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reception in Europe of written sources on Japan in
the "Christian century"***

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INTRODUCTION

The one hundred year period between the earliest recorded landing of European travellers in Japan, in 1543, and the final expulsion of the Portuguese after the events of the Shimabara rebellion, in 1639, was a most crucial one in the history of the Japanese archipelago.

The unifying process, initiated by Oda Nobunaga, continued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and completed by Tokugawa Ieyasu, didn't simply restore the integrity of the Japanese State: it pushed Japan, as a political entity, into a whole new stage. The centralized polity of the Tokugawa paved the way to a newfound political and economical assimilation. The establishment of the *bakuhau* 幕藩 system didn't, of course, automatically erase regional differences that predated the political disruption brought by the rise of the *sengoku daimyō*.¹ It, however, contributed to the creation of the conditions – the birth of regional (and even national) markets, reliable transport, urbanization, schooling – for a new, albeit still relative, level of cultural integration within Japan.² The enforcement, between 1633 and 1639, of what is commonly known as the *sakoku* 鎖国 policy,³ was, moreover, one step

¹ As observed by Amino Yoshihiko, who underlines, for example, how the diffusion of the *kokudaka* 石高 system for the distribution of rural territories happened far more slowly and reluctantly in Eastern Japan than in the Western regions of the archipelago. Amino Yoshihiko, *Higashi to nishi no kataru Nihon no rekishi* (History of Japan narrated from the East and the West), Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998.

² Mary Elizabeth Berry, “Was Early Modern Japan Culturally Integrated?”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31 No. 3 (Special Issue: “The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800”), 1997, pp. 547-581.

³ And which could maybe more properly defined, as suggested by Hamashita Takeshi, *sentakuteki kaikoku*, a “selective opening”, obtained through the application of sea

towards the definition of stable borders for the Japanese State. The demarcation was, granted, still more cultural and ethnical than territorial (in the modern sense of the term). However, by “bracketing the Japanese in place within the archipelago”,⁴ it laid the foundations for the development, in the long run, of a proto-national identity.

The interconnections between such processes of state (and identity) formation and the confrontation with the European natives living, preaching and commercing on the Japanese archipelago have long been a matter of fascination and discussion among scholars.

Past historians are known to have attributed a strong weight to the European influence, not only in terms of culture and economy, but also as far as religion and politics are concerned. Emblematic is Charles Ralph Boxer’s statement in the preface of the first edition (1951) of his well-known work, *The Christian Century in Japan*: “but for the introduction, growth and forcible suppression of militant Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, it seems probable that Tokugawa would have not retired into its isolationist shell”.⁵

Most contemporary critics, on the other hand, while not completely disregarding the weight of European cultural influences, have worked to debunk such assumptions, minimizing the consequences of the foreign presence in Japan, in the face of endogenous developments predating the arrival of the Portuguese. Derek Massarella, in particular, has underlined how the very label “Christian century”, which has commonly come to be associated, at least in non-Japanese

bans that weren’t completely new to the political tradition of the Greater China Seas area. Hamashita Takeshi, *Kindai Chūgoku no kokusaiteki keiki: chōkō bōeki shisutemu to kindai Ajia* (Modern China’s international opportunity: the tributary trade system and modern Asia). Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1990, p. 44.

⁴ David L. Howell, *Geographies of identities in nineteenth century Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p. 198.

⁵ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951, p. ix.

literature, with this phase of Japanese history, is in itself problematic, as it implies that “Christianity was quite central to the formation of the early modern Japanese polity”, while “in reality, the role of Europeans in early modern Japanese state-building is secondary.”⁶

Not quite as explored is, however, the other side of the medal: what legacy did the encounter between the Europeans and the Japanese leave for Europe?

The opening of the so-called era of the “Great discoveries”, in the aftermath of Da Gama’s pioneering expedition around the Cape of Good Hope (paralleled by Columbus’ voyage to the New World), surely had game-changing consequences for Europe, in more than one respect.

Through Portuguese merchants first, and then through the Spanish, the Dutch and the English, European economy entered into direct connection with the huge and prosperous maritime economical systems of the Indian Ocean and of the Greater China Seas areas. The balance of European trade, as a consequence, slowly shifted away from the Mediterranean and toward the oceans. The amount of Asian products flowing to Europe increased sensibly, and Europeans progressively became involved into Asian inter-port trades.

