mahometanos. Felicior fuit eius secunda Epistola, quam post tres menses suae habitationis in Sucheu Xensi Provinciae miserat per unum Mahometanum fugitivum melius instructum; qui in ea reddenda Riccio fidem suam quidem exolvit; sed tardiùs, idque in Novembri anni 1606, fuit ipsi reddita, propter moram, quam Mahometanus ille facere debuerat, in itinere brumali tempore ex Provincia Xensi Pekinum maximè impedito. [p. 151r]

Ricci's concern for Bento

However, because the letter was written in European script and addressed to “Fr. Matteo Ricci” – a name unknown in Peking and throughout China, where he was referred to as “Li Mateu” – the one who bore the letter to Peking did not know to whom it should be delivered. At the same time, many merchants arrived in Peking with, as was their custom, the envoys of Mohammedan rulers bearing tribute to the Chinese emperor. When Ricci inquired among them for any news of Bento, although many were familiar with him, they could provide no information because the name ‘Bento’ meant nothing to them – they only knew him as ‘Abdullah Isai’, the name he used among Mohammedans. Better fortune came with a second letter that Bento sent three months later, during his stay in Suzhou, via a better-informed Mohammedan convert. This man did indeed keep his word and delivered the letter to Ricci [151r], though it reached him late – in November 1606 – because of delays the messenger was forced to make during a particularly difficult winter journey from Shaanxi to Peking.

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Interim Benedictus in Sucheu consumptus tum laboribus et aerumnis itinerum, tum afflictione animi et necessitate, quibus dicitur accessisse venenum ipsi datum à Mahometanis ad finem vitae properabat.

Ioan: Fernandez missus à Riccio in Sucheu Provinciae Xensi ad illum

Habitâ hac illius epistola Riccius, quamprimum potuit obtinere facultatem à Tribunali Rituum, cum ea expeditiv Ioannem Fernandez natione Sinam tunc Tyronem Soc: Iesu die 11 Decembris anni 1606 instructum sufficienti pecuniâ ac literis tum suis, tum aliorum Patrum, et cum illo unum Christianum earum Regionum peritum, sed is nequam homo, ubi pervenit in Urbem Sigan Metropolitim Provinciae Xensi ablatâ furto pecuniâ mediâ Ioanni ampliùs non comparuit. Itaque solus Fernandez reliquum itineris in Sucheu [aparât: a.c. sucheu] Urbem conficere debuit, in quam ad finem Martii anni 1607 pervenit sine sufficienti provisione et necessitatibus Benedicti, et suo redditui Pekinum. Nocte quae praecesserat diem adventûs Ioannis Fernandez, Benedictus in somno vidit venisse unum in Urbem missum Pekino, qui illum quaereret; quod cùm crederet esse verum, manè misit suum fidelem Isaacum Armenum, qui eleēmosynam elargiretur pauperibus et in foro Urbis inquireret, utrum aliquis peregrè non venisset in Urbem? Quod cùm quidam Iuvenis Isaaco affirmasset, venisse scilicet unum è Regiâ, bonus nuncius fuit Benedicto, cui ipse supervenit Ioannes Fernandez. Ex eius aspectu, et affatu linguâ Lusitanâ, quam Fernandez callebat natus Macai, salutationeque, quam dedit à P. Riccio, Benedictus mirâ animi voluptate gestiens, obortis prae gaudio lacrymis, ac in caelum porrectis manibus, exclamavit: Nunc, inquires, dimittis servum tuum Domine secundum verbum tuum in pace etc. Verùm quanta ipsius fuit laetitia, tantum Fernandez [aparât: a.c. Fernandum] habuit animi maerorem, quod non potuerit ullum invenire remedium iuvandi Infirmi, praeter convenientem eius infirmitati cibum.

The year of Christ 1607, the 35th year of the Wanli reign

Meanwhile, Bento, weakened in Suzhou by both the physical hardships and suffering of the journey, and by spiritual affliction and deprivation – apparently worsened by poison administered to him by Mohammedans – was approaching the end of his life.

João Fernandes sent by Ricci to Suzhou in Shaanxi province

As soon as Ricci received Bento's letter and was able to obtain permission from the Tribunal of Rites, he sent João Fernandes – a Chinese-born novice of the Society of Jesus – on 11 December 1606, equipping him with sufficient funds and letters from himself and other Fathers. He also sent with him a Christian familiar with the region. However, when this vile man reached the city of Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, he stole half of Fernandes's money and disappeared. Thus Fernandes had to complete the rest of the journey to Suzhou on his own. He arrived there at the end of March 1607, lacking sufficient resources and the necessary supplies for Bento's care, as well as for his own return to Peking. The night before João Fernandes arrived, Bento dreamed that someone had entered the city, sent from Peking to find him. Believing the dream to be true, he sent his faithful Armenian companion Isaac the next morning to distribute alms to the poor and to inquire at the city market whether anyone had arrived from afar. When a young man confirmed to Isaac that someone had indeed arrived from the capital, Bento was overjoyed. Shortly afterward, João Fernandes appeared. Upon seeing him and at the sound of his native Lusitanian tongue – which Fernandes knew well, having been born in Macau – and then hearing Ricci's greeting, Bento was filled with spiritual delight. With tears of joy, he raised his hands to heaven and exclaimed: "Now, Lord, you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word..." Yet as great as Bento's joy was, so great was Fernandes's sorrow, for he was unable to find a means of helping the ailing man beyond providing food suited to his condition. In this city – seemingly inhabited mostly

