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Riccoldo as an Author and His Intellectual Afterlife*

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (*c.* 1243–1320), Dominican friar, missionary and scholar was truly a remarkable person. He is notable for his extensive travels in difficult and dangerous terrains, for his impetuous and sometimes rash temperament, for his deep interest in theology and how various peoples think about God, and for his learnedness. He is not least remarkable for his prolific writings which enable us to follow him over the years, physically from city to city, but also intellectually, to see how he worked with different genres of writings and treated different topics, and how he applied different methods according to where he was writing and to whom. Riccoldo is also of unusual importance for the European intellectual tradition because of the enormous influence he has had on later Christian studies of Islam and of the Qur'an. He is well known to scholars and has been so for hundreds of years; over the past few decades he has attracted the interest of a rapidly growing number of specialists from various academic fields and various countries.

Riccoldo entered the Dominican Order in 1267[1] when he was probably in his twenties, and was accepted in the Convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Five years later, in 1272, he became *lector* in the apparently newly established *Studium artium* at the Dominicans in Pisa, and in 1287 he was appointed to the Convent in Prato, from where he was transferred back to Florence in 1288.[2] It is probably while he was in Pisa that he composed his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*.[3] As far as ongoing

* Pp. 9–14 written by Kurt Villads Jensen, pp. 15–19 by Davide Scotto.

1 Orlandi 1955, vol. 1, p. 222.

2 Mérigoux 1986, p. 15.

3 Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Scripta super II Peryhermenias*.

research allows to be stated, it is a standard introductory textbook within the field, of no great originality,[4] but up to date with references to Thomas Aquinas and well suited for the basic teaching Riccoldo was undertaking. It is a decent pedagogical presentation but does not earn Riccoldo the merit of being considered a profound philosopher or logician, as has sometimes been claimed by modern scholars. It seems he even found the topic somewhat difficult as he later remembered his study time as laborious.[5] Riccoldo's introduction to Aristotle exists in only one manuscript and has not previously been studied.[6]

Florence and not least Santa Maria Novella were intellectual and cultural hotspots in the second half of the 13th century,[7] with numerous connections to the wider Mediterranean world and further. Merchants such as Marco Polo and missionaries travelled along the same routes in these years, and the Florentine Dominicans had connections to brethren and convents in the East.[8] Florence was also a rapidly growing city with significant social conflicts and lively political debates which featured in sermons, treatises, and diverse works of art. A Florentine who later was to become famous was Dante. He was exiled in 1301 because of his political work and opinions, but before that he may have followed the teaching in Santa Maria Novella and the Franciscan Convent of Santa Croce. It has been claimed that the composition of his *Comedia divina* may have been inspired by Islamic narratives to which he may have been introduced by Riccoldo or others from the religious missionary milieu in Florence.[9]

Florence was a place for innovative experimentation, and it was here in 1288 that Riccoldo decided to become a missionary to the Near East, leaving that same year. On Palm Sunday 1288, Pope Nicolaus IV had celebrated mass in Rome together with Rabban Bar Sauma, the envoy and teacher of the leader of the Nestorian church, Catholikos Mar Yaballaha III. The mass was of great symbolic significance and marked the—today partial—communion between the Catholic Church in the West and the Nestorian Church in the East. On 3 September that same year the Pope promulgated the

4 Thanks to Henrik Lagerlund, Professor in Medieval Philosophy at Stockholm University, for his evaluation of this text.

5 Riccold de Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient*, pp. 36–38: "quas longas et laboriosas peregrinationes adsumperam adhuc secularis existens, ut addiscerem illas seculares scientias quas liberales appellant."

6 Shortly described by Bauer in Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Epistole ad Ecclesiam triumphantem* (2021); Booth 2021, pp. 50–51.

7 For Santa Maria Novella, see Pegoretti 2020; Booth 2021.

8 Loenertz 1932; 1937; George-Tvrtković 2012, pp. 4–15; Hautala 2020; Booth 2021.

9 Tolan 2007. On the much-debated topic of Islamic sources in Dante's work, see most recently Celli 2022.