At the same time, new political structures were born – starting with the Portuguese *Estado da India* – specifically created to exert control over the newly discovered maritime trade routes. The treaties of Alcáçovas and of Tordesillas – which sanctioned the Portuguese expansion in the Atlantic Ocean – worked in this sense as fundamental landmarks for the construction of European modernity: where in the previous centuries state leaders had fought over lands and people,

⁶ Derek Massarella, “Some reflections on Identity Formation in East Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in Donald Deenon, Mark Hudson, Gavan Mc Cormack and Tessa Morris-Suzuki (eds.), *Multicultural Japan. Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 135-152, p. 136.

sovereignty was now, through the treaties, also being claimed over (yet to be encountered) seas. The ocean had become “politicised space to be fought over, controlled, taxed, allocated and reallocated, and international law had to extend its reach to encompass this new concept which was to lie at the hearth of European colonial expansion.”⁷

European perception of the “outside world” was also, inevitably, deeply influenced. European travellers, in increasing numbers, began to live and work in the newly discovered regions. Their experiences there challenged the visions of Asia that had dominated medieval narratives, where direct testimonies had been scarce, and only limited to certain areas. The Asian countries and populations came to acquire a definite character of reality, after having been relegated for centuries, in the European imaginary, to the realm of the magical and the legendary. And as the newly encountered populations came to be acknowledged as real, they also came to be deemed as pertaining to the domain of divine law: as “Gentiles”, who had to be approached with the prospect of extending the bounds of Christendom. Missionary impulse, of course, had been an integral component of the Christian ethic since its very origins – in accord to the teleological conception of history as a progression towards the last judgment, where all human beings, God’s subjects, should be led to the eventual, everlasting salvation. The new wave of geographical explorations, on the other hand, contributed to putting the drive to convert non-believers in a whole new perspective. Intellectual controversy soon arose, both on how the newly encountered populations were to be perceived, and on how to perform the missionary imperative. Were all the Gentiles really of the same kind of humanity as the Europeans? Were all of them apt to hear and

⁷ Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion 1400-1668*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 57.

understand the Christian message – and in the same way, or to different extents? The “other” was slowly defined, through a process of self-definition, that would exert long-lived influences on European intellectual history.

For little less than a century, the intercourse with the Japanese archipelago occupied a central role in such processes. A region that, up to the first decade of the sixteenth century had represented, in the eyes of the literate section of the European public, no more than a name lost in the monumental bulk of knowledge included in the work of Marco Polo, suddenly turned, for Portuguese, and later Spanish, Dutch and English merchants, into a stage for exciting economical opportunities: a market where precious materials were largely available for purchase and silk and cloth were easily sold; a most fundamental source of silver for countries that were working their way into a developing world bullion trade. At the same time, at least up to the final decade of the sixteenth century the Japanese archipelago came to represent, one of the territories, if not *the* territory, holding the most promising prospects in terms of evangelization.

The growing European presence in Japan throughout the last decades of the sixteenth, and the first decades of the seventeenth century, was born of such interests and expectations. And, conversely, it translated into the production of a huge amount of first-hand sources, reflecting the developing knowledge accumulated on Japan by the merchants and missionaries travelling to and operating on the archipelago.

Letters and longer accounts were exchanged among the Europeans residing in East Asia and shipped to Europe to report about the status of the religious and commercial missions. Part of such materials was kept, more or less deliberately, inside the circles of the clergy, or in the

archives of the Portuguese and Spanish Royal houses, and of the companies promoting trade in the China Seas. A consistent part of the sources was, however, distributed commercially in Europe, and, thanks to the diffusion of print, reached a considerable level of circulation, giving way to what was, in all respects, a small editorial boom. This was the case, in particular (even though not exclusively), of the Jesuit sources. The missionary materials were in fact released into the editorial world with more deliberation than the other sources – as instruments of propaganda, fitting into the purposes of the Counter Reformation movement. They nonetheless, as we’ll see, worked their way into the market more as part of “popular” literary trends, than through the pressures of the Roman Church. But it was first and foremost through their lenses that Japan was presented to European readers – who were indeed introduced to the archipelago in the perspective of a “Christian century”.

The missionaries’ and the merchants’ reports contributed therefore, for the first time, to the creation and systematic divulgation of an imaginary of Japan – an imaginary grounded, as opposed to the mythical visions of the Middle Ages, in *factual* knowledge, but not necessarily, of course, an *objective* one.

The aim of the current work is to analyze the sources produced in the “Christian century” and the imaginary they contributed to construct, in relation to both the context of their production and their circulation in Europe.

This is far from being a complete bibliographical account – much more thorough works exist for this scope, to which I have pointed the reader in the text. I have, moreover, focused almost exclusively on

sources effectively circulated in Europe,⁸ and have also, coherently, consistently given more weight to published materials, as opposed to manuscript ones.

