

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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the Americas (1600-1700)

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Alonso de Sandoval

DATE OF BIRTH 7 December 1576 or 1577
PLACE OF BIRTH Seville, Spain
DATE OF DEATH 25 December 1652
PLACE OF DEATH Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

BIOGRAPHY

Alonso de Sandoval was a Jesuit missionary who lived and worked in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, for most of his life. Born in Seville, he was one of the sons of Tristán Sánchez, a Spanish government official and native of Toledo who made a career for himself in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Sánchez fathered 12 children with three different women.

Alonso de Sandoval was born during a period when the family was in Spain, but the details of his childhood are uncertain: Beers gives 1576 as his date of birth ('Alonso de Sandoval', p. 5), whilst von Germeten mentions 1577 ('Introduction', p. ix). It is unclear when Sánchez and his family returned to Latin America; some sources claim it was shortly after Alonso's birth in 1577 (Pacheco, 'El maestro de Claver', p. 248), while others maintain it was as late as 1584 (Vila Vilar, 'Introduction', p. xxvii; Beers, 'Alonso de Sandoval', p. 5). Alonso and his siblings seem to have received the majority of their education in Lima. Most sources state that he and his brothers studied at the prestigious Jesuit College of San Pablo in Lima, whereas some, such as Fajardo (*Los Jesuitos*, p. 286) believe they were educated at the College of San Martín. Alonso entered the Jesuit novitiate on 30 June 1593. A further six of Sánchez's children also pursued a religious vocation.

In 1605, Sandoval was appointed to the newly established Jesuit College in Cartagena de Indias, where he worked for the remainder of his life. In the early 17th century, Cartagena served as an important slave-trading hub. Estimates based on Sandoval's work conjecture that between 1595 and 1640, about 135,000 slaves passed through Cartagena's market (*Un tratado sobre la esclavitud*, p. 18). Most of them were destined for labour in the mines or on the plantations; others were purchased to work as pearl divers.

Partly out of compassion, partly out of evangelistic zeal to save souls, Sandoval became involved with Cartagena's African community,

convinced that 'in Christ's robes, the black and white threads are intertwined, and the souls of blacks are as important as those of the whites' (*Treatise on slavery*, p. 8). In the early 17th century, Africans and people of African descent (both free and enslaved) formed about 70% of the city's estimated 10,000 inhabitants (von Germeten, 'Introduction', p. x). Aiming to save African souls through baptism, Sandoval organised catechism classes in the vernacular and engaged African converts as translators. Over the years, he expanded his ministry to include the thousands of enslaved Africans who arrived on the slave ships every year. His pupil and fellow Jesuit Pedro Claver was canonised in 1888 for his ministry among enslaved Africans in Cartagena.

On the basis of his experiences of ministering to Africans, Sandoval wrote his *Naturaleza, policía sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catecismo evangélico de todos etíopes*, better known under its Latin title *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (1627). An expanded version of the work was published in 1647. Apart from *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*, Sandoval also authored other, less renowned, works, including *Historia de la vida del P. Francisco Javier* (1619). A number of his reports and letters have also been preserved.

In 1652, Sandoval fell victim to an epidemic in Cartagena, and he died on 25 December of that year.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

De instauranda Aethiopum salute, 'How to restore the salvation of the blacks'

Naturaleza, policía sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catecismo evangélico de todos Etíopes, 'The natural, the sacred and the profane customs and the rites, discipline and evangelical catechism of all Ethiopians'

DATE 1627; second expanded edition 1647

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Spanish

DESCRIPTION

Naturaleza, policía sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catecismo evangélico de todos etíopes ('The natural, the sacred, and profane customs and the rites, discipline and evangelical catechism of all Ethiopians'), better known under its Latin title *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* ('How to restore the salvation of the blacks'), is an instruction manual for priests working among enslaved Africans. The work was first published in 1627 and is based on Alonso de Sandoval's personal experiences of working among enslaved Africans in Cartagena de Indias, expanded with material from theological and ethnographical works. Beers ('Alonso de Sandoval', p. 13) suggests that Sandoval may have carried out research for his book in the library in Lima, during an extended stay related to

administrative matters during the period 1617-19. Both von Germeten and Beers point to the influence of José de Acosta's *De procurande Indorum salute* (1588) on Sandoval's book (von Germeten, 'Introduction', p. xviii; Beers, 'Alonso de Sandoval', p. 5).

