Giulia Nardini, MA, A case of Accomodation: Roberto Nobili’s ŃānaUpatēcam, Tamil catechism for Brahmans.

The Jesuit missionaries in India are often associated with their strategy of accommodation, a strategy that tried to meld Catholic theology and Brahmanical practice. Most central for this strategy was the Italian Jesuit Roberto Nobili (Rome 1577 – Madras 1656). Nobili developed a new model of catechesis, including forms of worship, religious practices and theological texts, to transfer the Catholic doctrine to the neophytes of Madurai mission between 1606 and 1656, moreover it was admitted only in 1623 by Papal Bull “RomanaeSedisAntistes.

To gain the papal acceptance Nobili had to explain or translate the Brahmin customs for the catholic institutions in Rome. This was even more important, because several theologians understood the accommodation as challenging the pure orthodoxy of Catholic Church. Such criticisms had a revival in the Malabar Rites Controversy and ended in the prohibition of accommodation as a missionary strategy in 1744.

However, accommodation is not only topic of an inner catholic dispute about Christian purity, there is also an Indian or Brahmanic side that has to be considered and has been quite neglected so far. Therefore this project analyses a double translation of Nobili’s understanding of Christianity: His translation of the catholic institutions as well as for South Indian Brahmins. The project concentrates on Nobili’s ŃānaUpatēcam, a Tamil catechism and the making of a comprehensible form of Christian narratives for the conversion of Tamil Brahmins. This book represents the compendium for the education of the Catholic worshippers, an introduction to the Catholic doctrine’s categories, the manual expressing the theological topics and the narration of the mysteries of faith and the divine revelation. His teaching cover the existence of god and his attributes, the creation of angels and men, their nature, fall and consequences, holy trinity, incarnation, redemption and sacraments and the basic prayers.