I have tried, on the other hand, to provide an as complete as possible overview of the different typologies of sources produced and circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; to illustrate how they depicted Japan, and why, in accord to the cultural and professional background of their writers; to approach the sources also from a bibliographical point of view, discussing editions and distribution, so as to evaluate their effective impact on the European readership; to discuss how they came to fit into the European intellectual panorama of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and contributed to the construction of images of self and the other.

Chapter 1 will provide an introductory overview on the “mythical” imaginary on Asia and Japan developed through the European (mostly indirect) sources predating the so-called era of the “Great discoveries”.

Chapter 2 will discuss how the early Portuguese explorations in the Atlantic Ocean and Greater China Seas area came to affect the perception and representation of Asia, and focus, particularly, on the production of lay Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) sources on Japan.

Chapter 3 will focus on the sources related to the Christian missions in Japan.

Chapter 4 will focus on Dutch and English lay sources, discussing to what extent they added to the already massive existing corpus of knowledge on Japan available in European languages, in the first half of the seventeenth century.

⁸ Leaving aside, for example, the works produced by the Jesuit mission press in Japan.

1. MYTH AND REALITY – EUROPEAN REPRESENTATIONS OF ASIA BEFORE THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

By the end of the fifteenth Century, when Vasco da Gama's voyage opened the so-called era of the Great Discoveries, a long tradition of contacts had already been established between the European continent and Eastern Asia. The course of such relations, far from linear, had been matched by a parallel tradition of geographical, cartographical and historical writings, reflecting an ever-changing and developing "European" consciousness of the "East".

Much has been written on such tradition of pre-Modern contacts and writings. As this is not the scope of the present work, I will not dwell on the matter extensively, but I'll try to summarize it, while pointing to a list of useful references, as way to contextualize the sixteenth and seventeenth century sources on Japan.

1.1. THE GREEK, LATIN AND MEDIEVAL LITERARY TRADITIONS ON ASIA

The Indian subcontinent had been known to the Greek world at least since the sixth Century B.C. In 515 B.C., when Darius of Persia annexed the Indus Valley to his dominions, he sent a Greek officer, Scylax, to explore the new province. Scylax's report, which, given his

“technical” scope, was mostly focused on the resources of the region, was also rich in mythical elements, and set off an early tradition of oral and written narrations of India, in which fantastic and factual narration were strictly intertwined.

From such tradition, apparently, Herodotus (c. 484 B.C. – c. 425 B.C.) drew for his *Histories*, written from 450 B.C. to 430 B.C. Herodotus places India as the easternmost habited part of the world. His narration uncritically mingles facts and fantasy: he describes the inhabitants of the peninsula as a collection of different populations and language groups, but also speaks of cannibalism and giant ants collecting gold for the tributes due to the Persian Empire.

More realistic in nature, though not completely devoid of fantastic elements, were the narrations included in Megasthenes’ (ca. 350 – 290 B.C.), and Eratosthenes’ (c. 276 B.C. – c. 195 B.C.) writings. Such works were indebted, for much of their factual knowledge, to Alexander the Great’s India campaigns, undertaken from 326 to 324 B.C. Alexander’s military effort, while it did not go as far as to penetrating India thoroughly, helped to establish a more direct intercourse between the subcontinent and the Greek world, and to expand Greek understanding of India beyond the realm of the territories surrounding the Indus River.⁹

It was however during the *Pax Romana* that the notion that regions and populations existed beyond the Eastern fringes of India became familiar to the inhabitants of the European continent. From the first century B.C. up to the third century A.D., thanks to political stability, to the relative safety of the terrestrial and naval routes that connected

⁹ A more complete overview of such early European materials, and a useful list of references, can be found in Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965, pp.6-12.

Rome to Asia (guaranteed by a more severe control over brigandage and piracy), and to the reduction of the fiscal impositions affecting commerce within the territories controlled by Rome, not only the connections established by Alexander with the Indian peninsula were maintained and expanded, but a regular commercial intercourse also flourished between the Latin world and the Chinese territories.

Trade routes, originating from Antioch and Alexandria of Egypt, headed South, to Peshawar and India, or North, along the Silk Road that led to Tun Huang and China. The driving force in the interchange was most probably the Roman demand for Asiatic luxury goods (and particularly Chinese silk), which made the balance of the trade overtly in favour of the Asiatic counterparts.¹⁰ As underlined by Samson,¹¹ in the developing economy of the Roman Empire the levels of consumptions were subjected to a constant rise, and this kind of articles, above all spices and plants, became common in the majority of Roman households. In other words, Asian products came to play an important role in the everyday life of the urban Roman population.