An expanded, two-volume edition of the work was published in 1647 under the title *De instauranda Aethiopum salute. Historia de Aethiopia, naturaleza, policia sagrada y profana, costumbres, ritos y catechismo evangelico de todos los Aethiopes conque se restaura la salud de sus almas. Dividida en dos tomos: ilustrados de nuevo en esta segunda impresion con cosas curiosas y Indice muy copioso por el P. Alonso de Sandoval, de la Compañia de Jesus, natural de Toledo*. Sandoval died before completing an intended third edition. All 20th-century editions and translations are based on the 1627 text, which was widely circulated; copies of the 1647 publication are rare. The 1627 edition takes 334 pages, the 1647 edition 520 pages.

De instauranda Aethiopum salute is divided into four parts. Part 1 presents an overview of the four main regions of origin of the slaves brought to Cartagena in the early 17th century, these being Senegambia, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Luanda. As Sandoval never visited Africa, his descriptions probably draw on ethnographic and missionary material available to him, elaborated with information gained from sailors and slaves. Part 1 briefly charts the political and religious history of these areas in western Africa, and culminates in a detailed outline of physical characteristics (e.g. tribal marks, hair-styles, piercings) of the main groups of people from the regions. By listing these characteristics, Sandoval intended to aid priests who were ministering to the enslaved in identifying their ethnic origin, thus simplifying the process of finding interpreters who could facilitate communication with the slaves, in some cases when they were on the verge of death.

Part 2 is a description of the abuses and sufferings endured by the enslaved, followed by admonitions to Christian masters to treat their slaves humanely. This part of *De instauranda* is widely known among contemporary scholars for its first-hand accounts of the horrors of the middle passage and the cruelty endured by slaves during their sojourn in Cartagena. Part 2 evidences that Sandoval did not advocate the abolition of slavery or the slave trade, but argued for the humane treatment of slaves. The text further evidences that he considered the evangelistic prospects to be a legitimisation of the African slave trade, writing: 'Bread must be rolled out before it is baked, and the slave ships are the paddles

for placing this bread in the oven of the Church' (*De instauranda*, p. 73). And, concerning Christ, 'Now he wants you to be Christians, his children, his brothers and sisters. For this reason, he took you from your lands, where you lived among Moors, gentiles, barbarians, and children of the devil. Leaving your parents, relatives, and friends, condemned to miserable labour, he chose you to teach you the true and certain path to blessedness' (p. 138).

Part 3 is the heart of the *De instauranda*. It proffers concrete suggestions and guidelines as to how effectively to catechise Africans in their own vernacular with the aid of translators and how to prepare them for baptism. Several pages are dedicated to practices in the African ports of departure of baptising slaves before boarding the slave-ships and deliberations as to whether such baptisms can be considered valid.

Part 4 argues, on the basis of the Bible and church history, that the evangelisation of Africans in general and African slaves in particular is an urgent and worthy calling for Jesuits. Beers ('Alonso de Sandoval', p. 15) calls it an 'extensive apology for the appropriateness of the ministry to the slave as a worthy missionary vocation'. The closing section serves the double purpose of invoking higher religious authorities that sanctioned the evangelisation of Africans as well as appealing to fellow Jesuits to embrace the ministry to the African enslaved.

