

**Production and circulation
of Vernacular Italian texts
related to the Jesuit
mission in Japan in the
sixteenth century. The
Case of Venice.**

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THE JESUIT CORRESPONDENCE SYSTEM IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Annual dispatches from India guaranteed a flow of communications between Asia and Europe unparalleled by any other religious order of the time.

Letters conveyed information

- **About the status of the missions**
- **About the geography, the climate and the culture of the countries in which missionaries were stationed**

They included

- **Official letters (addressed to the Father General of the Company in Rome, to the Jesuit college in Coimbra, or to the Society of Jesus in general)**
- **Private letters**

CIRCULATION OF THE REPORTS IN EUROPE, IN MANUSCRIPT AND PRINTED FORM

he letters were sorted in Goa, forwarded to Coimbra and Rome and then

irculated in manuscript form throughout the various Jesuit Colleges in Europe, serving

- as sources of information about the missions**

- as a guide for future missionaries**

- as means of edification for the members of the orders**

BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND STUDIES THAT INCLUDE LISTINGS OF THE JESUIT MATERIALS

GENERAL WORKS

- **Sommervogel, Carlos**, *Bibliotheca Mariana de la compagnie de Jesus*, (Paris, 1885)
- **Streit, Robert**, *Bibliotheca Missionum...* (Herder, 1916-1955)
- **Ternaux-Compans, Henri**, *Bibliothèque asiatique et africaine...* (Amsterdam, 1968)

WORKS FOCUSED ON JAPAN

- **Cordier, Henri**, *Bibliotheca japonica...* (Paris, 1912)
- **Wenckstern, Friedrich von. and Pages, Leon**, *A bibliography of the Japanese empire... to which is added a facsimile-reprint of Leon Pages, Bibliographie Japonaise depuis le 15. siecle jusqu'a 1859* (Leiden, 1895-1897)

PROMINENCE OF THE REPORTS ON JAPAN THROUGHOUT THE SECOND HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

PRINTED MATERIALS ON JAPAN

usually written in Spanish or Portuguese, letters from Japan were included

in Iberian collections

in translation, in Italian collections of printed letterbooks. Many later translations in Latin or in other European languages were based on them

AIMS OF THIS PAPER

his paper aims at presenting the Italian printed materials, from both a textual and a bibliographical point of view.

t will:

ssess the number of published editions

elineate their evolution in term of contents

nalyze them in relation to the context in which they were produced and circulated

NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE EDITIONS IN TIME

74 editions were issued in the sixteenth century:

- **32 first editions**
- **42 reprinted editions of earlier works**

A total of about 100 letters was translated in the whole of the letterbooks

The overwhelming majority of the books saw the light in the last two decades of the sixteenth century.

DITIONS ISSUED UP TO 1580:

visi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo... **Rome, 1552**

visi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo, nuovamente havuti... **Rome, 1556.**

ettere del Giappone... **Rome, 1578**

Rome, 1579;

Brescia, 1580;

Naples, 1580

iversi avisi particolari dall'Indie... **Venice, 1558**

Venice, 1565;

Venice, 1568

DITION ISSUED IN THE LAST TWO DECADES OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY:

Icvne lettere delle cose del Giappone. Dell'anno 1579. Insino al 1581. Rome, 1584

Rome, 1584;

Naples, 1584;

Brescia, 1584;

Milan, 1584;

Venice, 1585

ettera annale scritta di novo dal Giapone delle cose ivi successe l'anno M D LXXXII. Venice, 1585

Venice, 1585;

Venice, 1585;

Milan, 1585;

Rome, 1585

- *Avvisi della Cina et Giappone del fine dell'anno 1586... Rome, 1588*
Venice, 1588;
Brescia, 1588
- *Ragguaglio d'un notabilissimo naufragio... Rome, 1588*
- *Lettera annale del Giappone scritta al padre della Compagnia di Giesv alli XX. di Febraio M.D.LXXXVIII. Rome, 1590*
Brescia, 1590
Milan, 1590
- *Lettere del Giappone, et della Cina de gl'anni M. D. LXXXIX & M. D. XC. Rome, 1591.*
Milan, 1592
Venice, 1592
- *Ragguaglio d'alcune missioni delle Indie Orientali, & Occidentali. Cavato da alcun auvisi scritti gli anni 1590. et 1591. Rome, 1592*
Rome, 1593
Turin, 1593
Bologna, 1593
- *Copia di due lettere annue scritte dal Giappone. Del 1589. Et 1590. Rome, 1593.*
Milan, 1593
Brescia, 1593

