

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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(1600-1700)

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Pieter Fardé

DATE OF BIRTH 9 May 1651
PLACE OF BIRTH Ghent, Belgium
DATE OF DEATH 16 June 1691
PLACE OF DEATH Aachen, Germany

BIOGRAPHY

Pieter Fardé was a 17th-century Flemish Franciscan Recollect who is believed to have been captured and enslaved by Algerian corsairs. Some scholars infer an association between Fardé's captivity narrative *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius broeder Pieter Fardé, minderbroeder recollect van de Provincie van St. Joseph in 't Graefschap van Vlaenderen (1708)* and Franciscan missions to Agades and Katsina in the first decade of the 18th century.

Fardé was born on 9 May 1651, the fourth child of Jean Fardé and Joanna Cordonnier. The Fardés were a successful merchant family of French origin who had settled in Ghent in the 1640s. Like two of his older siblings, Pieter opted for the religious life; on 12 September 1672, he made his profession as a lay brother at the Franciscan Recollect monastery in Ghent.

Few details of Fardé's monastic life are known with certainty. It seems that he gained some fame in February 1675 for expertly handling one of Ghent's recently purchased firehoses when a fire threatened to destroy the Jesuit College. In 1682-3, he visited the Franciscans in Jerusalem, but was recalled to Ghent in 1683 to collect alms for the Holy Land.

Fardé undertook a second journey to Jerusalem in February 1686. The Dutch ship on which he was travelling was attacked by Algerian corsairs, probably leading to his enslavement and perhaps to a stay in Agades and a journey through to central Africa. However, the historicity of Fardé's movements between October 1686 and January 1691 is contested.

By January 1691, Fardé was back in Ghent. A few months later, he was sent to Germany to accompany the ailing father superior Alfons Coen to Aachen's thermal spa. While Coen seems to have benefitted from the treatment, Fardé succumbed to fever. He died on 16 June 1691 and was buried in Aachen.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Pieter Fardé, *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius broeder Pieter Fardé [...]*, Brugge, 1708

Secondary

A. Capiteyn, *Een Vlaming ontdekt Afrika. Pieter Fardé feiten, fraude, fictie*, Leuven, 1986

C. Müller, 'De familie Fardé te Gent', *Franciscana. Tijdschrift voor Franciscaanse geschiedenis en bibliografie* 15 (1960) 1-28

J. Goyens, 'Notes biographiques et documents du Fr. Pierre Farde O.F.M., voyageur en Afrique (1652-1691)', *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 7 (1914) 20-31

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius broeder Pieter Fardé, 'Copy of the letters of the pious religious brother Pieter Fardé'

DATE Before 1691

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Flemish

DESCRIPTION

Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius broeder Pieter Fardé, minderbroeder recollect van de Provincie van St. Joseph in 't Graefschap van Vlaenderen en ander brieven van diversche perzoonen die schryven wat hem overgekomen is al hy voor de tweede mael zoude gaen naer Jerusalem, waerom hy deze reyze aenveirde, en hoe hy gevangen is van de Algiersche zee-roovers enz is a collection of letters that narrate the enslavement of Pieter Fardé. Seven of the letters are attributed to Fardé himself, while the others are ascribed to his fellow-travellers.

Letters purportedly sent from Targa (Fardé, letter 3) and Agades (Fardé, letters 4 and 5) report that Fardé worked as a slave in Agades, where he was tortured because of his successful evangelism among Muslims and Jews; the letters claim that he made about 200 converts in Agades. In letter 6, Fardé describes his astounding journey home, returning to Ghent via northern Nigeria (Gobir) and Angola, a Robinson Crusoe-like episode on a deserted island in the St Helena archipelago, and an interlude as a slave in Salé, Morocco. Letter 7 is a short note from Hamburg announcing his imminent arrival.

The collection blends a captivity narrative and a Robinson Crusoe-style adventure tale with elements of Franciscan martyrology. Generally speaking, the letters supply no particular details that help verify the story or identify localities; there are no thorough descriptions of the slave-market in Bono, the journey through the Sahara, life in Agades or Fardé's remarkable journey to Angola. Only the 1687 Agades letter, attributed to the ship's clerk and co-captive van Breuckel, is rich in detail. This letter eloquently portrays Fardé's versatility in Arabic and 'Moorish', his evangelistic zeal amongst Muslims, and the cruel punishment meted out to him: 100 strokes with a stick on the sole of his feet, and being carried around town in a contraption while being continually beaten.

Despite the fact that Muslims feature as corsairs and slavers, the book does not contain any vilifications of Islam or Muslims; rather, the people introduced as Muslims, such as Saura Belyn, Fardé's Agadeshi master, are depicted as considerate and morally upright human beings.

