

Noël Golvers and Efthymios Nicolaidis, *Ferdinand Verbiest and Jesuit Science in 17th Century China: An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Constantinople Manuscript (1676)*, Athens, Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Leuven Chinese Studies; 19), 2009, 382 pp.

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The present book, a co-production by the well-known Leuven researcher and specialist Noël Golvers of the Verbiest-Stiching and the Greek scholar Efthymios Nicolaidis, presents the interesting results of two different types of researcher, namely of a Latinist and historian of Christian missions in China (Golvers), and an historian of science in the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires (Nicolaidis). They were supported by Nicole Halsberghe, an expert on Verbiest's scientific work, who added annotations to the scientific parts. The story behind the present book is the discovery of a text on the reformation of astronomy in China, written by the important Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁 (1623-1688), who was director of the Astronomical Bureau in Peking from 1669 until his death, constructor of the astronomical instruments still preserved at the old observatory in Beijing today, and tutor and *confidant* of the young Kangxi emperor 康熙 (r. 1662-1723).

The two previously unknown manuscripts by Verbiest under the title *Liber Organicus Astronomiae Europaeae apud Sinas Restitutae sub Imperatore Sino-Tartarico Cam Hy appellato Auctore P(atre) Ferdinando Verbiest* are related to his *Astronomia Europaea* and the *Mechanica*. They are preserved in the Metochion of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople, and were recently found by Nicolaidis. There are several items inside, namely the *Compendium Historicum De astronomia apud Sinas Restituta* (1676), the *Astronomiae apud Sinas Restitutae Mechanica Centum et Sex Figuris Adumbrata...*, a description of the drawings in Verbiest's Chinese book *Yixiang tu* 儀象圖,

and covering letters. The whole manuscript was copied in Moscow in 1693 by the Greek Chrysanthos Notaras, a nephew of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Dositheos (which belonged in Ottoman times to Constantinople). The *Liber organicus* consists of 57 folio sheets, ending with 57r. It is, and this was an astonishing discovery, a new version of an already known book by Verbiest, the *Astronomia Europaea sub Imperatore Tartaro-Sinico Câm Hy appellata ex umbra in lucem revocata*, which was published in Dillingen in 1687, and which describes the story of the successful work of the Jesuits at the Astronomical Bureau in Peking.<sup>1</sup> Included in the book as additions to the text of the second manuscript are the relevant 117 pictures of astronomical and mechanical instruments used in the above mentioned *Yixiang tu*.

The story behind the manuscripts is most curious. They were given by Verbiest to the Russian legate Nikolas Gavrilovič Spathary Milesco (1636-1708) for the Russian Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1629-1676). Spathary, a Moldavian, was sent to China in Russian service to establish direct relations with the Chinese empire in 1675. This placed the Jesuits at the Qing court in a delicate position. On the one hand, they had to consider the interests of the Christian mission and of their order in China, which would gain from friendly relations with Russia. On the other, they were members of the Chinese imperial bureaucracy, and thus under obligation to the Emperor. In the end, they tried to keep their exclusive privilege as brokers between China and all Western countries. Verbiest, who acted as interpreter for the delegation led by Spathary, did therefore not give too much information to Spathary. For example, when asked by Spathary for a Chinese-Latin grammar, Verbiest dodged the issue by saying that none existed. This was a tactic used by all the Christian orders in China who wanted to keep their language aids secret and not to share them with people from outside in order to protect their exclusive role as interpreters. Verbiest, however, also wanted to convince Spathary and the Russian Tsar of the Jesuits' usefulness, because the Jesuits wanted to get permission to travel through Russia to Europe to avoid the dangerous sea voyage. Therefore, he secretly gave Spathary a map of China and a copy of his astronomical research in China dedicated to the Tsar together with a covering letter. By doing this, he prevented too much contact between the Chinese and the Russians, and also showed the usefulness of the Society of Jesus.

By the time Spathary had returned to Russia, Tsar Alexei had died and been succeeded by his son. The manuscripts were copied there by Chrysan-

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<sup>1</sup> Noël Golvers, *The Astronomia Europaea of Ferdinand Verbiest, S. J. (Dillingen, 1687). Text, Translation, Notes and Commentaries* (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XXVIII) (Nettetal 1993), and the same: *Ferdinand Verbiest, S. J. (1623-1688) and the Chinese Heaven* (Leuven Chinese Studies XII) (Leuven 2003).

thos Notaras, who had been entrusted with several diplomatic missions by his uncle Dositheos Notaras concerning the situation of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire. Chrysanthos had studied in Italy and was quite interested in astronomy, as shown by a book he wrote on the astrolabe-quadrant. It is hard to answer the question of what influence Verbiest's story about Western astronomy in China had on his Greek or Russian contemporaries, but at least it was useful to Chrysanthos.

The authors provide nearly one hundred pages of introduction, covering the story behind the manuscripts, the early influence of Greek science on China through the East Syrian Church during the Tang dynasty, and the story of Jesuit astronomy in China in the early Qing dynasty. This is followed by the edition of the texts, i.e. the letter to the Tsar, the *Compendium Historicum* and the *Mechanica*, together with the seven pictures of the manuscript in the Metochion. At the end the 117 images of the *Yixiang tu* are included. We not only learn about the story of Western astronomy in China during the seventeenth century, but also get a fascinating glimpse into the Ottoman Empire and the conditions of the Greek Orthodox Church there. Evidently, relations between Muslims and Christians at that time were considerably better than they are today. The book leaves us wondering if there are more as yet undiscovered manuscripts in less well-known archives that might illustrate further historical relations between the two ends of the Eurasian Continent.