- *Lettera del Giappone degli anni 1591. Et 1592.* **Rome, 1595**
Milan, 1595
Venice, 1595
- *Lettera annua del Giappone del marzo del 1593, sino al marzo del 94.* **Rome, 1597**
Milan, 1597
- *Copia di due lettere scritte dal P. Organtino Bresciano della compagnia di Giesu dal Meaco del Giappone.* **Rome, 1597**
Milan, 1597
- *Ragguaglio della morte di Quabacondono...* **Rome, 1598**
- *Copia di una lettera annua scritta dal Giappone nel M.D.XCV...* **Rome, 1598**
Milan, 1598
- *Relatione mandata da Don Francesco Teglio...* **Rome, 1599**
Venice, 1598
- *Relatione della gloriosa morte di 26. posti in croce...* **Rome, 1599**
Bologna, 1599
- *Lettera annua del Giappone dell'anno M.D.XCVI....* **Rome, 1599**
Milan, 1599
Venice (Padua), 1599
- *Copia d'una breve relatione della Christianità di Giappone...* **Venice, 1600**
Venice, 1601
Rome, 1601

EVOLUTION IN THE TYPOLOGY AND IN THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOKS

Letterbooks published up to 1580 differ from later ones both in

- **Typology: earlier books are mostly not specifically devoted to Japan; later ones, on the contrary, are mostly centered on Japan or Japan and China.**

The first letterbook wholly centered on Japan is the 1578 collection published by the Zanetti publishing house in Rome.

- **Contents**

EARLIER LETTERBOOKS

They include reports by the hands of Francis Xavier and his direct successors, the very first Fathers to set foot in Japan

AVIER'S LETTERS:

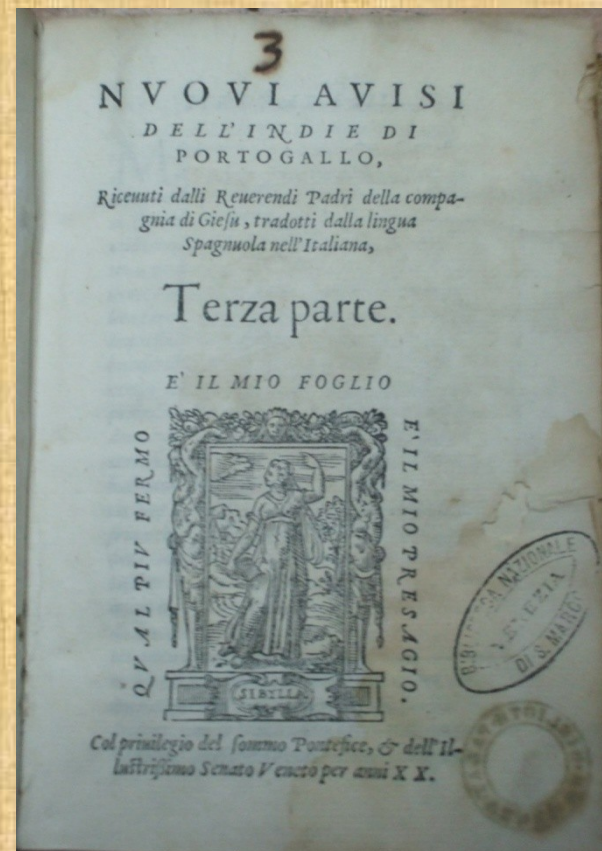
1549 letter from Cochin, included in the 1562 *Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portogallo... Terza parte.* by the Tramezzino house in Venice

1549 letter from Kagoshima and addressed to Goa, included in the 1552 *Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo...* by the Dorico and Bressani house in Rome

1549 letter from Kagoshima and addressed to Coimbra, included in the 1558 *Diversi avisi particolari dall'Indie...* by the Tramezzino house in Venice



*Diversi Avisi Particolari
dell'Indie di Portogallo...
Venice, 1558*



*Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di
Portogallo... Terza Parte. Venice,
1562*

Xavier's reports testify good insight, but also a knowledge of Japan that is still in many ways superficial. They tend to minimize the cultural differences and the difficulties encountered by the missionaries in approaching Japanese culture and language.

LETTERS WRITTEN BY XAVIER'S DIRECT SUCCESSORS

They include reports by many of the Fathers who took charge of the Mission in Japan after Xavier's departure in 1551: Cosme de Torres, Balthasar Gago, Gaspar Vilela, Luis Almeida, Francisco Cabral, Organtino Gnecchi-Soldo and Francesco Stefanoni, together with one by Brother Lourenço, the first Japanese layman to be received inside of the Society of Jesus.

