



Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (+1320)
Missionary to the Middle East and Expert on Islam

A conference organized by
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The Dominican friar Riccoldo da Monte di Croce left for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1286, lived for years in Muslim Baghdad where he learned Arabic and studied the Qur'ān, and returned to the monastery of Santa Maria Novella in Florence shortly after 1300. He wrote extensively on the peoples and religions in the Middle East, and his polemical treatise against the Qur'ān became the most influential single work for Western European understanding of Islam till today.

At present, Riccoldo is being studied by a number of both experienced and younger scholars from various perspectives, but these have never been discussed together and compared. That is the purpose of the seminar we propose here.

Riccoldo was a prolific writer, and within the latest generation his works have become accessible in new editions. His *Liber peregrinationis* or *Itinerarium* (ed. Laurent 1873; Kappler 1997) describes his travel through Asia minor and to Jerusalem and contains important ethnographic descriptions of Mongols and Kurds, theological discussions with Eastern Christians, list of the holy Places in and around Jerusalem, a short presentation of the Qur'ān, his positive impression of Muslims, and the first known descriptions of the Judeo-Johannite sect of the Sabaens.

Riccoldo's *Epistolae ad Ecclesiam triumphantem* (ed. Röhrich 1884; Kappler 1997; Panella 2010) are the moving laments to saints and God that Acre had fallen to the Muslims in 1292 and Christians were killed or sold on the slave markets in Baghdad. The style of the letters has been compared to that of Dante, whom Riccoldo had probably been teaching.

His *Libellus ad nationes orientales* (ed. Villads Jensen 1997; Panella 2005) is devoted to the different religions in the East. The section on Eastern Christians and on Jews are unoriginal and taken from other authors, while the part on Mongols is highly interesting and built on Riccoldo's own conversations with Mongols and some of their Buddhist priests.

The grand oeuvre of Riccoldo was his *Liber contra legem Sarracenorum* (ed. Mérigoux 1986) with a detailed refutation of the content of the Qur'ān. It was widely diffused in the Middle Ages, used by Nicholas of Cusa, translated into Castilian at the dawn of 16th century, studied and translated into German by Martin Luther and printed in 1543. Its importance for Western European studies of Islam cannot be overestimated.

The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is to push forward investigations on Riccoldo's biographical experience and thought by exploring the implications of the missionary context of his time (first session of the conference), his theological and exegetical thinking (second session), and the impressive, unstudied dissemination and use of his works from 14th to 17th century (third session).