Chinese chronicles report also of contacts more diplomatic in nature. As far back as in the second century B.C., an envoy of the Han Emperor Wu-ti apparently reached the Eastern fringes of the Roman dominions, paving the way for a number of subsequent missions directed in those areas. The first reported case of a mission originating from the Roman territories and directed to China is instead dated 166 A.D., when some travellers reached the Chinese court bearing tributes and declaring themselves to be ambassadors of An Tun (Marcus Aurelius). No definite proof exists, however, that this expedition was sent directly from Rome to the Chinese Court: it is hardly doubtful that

¹⁰ As testified by, amongst others, Pliny the Elder, who lamented the excessive amounts of money invested by his contemporaries for the purchase of silk.

¹¹ George Bailey Samson, *The Western World and Japan. A study in the interaction of European and Asiatic cultures*. London: The Cresset Press, 1965.

in this and other similar later cases the expeditions were really of a private nature, set up by merchants hoping to establish new commercial relationships.¹²

Nevertheless, travellers from the eastern regions of the Roman Empire, and particularly Syrians and Egyptians, with little doubt came to cover the routes to Asia on a regular basis.¹³ The exchanges prompted the circulation of knowledge, as well as money. And as a consequence to this intercourse, as early as in the first century A.D, a number of Latin writers were able to include mentions and even sketchy descriptions of China in their works.

Pliny was one of the first historians to use the term *Seres* in reference to the Chinese population. The word, of Iranian origin, had previously been applied to Central Asian populations trading gold from Siberia to Persia.¹⁴ By Augustus' time, it apparently came to be commonly associated with the production of silk and with the Chinese territory. Virgil and Statius, among others, used it with such connotations in their writings. Pomponius Mela, the earliest known Roman geographer,¹⁵ also located the *Seres* territory on his maps. His work largely relied on earlier Greek sources, without adding much to the geographical knowledge of Asia. However, he seemed to be aware of the travel accounts of his contemporaries, and reported of the existence of rich lands beyond the realm of eastern India (the imaginary Chryse and Argyre, whose soil he claimed to be of gold and silver). Ptolemy of Alexandria (c. A.D. 100 – A.D. 175), probably the most influential

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 17-20.

¹³ For details on the commercial routes and on recorded expeditions, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Italia e Oriente*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2005.

¹⁴ Giuseppe Tucci, *Italia e Oriente*, cit., p. 22.

¹⁵ Little is known about his life, but he might have been related to Seneca the Younger and therefore probably died in the first century A.D. His *Cosmografia, sive de situ orbis* was reissued many times, both in Italy (with several Venetian editions) and in the rest of Europe, throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries.

geographer of the classical period,¹⁶ based his work not only on Greek antecedents, but also on the accounts of the merchants that, from his native city, travelled back and forth along the terrestrial and naval routes that led to Asia. He, as well, mentioned the *Seres*, and (though with many inaccuracies) was able to account with remarkable detail for the complex geographical divisions of India and South Asia.

In large part, the Roman sources, in spite of their larger horizons, did not differ from the Greek ones in mingling factual elements with mythical ones. As for their impact on the general public, it was probably fairly limited. The merchants, and more generally the inhabitants of the Eastern fringes of the Roman Empire, had to be well aware of the possibilities opened by the commercial routes to Asia, and the very existence of the sources testifies an awareness of the complexity of the cultures coexisting on the Asian continent from the part of at least the learned section of the Roman population. However, the territories beyond India were still treated as such remote a concept that it is unlikeable that they made a lasting impression on the Latin world in its entirety.

After the third century, the Roman control on the routes that connected the European continent to China and India began to waver. With the shift of the Imperial power to Constantinople and the collapse of the Western Roman Empire (as well as the subsequent collapse of the Gupta Empire in India), the sea routes lost their importance to the exchanges, and the land routes gradually gained centrality. At the same time, new political forces (the Axumites first, and later the Arabs) acquired control over the territories that separated Europe and

¹⁶ His work, reissued, both in manuscript and print, in several revised and augmented editions throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries, would become, as we'll see, one of the basis for early modern cartography.

Eastern Asia and began to act as mediators in their commercial intercourse. As a consequence, throughout the Early Middle Ages, only a limited number of European individual travellers that we know of crossed the path to the two areas.¹⁷ Just as China was about to enter a great era of expansion and openness under the Tang dynasty, direct relations between the European continent and both India and China were severed. And with the loss of commercial opportunities in Asia and the incumbent Islamic threat, the interest of the Latin Christendom progressively focused on the Mediterranean Sea.