They aren't much more informative than Xavier's ones: they tend to focus only on topics directly related to the mission. Some, however, include incidental references to Japanese culture, politics and social practices or to Japanese language (i.e. the 1555 letter written by Father Balthasar Gago, included in the 1558 collection by the

LATER LETTERBOOKS

ALIGNANO'S INFLUENCE

Later letterbooks include reports written under the influence of Alessandro Valignano.

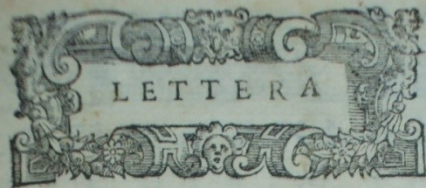
They reflect Valignano's "adaptionistic" approach, i.e. the will to make, for the sake of the mission, a compromise with Japanese customs and the strive to gain a thorough understanding of the linguistic, cultural and religious background of the Japanese people.

They focus on matters ignored by previous writers and

LUIS FROIS

he major interpreter of Valignano's vision was Father Luis Frois.

ince his arrival in Japan in 1563 and up to his death in 1597, he was the most important chronicler of the mission.




LETTERA

A N N A L E
SCRITTA DI NOVO
DAL GIAPONE,

Delle cose iui successe l'anno
M D LXXXII.



IN VENETIA,
APPRESSO I GIOLITI.
M D LXXXV.

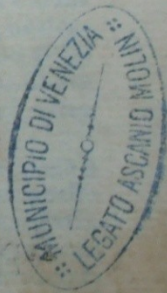


*Lettera annale scritta di novo dal
Giapone delle cose iui successe
l'anno M D LXXXII.
Venice, Giolito, 1585*

LETTERA
A N N A L E
DEL GIAPONE
SCRITTA

AL PADRE GENERALE
DELLA GOMPAGNIA
DI GIESV

Alli xx. di Febraio M.D.LXXXVIII.



I N R O M A.
Appresso Francesco Zannetti, In Piazza di
Pietra. 1590.

CON LICENZA DE'SUPERIORI.

**Lettera annale del Giappone scritta al
padre della Gompagnia [sic] di
Giesv alli XX. di Febraio
M.D.LXXXVIII.
Roma, Zannetti, 1590**

5
LETTERE
DELL'INDIA
ORIENTALE,

Scritte da' Reuerendi Padri della
Compagnia di GIESV'.

*Nelle quali si scopre la grande arte vsata
da gli istessi, per liberar l'anime de gli in-
fideli Indiani dalla potestà del nimico in-
fernale, & ridurle alla nostra santa fede.*

Nouamente stampate, & ampliate in molti
luoghi, & ricorrette con diligenza.

CON PRIVILEGIO.



IN VINEGIA, Appresso Antonio Ferrari.
M D LXXX.



***Lettere dell'India Orientale, Scritte
da' Reuerendi Padri della
Compagnia di Giesv'. Nelle quali si
scopre la grande arte vsata de gli
istessi, per liberar l'anime degli
infideli Indiani dalla potestà del
nimico infernale, et ridurle alla
nostra santa fede. Nouamente
stampate, & ampliate in molti luoghi,
& ricorrette con diligenza.
Venice, Ferrari, 1580***

PRINTED LETTERBOOKS AS OPPOSED TO MANUSCRIPT REPORTS

Donald Lach, in his *Asia in the making of Europe*, notes that the letterbooks tend to be less truthful to the original reports than the letters in manuscript form.

This is particularly true of Italian letterbooks, as they suffered both

the effects of not always reliable translations

the intervention of the board of censors

THE MERITS OF THE LETTERBOOKS

Printed materials overcome the merits of the manuscripts in two respects:

Availability: an average of 10 copies for each edition is scattered throughout Italian libraries and the majority of them is stored in the Marciana National Library in Venice.

Letterbooks offer access to a kind of information that can hardly be derived from manuscripts alone: they can be analyzed not only as text, but also as objects, viewed in the light of the cultural and economical

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE STUDY OF THE PRINTED LETTERBOOKS

Studying the published materials from a bibliographical point of view can be of help in solving a number of questions for which no account provides direct answer.

The Jesuit reports were the first organic and direct sources of information on Japan to be ever circulated in Europe. Then, what was the response to them? Did they contribute to putting Japan on the map for at least a part of the European public?