Islam and Muslims are mentioned in Parts 1, 3, and 4. In Part 1, Sandoval regularly, and in strongly antagonistic terms, refers to the spread of Islam on the Upper Guinea coast, possibly drawing on the material of fellow Jesuits such as Baltasar Barreira and Manuel Álvares. He talks about the 'numerous Mandingas who energetically interact with all the Guinean kingdoms with the goal of infecting them with the cursed Mohammedan sect [Islam]', who not only 'drink the poison of Mohammed's sect themselves' but spread Islam while trading, with the result that 'the devil gets a good bargain for their labour' (*De instauranda*, pp. 25, 33). Sandoval uses the terms 'Mandingas' and 'Moors' interchangeably to refer to Muslims and calls Islam 'the cursed Mohammedan sect'.

Interestingly, Part 1 offers a detailed description of how Muslim scholars go about spreading their message in the towns of Guinea. The richness of detail in the account of how the event is announced, the scene decorated and the preaching conducted suggests that Sandoval may have gathered information from one of his informants who witnessed these performances personally.

Again, the tone of the narrative is strongly polemical and the description projects a similar polemical attitude about Muslim scholars, whom Sandoval represents as actively vying with Christianity for the soul of Africans: 'When they arrive in a new town, they announce the day when they will begin their sermons so that many people from all over the region will know to gather there at that time. They decorate a plaza and hang a few scrolls that seem to give their lies some authority. Then the priests stand and raise their hands and eyes to heaven. After a while, they prostrate themselves before the infernal writings and bow to them. After getting up, they give thanks to Allah and to his great prophet Mohammed, sent to pardon their sins. No one speaks, sleeps, or lets their eyes wonder for two hours as they read and discuss the writings. Orators praise their kings and lords, puffing up their vanity, as the priests speak of their victories and those of their ancestors. They mix many lies into their stories, degrading our holy faith and praising Mohammed's cursed sect, eloquently persuading the kings and everyone else to reject Christianity' (p. 33).

Part 3 offers only fleeting references to Muslims, mentioning that there are 'slaves who do not want to be baptised' but rather 'refuse to leave their sect and false law' (p. 110), whilst other slaves 'make a thousand salaams to show their gratefulness' (p. 138). Also among the catechism questions formulated by Sandoval, there is a brief but explicit reference to Islam: 'Do they want to be Christians, obeying the law of Jesus Christ like the whites, living like them, serving and obeying the great God of the Christians, or be Moors [Muslims], gentiles, and barbarians, like they were in their land?' And Sandoval instructs his fellow priests to teach people 'until they give the correct answers to these questions', which is 'Be like Christians' (p. 134).

Sandoval ends Part 4 and the work as a whole with a passionate appeal to his fellow Jesuits to forge ahead in the evangelisation of Africans, lest Muslim preachers, whose zeal he grudgingly admires, win the race: 'The Moors preach their cursed sect on the Ethiopian coasts. They brave the scalding sands of Libya and endure such hunger and thirst that they have to kill their camels and suck their blood in order not to die on the road. The Moors endure so many dangers and risks for such a worldly, corrupt reward, but we as Christians, especially those who are religious professionals, and most especially brothers of the Company of Jesus, should run towards the greatest eternal prize. . . . Ignorant men sacrifice themselves for their diabolic superstitions, so we should do everything for the sake of Christ's faith and the cross on which he died' (p. 191).

SIGNIFICANCE

Sandoval's *De instauranda Aethiopia salute* demonstrates that 16th-century decrees regulating the immigration of Muslims and Moriscos to the Americas proved increasingly untenable when the slave trade began to burgeon. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the Upper Guinea coast where Islam had already spread was one of the main suppliers of slaves to be deported to the Americas. Sandoval's text evidences that, in the early 17th century, substantial numbers of enslaved African Muslims (Wolof, Serer, Mandinka and Fula) passed through the Cartagena markets. While some of these enslaved Muslims converted to Christianity, others rejected baptism outright, causing Sandoval to lament: 'We often have difficulty converting them, so we catechise them using only the most articulate translators' (p. 44).

Sandoval's antagonistic descriptions of the spread of Islam in West Africa and his passionate appeals for the evangelisation of Africans in both Africa and the Americas could possibly be construed as an indication of his fear that the presence of enslaved African Muslims in Cartagena signposted that the New World was to become the next front line between Christianity and Islam.

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