At the same time, the Bible gained increasing relevance as a reference for geographical knowledge. Encyclopaedic works such as the *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville (c. 560 – 636) became standard models for literary descriptions of Asia.¹⁸ Greek and Latin literature remained the main source for geographical representations, but the classical myths and notions were filtered and remoulded, incorporated into the writings of the early Christian thinkers and given authority through the Scriptures. The titbits of factual information that the Greek and Latin writers had included in their works became even more diluted in the myths, as no contemporary travel account reached the level of authority necessary to corroborate them. Throughout the Early

¹⁷ Like Cosmas Indicopleustes, author of the *Christian Topography*, who nonetheless based his work as much on religious observations as on his travels, that took him to Ceylon. For a critical edition of Cosmas' work, see Cosmas, Indicopleustes, Paul Lemerle and Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chretienne. Cosmas Indicopleustes; introduction, texte critique, illustration, traduction et notes par Wanda Wolska-Conus ; Preface Paul Lemerle*. Paris : Les editions du Cerf, 1968-1973. Or the more recent Italian translation Cosmas Indicopleustes, Riccardo Maisano and Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Topografia cristiana : libri 1.-5. Cosma Indicopleusta ; a cura di Antonio Garzya ; con una premessa di Wanda Wolska-Conus e una postfazione di Riccardo Maisano*, Napoli: D'Auria, 1992.

¹⁸ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit.,

Middle Ages, western representations of Eastern Asia basically lost touch with reality.¹⁹

It was only in the Crusades era that the intercourse between Asia and the Latin Christendom displayed once again some of its previous dynamism. Travellers from the Christian kingdoms were, for the first time in centuries, brought in significant numbers to the western fringes of Asia. In the era of the so-called late medieval European Commercial Revolution, the possessions they acquired through their military campaigns came to function as commercial outposts, where Asian products were purchased in exchange for Venetian and Byzantine coins.²⁰

At an early stage, the volume of the commerce was, however, fairly limited. Up to the thirteenth century, western merchants still dealt with Arab and Jewish intermediaries, and, likely, weren't able afford much more than common products – leather, cereals, fish and metals – from North-Western Asia.

It's not easy to evaluate how much of an actual knowledge about the lands beyond Persia and Arabia they were able to accumulate through such exchanges. Surely, up to the end of the thirteen century, very

¹⁹ For an in-depth account on the Medieval imaginary about the East and its roots in the classical tradition, see Jacques Le Goff, *L'immaginario medievale*, Roma, Bari: Laterza, 1988 and Jacques Le Goff, *Tempo della chiesa e tempo del mercante*, Einaudi, Torino, 1977. A really useful schematic illustration of all the principal Medieval legends and myths related to Asia is moreover included in Adriana Boscaro, *"Mirabilia" in Occidente e Oriente*, Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 1988, which provides also an extensive bibliography on the subject.

²⁰ Robert Sabatino Lopez has written extensively about the European Commercial Revolution and its implications for the commercial relationships between Asia and Europe. See in particular his *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1976, for an overview of the economical aspects of the Revolution. Avner Greif analyzed instead some its political premises in his article "On the Political Foundations of the Late Medieval Commercial Revolution: Genoa During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 54, No. 2, ("Papers Presented at the Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the Economic History Association"), Jun. 1994, pp. 271-287.

little information about Asia had been passed on to the rest of the European population. As suggested by Olschki,²¹ the merchants themselves might have had little interest in accumulating knowledge collateral to the trade; or, in spite of the factual and practical knowledge they did collect, they might have consciously aimed at perpetrating the traditional images of Asia, so as to surround the imported products with an allure of exoticism.

Whatever the explanation, the newly developed commercial relationships didn't immediately add to the objectivity of European literary representations of Asia. Not only the weight of the classical myths wasn't upstaged, but, by the beginning of the High Middle Ages, a number of more recently popularized legendary traditions also came to dominate the Christian imaginary of Asia.

The most popular of such traditions was probably the one related to the Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. Tales about his life and deeds – including accounts of his Indian campaign – had begun to circulate in oral and written form as early as in the fourth century B.C., right after his death. By the beginning of the Middle Ages, all contemporary records were lost, and the one work directly based on them, the *Anabasis Alexandri* by Arrian (ca. 86 – 160 A.D.), had fallen into oblivion,²² but the conqueror was still at the center of a “living popular tradition”.²³ In literature, such tradition was perpetrated mostly through the work known as the Alexander Romance, an anonymous writing, presumably composed in the third century A.D. by

²¹ Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo: introduzione alla lettura e allo studio del Milione*, Venezia, Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1957, pp. 39-50.