THE READERSHIP'S RESPONSE TO THE LETTERBOOKS

hroughout the second half of the sixteenth century, the pace of the publications on Japan undergone a rapid increment.

ditions grew in number up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the fortunes of the mission in Japan began to whither, and the number of the dispatches forcibly diminished.

. THE COUNTER REFORMATION AND THE CATHOLIC REVIVAL

he society of Jesus actively promoted the publication of the letters from the East as a mean of propaganda: the news of the conversions of far away populations were used to inspire public interest and foster the notion of the greatness of the Catholic Church, in the face of the defeats suffered by Catholicism in Europe.

reports from Japan occupied a central position amongst the reports, because of the exclusive

2. AN INCREASING DEMAND FOR JAPANESE LETTERBOOKS FROM THE PART OF THE READER

The Catholic revival influenced the book market, both

- By means of coercion (through the censorship and the Index of banned books)**
- By stimulating the interest for new kind of published materials**

However, with the introduction of print, the pole of European book circulation had shifted from the traditional places of book promotion, the Church and the Courts. And, in the absence of modern strategies of publicity, demand was what mostly determined editorial policies.

FACTORS THAT CONCURRED IN THE INCREASE OF THE DEMAND FOR JAPANESE LETTERBOOKS

- **THE JAPANESE EMBASSY THAT REACHED EUROPE IN 1585:**

The embassy seems to have exerted a considerable impact on Europe. Records of the time report of the enthusiastic reception accorded to the envoys in the various cities they visited; moreover, a huge number of pamphlets and gazettes, and at least one more organic work, the *Relationi della venuta degli Ambasciatori Giaponesi a Roma* by Guido Gualtieri, were published in its wake.

- **SOME OF THE MORE GENERAL TRENDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLISHING MARKET:**

The popularity of “periodical” and epistolary publications (see Monaco, Giuseppina, *La stampa periodica nel Cinquecento*) and of travel literature.

THE PUBLICATION OF THE JAPANESE MATERIALS , SEEN IN INTEGRATION WITH AMPLER EDITORIAL POLICIES FROM THE PART OF THE PUBLISHING HOUSES

he idea that the Japanese materials were published in response to a precise demand and in integration with ampler editorial policies is reinforced by an analysis of the production of the publishing houses that materially prompted their circulation.

his is the case of the *Giolito* publishing house, that was responsible for the publication of the majority of the Japanese reports issued in Venice:

p to 1560, the production of the *Giolito* was almost exclusively devoted to contemporary literature. When the general Italian book market was hit by a crisis in the second half of the sixteenth century, however,

THE READERSHIP OF THE LETTERBOOKS

The diffusion of print and the growth of the publishing industry in Europe in the XVI Century was connected with an expanding of the reading population, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms



Amongst what sections of the European readership were the books popular?

number of factors suggest that the letterbooks were

1. THE USE OF THE VERNACULAR

he expanding use of Vernacular languages in print, as opposed to Latin, was a factor, in the sixteenth century, in the widening of the public.

he use of the Vernacular in the letterbooks is in itself an indication that they were not addressed, or at least not exclusively, to the more traditional categories of learned, professional readers (university professors and students, aristocracy, clergy, doctors or jurists)

2. THE PUBLISHING HOUSES

he biggest publishing houses in the sixteenth century tended to follow a definite editorial line and to address their production to a specific section of the public.

his is the case, for example, of the *Giolito* house in Venice: it was specialized in Vernacular books, and that its production was mostly intended for an upper, educated middle class

3. THE FORMAT AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE BOOKS

he books were printed in the “octavo” format, that the published Aldo Manuzio applied for the first time at the beginning of the sixteenth century to books intended for non-professional, middle class readers.

he same small format is also usually applied to popular books. However, the letterbooks do not share the other physical characteristics identified by Paul Grendler in his *Il libro popolare del sedicesimo secolo* as typical of popular literature.

4. THE CIRCULATION AND CONSERVATION OF THE BOOKS

Popular books were rarely conserved in libraries or circulated in places far from their place of production.

The fact that letterbooks published in Rome, Naples or Brescia are today available in the Marciana library in Venice can in itself be an indicator of the kind of public that used to read them

CONCLUSIONS

Printed materials related to the Japanese mission can be explored from different perspectives:

With due caution, they can be exploited as sources of information on Japanese history, above all social history, local history, or the so-called “history of mentality”.

They can be analyzed not only as contents, but also as containers, and, in this sense, offer some glimpse on the extent to which the circulation of news from Japan affected the European public of the sixteenth century.

Thanks for your attention

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