Opinions vary regarding the historicity of the Pieter Fardé adventures. While it is beyond doubt that Fardé was an historical person, some scholars, such as Jules Raes (who also published as Père Hildebrand), discard the captivity story as literary fiction, pointing out blatant inconsistencies and improbabilities in the letters. Raes believes Fardé did travel to the Holy Land in 1686, but arrived safely in Jerusalem and for reasons unknown fabricated the letters ('De zoogezegde Kongoreis', pp. 137, 141). Others, such as Chrysanthus Müller and André Capiteyn, consider the enslavement by Algerian corsairs to be historical and Fardé's sojourn in Agades a possibility, referencing the 1687 records of the Ghent monastery, where an entry reads: 'In Africa apud Agades, fr. Petrus Fardé, laicus ...' (Müller, 'Onderzoek van de Fardé-brieven', 1963, pp. 76-90; Capiteyn, *Een Vlaming ontdekt Afrika*, pp. 56-60, 187). Both Müller and Capiteyn, however, assume that the original narrative was embellished with fictional elements, such as the journey to Angola and the Robinson Crusoe episode. They tentatively accept the historicity of (most of) the first three letters which, they speculate, may have formed the content of the earliest, no longer extant, 1708 edition of *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religieus Br. Pieter Fardé*. Joseph Kenny seems to consider all the Fardé letters to be historical and reliable ('Seventeenth century Belgian visitor', p. 87).

Though the letters have been extensively researched, many issues are unresolved. It remains uncertain whether all of them were written by Fardé himself or whether they were revised at some point. The fact that

the handwriting of the sixth and only remaining original letter – the letter purportedly written from Salé – is identified as belonging to Fardé would suggest that he would somehow seem to have been involved in the project. The unlikely adventures described in this sixth letter would seem to cast grave doubts on the historicity of the events described in it.

The book went through several editions. Nineteenth-century sources refer to a seemingly no longer extant 1708 edition. The oldest surviving edition was published in Ghent in 1720 and is about 95 pages long; a later edition from 1778 is somewhat longer at 125 pages. There may have been earlier editions. In the 1960s, a fragment of an older, unidentified edition was discovered, which seems to have contained six letters only, three of them by Pieter Fardé. *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religieus Br. Pieter Fardé* was translated into French (1878), German (1911), Italian (1929), Spanish (1945) and also a partial edition in English (1981).

SIGNIFICANCE

Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religieus Br. Pieter Fardé weaves elements of Franciscan theology about witnessing to Muslims (e.g. the need to be conversant in Arabic, to be humble, to surrender to God's will, and having the desire to die a martyr for Christ) into the genres of a captivity and adventure tale. For example, Letter 5 exclaims about his near escape from execution: 'If it had been God's will, I would have much preferred to remain in their hands, so that they could have completed what they had planned to do to me. But God intended otherwise, and there is nothing better for me and all people than to surrender to the will and purposes of God.' In a context where Barbary slavery was a continual hazard for both travellers and sailors, the book casts enslavement as an opportunity to evangelise and convert Muslims to Christianity, and presents Fardé as a pious Franciscan role model of evangelical zeal and loyalty to Christ, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Several modern scholars, such as Isidore Nwanaju (*Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria*, p. 86), J.J. Onotu ('Milestones', p. 55), Kenny ('Seventeenth century Belgian visitor', p. 83) and Capiteyn (*Een Vlaming ontdekt Afrika*, pp. 178-84) associate the Fardé story with an early 18th-century Franciscan mission to Agades and Katsina. Nwanaju postulates that, after Fardé had returned to Ghent, he reported his Agadeshi mission experiences to the Tripoli Franciscan superior Maurice de Lucca and the Propaganda Fide. According to Nwanaju, this report initiated the Franciscan missionary ventures to Agades in 1705 and 1710. Others, such as Nkem Chigere (*Foreign missionary background*, pp. 147-8) hypothesise

that Fardé's report of a community of Christian converts in Agades tallied with rumours that there were Christians in the area of present-day northern Nigeria. The Fardé report, according to Chigere, therefore served to invigorate Maurice de Lucca's plans for a Franciscan mission to Agades. Capiteyn sees a different connection between the letters and the Franciscan mission. He suggests that the reports of the latter may have been used to enhance the captivity narrative. Interestingly, the historian Richard Gray ('Christian traces'), who first mapped the 18th-century Franciscan mission to Agades and Katsina, does not mention Fardé in his reconstruction.

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Pieter Fardé, *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius Br. Pieter Fardé, minderbroeder recollect van de Provincie van S. Joseph in 't graefschap van Vlaenderen, ende ander brieven van diversche persoonen, die schryven wat hem overgekhomen is onderwege, als hy voor de tweede mael soude gaen naer Jerusalem en waerom hij dese Reyse aenveirde*, Ghent, 1720

Pieter Fardé, *Copie van de brieven van den godvruchtigen religius broeder Pieter Fardé, minderbroeder recollect van de Provincie van St. Joseph in 't Graefschap van Vlaenderen en ander brieven van diversche perzoonen die schryven wat hem overgekomen is al hy voor de tweede mael zoude gaen naer Jerusalem, waerom hy deze reyze aenveirde, en hoe hy gevangen is van de Algiersche zee-roovers enz.*, Brugge, 1778

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