²² Only to be rediscovered much later, by European scholars of the Renaissance period. For an overview of the legend and its diffusion, see John Andrew Boyle, “The Alexander Legend in Central Asia”, *Folklore*, Vol. 85 No. 4, Winter 1974, p. 217-228.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

some Hellenized Egyptian resident of Alexandria,²⁴ which included two long letters focused on the conqueror's advance in India. The work was first rendered into a Latin translation in the fourth century (to which another Latin translation followed in the tenth century), and subsequently translated into a number of European vernacular languages, as well as into Armenian, Pahlavi, Syrian and Arabic.²⁵ It became the source of a rich literary and iconographical production both in Europe and in Asia, and perpetrated the Alexander myth well into the High Middle Ages, when it gained vast popularity, above all between the eleventh and the fifteenth century.

The Asian, and particularly the Indian imagery born of the Alexander Romance was paralleled by the one connected to the legendary tradition of St. Thomas the Apostle. St. Thomas was believed to have set out for the Indian subcontinent directly after the resurrection of Christ, when the Apostles split into different regions of the world for the sake of Evangelization. Sold as a slave to an Indian merchant named Habban, he was taken to an Indian court, where he supposedly converted the king, Gundafor (Gudaphara), to Christianity. According to the legend, he managed to create a consistent Christian community, before a slight to another Indian (or Persian) king, Mazdai, led to his martyrdom. The main source for the medieval tradition on St. Thomas were the *Acta Thomae* (Acts of Thomas), a Syrian work,

²⁴ A Medieval manuscript wrongly attributed the Alexander Romance to Alexander's official historian (and Aristotle's nephew Callisthenes), which is why the romance is also known as Pseudo-Callisthenes. The actual author probably drew from some epistolary Alexander romance composed in the first century B.C., as well as from Clitarchus (or Cleitarchus), author of an Alexander history of uncertain date (but assumingly produced after 280 B.C.), characterized by the heavy use of rhetorical embellishments (and therefore fundamentally unreliable). For a general overview of the historiographical material produced on Alexander before the Middle Ages, see Lionel Pearson, *The lost histories of Alexander*, New York: The American Philological Association, 1960.

²⁵ On the different translated versions and the diffusion of the work, see John Andrew Boyle, "The Alexander Romance in the East and West", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester*, 60.1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 13-27.

part of the New Testament apocrypha and presumably composed in the early third century.²⁶ It was through the subsequent translations of the *Acta* (a very early one in Greek, to which ones in Latin, Armenian and a number of other languages followed) that the legend gained popularity throughout the Christian world. The figure of St. Thomas was then to be further popularized by the writings of the first missionaries that ventured to China through the newly reopened land routes,²⁷ so that the tradition lived on well up to the era of the Great Discoveries.²⁸

Part of the basis for the popularity of the legend was of course the appeal that the idea of a large Christian community – or even a Christian nation – existing somewhere in Asia held for the European rulers of the Crusades Era, who clung to the hope of finding new allies against the Muslims. The very same notion was also at the heart of the legendary tradition of the mythical figure of Prester John, which acquired popularity in Europe in the twelfth century.²⁹

²⁶ For a more detailed account of the legend as narrated in the *Acta*, see A.E. Medlycott, *India and the apostle Thomas : An inquiry, with a critical analysis of the "Acta Thomae"*, London : D. Natt, 1905. The factuality of the Apostle's venture in India is actually doubtful. While the Indian Christians tend to identify themselves, still, as the "St. Thomas Christians", no definite historical proof exists that the voyage of St. Thomas ever happened in the first place (even if the actual existence of a king Gudaphara in India, in the first half of the first century A.D., has been substantiated by archeological evidence; see in this regard chapter 1, "The Apostle Thomas and Gondophares the Indian King – connection proved from coins and inscription" in *ibidem*). As underlined by Leslie Brown, even more doubtful are the long-term effects of the Apostle's influence on the diffusion of the Christian religion in India. Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas. An Account of the Ancient Church of Malabar*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1982, part 1, chapter 2 ("The Saint Thomas tradition").

²⁷ As well as in the Letter of Prester John, which will be mentioned later.

²⁸ St. Thomas was even associated with Columbus and the discovery of America. See in this regard Louis-André Vigneras, "Saint Thomas, Apostle of America", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 57 No. 1 (Feb., 1977), pp. 82-90.