Medici Sinae [aparatus: p.c. Sinae] in ea Urbe tota quasi habitata ab Exteris nulli, medicinae nullae. Mahometanis, inter quos inveniebantur et medici et medicamenta, non erat fidendum: ut qui iam ante prae odio Christianae Religionis dederant ipsi venenum, et tunc desiderabant eius mortem, ut in res, quas secum habebat, involarent, sicut postea fecerunt. Ita magis ac magis deficiendo viribus Benedictus ad diem [aparatus: p.c. diem] undecimum ex quo venerat Fernandez, Spiritum suum Deo reddidit, Religiosus consummatae virtutis, ob quam ipsi etiam Mahometani vocabant eum sanctum in Lege Christiana.

Mors Benedicti Goës, et acta Mahometanorum maligna

Post eius mortem Mahometani, quidquid habuit, inter se diripuerunt; scripta eius, et Diarium itineris, in quo singula, quae toto itinere occurrerant, notata fuerant, quod contineret debita eorum apud ipsum contracta, ne superesset memoria, ex qua convincerentur esse debitores, siquidem Persico idiomate conscriptum fuit, combusserunt: ipsumque Corpus voluerunt habere in suis manibus, et sepelire in suo, quod in ea Urbe habent Cemeterio. Vix Fernandez cum suo Isaaco illud potuit ab illis eripere, et inclusum Arcae lignae in loco separato dare sepulturae. Successerunt deinde ingentes ab illis illatae molestiae tum Isaaco, quem volebant in suam servitutem redigere, tum Ioanni Fernandez, quod requireret ab eis furto sublata post mortem Benedicti: ob quod utrumque morti destinaverant. Cum autem id non possent, effecerunt apud Gubernatorem Urbis, hominem venalem et iniquum, ut eos carceri addiceret, [p. 151v]

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In quo quatuor aut quinque menses detentus Ioannes, tandem et se, et Isaacum fremente iniquo Gubernatore cum suis Mahometanis, et res aliquas secum, quas Isaac ab oculis Mahometanorum absconderat, generose liberavit, ac demum accepta [aparatus: p.c. accepta] mutuò ab

by foreigners – there were no Chinese physicians or medicines. The Mohammedans, who did have physicians and remedies, were not to be trusted. Having previously poisoned Bento out of hatred for the Christian faith, they also now wished for his death so they could seize his belongings, which they eventually did. Thus, as his strength continued to fade, Bento surrendered his soul to God on the eleventh day after Fernandes's arrival. He was a religious man of exemplary virtue, for which reason even the Mohammedans referred to him as "a saint according to the Christian law".

The death of Bento de Góis and the misdeeds of the Mohammedans

After his death, the Mohammedans plundered all his possessions among themselves. They burned his writings and travel journal, which contained a full account of everything that had occurred during his journey. Because the journal recorded their debts to him – written in Persian – they destroyed it to eliminate any proof that could be used to hold them accountable as debtors. They also attempted to retain his body and bury it in their own cemetery in the city. Fernandes and Isaac barely succeeded in seizing the body from them, which they placed in a wooden coffin and buried in a separate location. Afterward, the Mohammedans began to harass them violently – attempting to enslave Isaac and threatening João Fernandes for demanding the return of Bento's belongings. They resolved therefore that both men should die. As they were unable to do this, they succeeded in bribing the city's corrupt and unjust governor, who had them imprisoned. [151v]

In the year of Our Lord 1607, the 35th year of the Wanli reign

João was held in prison for four or five months. Ultimately, despite the hostility of the corrupt governor and his Mohammedans, he managed – dignified and resolute – to secure the release of himself, Isaac, and certain belongings that Isaac had hidden from the eyes of the Mohammedans.

Bento de Goës SJ (1562–1607) and his journey from India to China...

amico pecuniâ pro reditu impendenda reversus fuit Pekinum ad finem Octobris Anni 1607. Inde Isaac restauratis viribus instructus rebus necessariis a P. Riccio ad iter faciendum in Mogor discessit Macaum, Macao Goam, et Goâ Agram Metropolim Mogoris redux ad suos, oculatus et suo impendio doctus testis [aparatus: sscr. testis], dubio, utrum Cataium esset Sina, finem imposuit.

At last, borrowing funds from a friend to finance the journey home, João returned to Peking at the end of October 1607. After regaining his strength, Isaac, provided by Father Ricci with the necessary supplies for the journey to the Mughal Empire, set out for Macau, from there to Goa, and finally to Agra, the Mughal capital. There, he rejoined his community as an eyewitness, bearing hard-earned knowledge that ended the dispute about whether Cathay was China.