²⁹ For the connections between the St. Thomas tradition and the legend of Prester John, see Robert Silverberg, *La leggenda del Prete Gianni: il mitico re d'Oriente che i popoli d'Europa sognarono per secoli*, Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1998 (originally in English: *The realm of Prester John*, Doubleday: New York, 1972), pp. 27- 48 (chapter 1, paragraph 4).

Many hypotheses have been formulated regarding the origins of such legend.³⁰ The figure of Prester John has been associated by a number of scholars with the one of Yeh-lü Ta-shih, a Mongolian conqueror who, in 1141, won a renowned victory against the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar at Qatwan, near Samarkand. The news that such victory had been achieved by a non-Muslim ruler surely exerted a strong impression on the Latin Christendom, and the often oversized reports of the achievements of the Nestorians in Asia may have prompted the belief that the conqueror adhered to the Christian faith. The Rumanian historian Constantine Marinescu has instead suggested the identification of Prester John with the monarch of Ethiopia – a country that had been introduced to Christianity ever since the fourth century and, in spite of being later isolated from Europe by the Arab conquests, was by the twelfth century still rumoured to host a Christian stronghold. A less accredited hypothesis is the one formulated by the Russian scholar Philipp Brunn, who identifies Prester John with the Georgian commander Ivané Orbelian (who obtained a number of victories against the Turkish army between 1123 and 1124). Finally, Leonardo Olschki has suggested the idea that the legend revolving around Prester John was an altogether allegorical creation: the image of an utopian society originally born to inspire the European public, which ended up being taken too literally.³¹

The first known written testimony about the legend is the one included in the seventh book of Otto of Freising's *Chronica sive*

³⁰ Not necessarily, as underlined by Charles E. Nowell, mutually exclusive. See Charles E. Nowell, "The Historical Prester John", *Speculum*, vol. 28 No. 3, Jul. 1953, pp. 435-445.

³¹ On the debate regarding the origins of the legends, see *ibidem*, pp. 435-445; Robert Silverberg, *La leggenda del Prete Gianni*, chapter 1; and Igor de Rachewiltz, "Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia", *East Asian History*, No.11, Jun. 1996, pp. 59-74.

Historia de duabus civitatibus.³² The book reported of a hearing granted by Pope Eugene III to the bishop Hugh of Jabala (Syria), in the fall of 1145. The bishop, born in France and loyal to the Roman Church, had set out for Europe in order to seek help against the Saracens (who, starting with the taking of the city of Edessa in 1144, had scored a number of notable victories against the crusaders, under the guidance of the general Imad ad-din Zengi). According to Freising's report, after relating to the Pope about the Syrian situation, the bishop added an account about a "Presbyter Ioannes", a Nestorian priest king living somewhere East of Persia and Armenia; the king, who had posed a significant threat to the Persian army, had apparently been trying to reach Jerusalem, in order to bring help to the members of the Christian Church stationed there, but had been blocked by the inability to cross the river Tigris with his army.³³

The legend gained remarkable popularity throughout the Latin Christendom after the year 1165, when the Byzantine emperor, Manuel Comnenus, forwarded to Frederick Barbarossa, Holy Roman Emperor, a letter supposedly composed by the legendary priest, who described himself as the ruler of "India" (a term which could mean anywhere between actual India and the farthest East, or Africa). It subsequently took root both in Western and Eastern European kingdoms, and its influences lived on for more than five centuries, well after the reopening of the sea routes to Asia.

³² A world history in eight books. An edited version of the work, by Adolf Hofmeister, was published in 1912: Otto von Freising and Adolf Hofmeister, *Otonis episcopi Frisingensis Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus, recognovit Adolfus Hofmeister. Editio altera*. Hannoverae ; Lipsiae : impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1912.

³³ See Robert Silverberg, *La leggenda del Prete Gianni*, cit., pp. 11-16.

In cartography, as well as in literature, scholars of the Middle Ages assumed map models found in the Hellenistic and Roman traditions, modifying them in accord to the changing emphases in thought.

World maps or *Mappaemundi*,³⁴ in particular, developed into a number of defined graphical structures, according to their historical origins: Roman cartography, and particularly Sallust's *De Bello Jurgurthino*, inspired the so-called tripartite maps, which represented the inhabited world as a disk, with Asia on top, Europe in the lower left quarter and Africa in the lower right quarter; Erathostenes and the Greek *climata* theory were instead the root for zonal maps, that divided the world into five climatic zones following the parallels of latitude; a later source, a lost eighth century map included in the *Commentary of the Apocalypse of St. John* by Beatus of Liebana (who stressed the idea that the Apostles had to travel in all parts of the world in order to spread the Christian truth) is believed to be the origin of quadripartite maps, which represented the world in the same fashion as the tripartite form, with the addition of a fourth part, identified with the Antipodes.³⁵

Regardless of the graphical differences, however, maps of all typologies came to be structured more as an historical and allegorical narrative rather than as a spatial description of the current world.³⁶ As they were given meaning through biblical sources, the *spiritual* picture

³⁴ Of which some 1.100 exemplars, dated from the ninth up to the fifteenth century, still survive.

³⁵ For an overview of the different typologies and their origins, see David Woodward, "Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 75 No.4, 1985. For an accurate periodization of the *Mappaemundi*, see John Brian Harley and David Woodward, *Cartography in prehistoric, ancient and medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago press, 1987, chapter 18 ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*"), and in particular pp. 296-318.

³⁶ As illustrated, amongst other things, by the usual choice of a central feature for the maps. See David Woodward, "Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps", cit., p. 515.

of Christianity was bound to prevail, in their representations, over the reality of geographical information.³⁷

As underlined by Harley and Woodward,³⁸ the lack of accuracy in the *Mappaemundi* didn't necessarily imply a lack of current geographical knowledge from the part of their compilers. Their format and the lack of factual information, was in many ways (as it could very well have been, as mentioned above, in the case of literature), the effect of a *deliberate* choice on the part of the compilers. Medieval maps, according to their genre, served aims established by custom, more than determined by utility. *Mappaemundi*, in particular, formed a well-defined cartographical typology, that very rarely showed contact with other cartographical genres of more practical use (such as celestial maps, regional or local maps, and, above all, the portolan charts – which showed, indeed, a faster evolution, but are, on the other hand, very rarely dated before the fourteenth century). *Mappaemundi* did not aim at producing a detailed geographical outline of the regions they represented. Their purpose was instead “philosophical and didactic: a schematic representation of the earth that in the more detailed examples was extended to give a great deal of information about its inhabitants and their relationship to the deity.”³⁹ The authors could be considered more as illustrators than cartographers in the proper sense of the term, as their maps, which were made to appeal to a learned

³⁷ Tripartite maps, for example, were commonly conceived as representations of the peopling of the Earth by Noah's sons, or as symbols of the Cross and of the Passion of Christ. India, and Eastern Asia in general, on the other hand, came to be commonly identified with the Terrestrial Paradise and the figure of Christ or of God the Father was often graphically superimposed on them, as a symbol the Last Judgment.

³⁸ John Brian Harley, David Woodward, *Cartography in prehistoric, ancient and medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, cit., chapters 17 (Medieval maps: an introduction”) and 18 (“Medieval *Mappaemundi*”), and in particular the paragraphs “Realism versus symbolism” and “Relationship of *Mappaemundi* to other Medieval Maps” (pp. 288-294).

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 284.

public, could hardly be separated from the textual descriptions that accompanied them.

While it is difficult to ascertain how much of the geographical knowledge of the present and of the past was available to the compilers of the *Mappaemundi*, however, what is sure is that their willingness to “point out that the knowledge of information about the earth was of strictly secondary importance to the Christian, whose mind should be on a higher spiritual plane”⁴⁰ prevented their work from conveying precise geographical information to their public, above all as far as Asia was concerned.

1.2. THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES: TRAVEL NARRATIVES AND THE “REDISCOVERY” OF EAST ASIA

Only in the thirteenth century, the way Asia was perceived and represented in European literature underwent a progressive shift. It was by the beginning of the century, in fact, that some of the barriers that had previously kept European travellers from personally reaching for Eastern Asia began to crumble.

In 1204, the Byzantine Empire, which had previously banned foreigners from travelling beyond Constantinople, was overthrown (albeit temporarily), allowing European merchants – and particularly members of Northern Italy’s city-states Genoa and Venice – to establish their commercial bases around the Black Sea. At about the same time, in 1206, the Mongol prince Temüjin, having secured his leadership over the tribes of the eastern Eurasian steppe, assumed the

⁴⁰ David Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps”, cit., p. 515

title of Chinggis Qan. This was the start of the expansion of the Mongol Empire, which by the time of the Qan's death, in 1227, would extend as far east as the Yellow Sea and as far west as the Caspian Sea, incorporating nomadic tribes, semi-sedentarised populations and settled people alike.

By mid-century, the Mongol Empire came to pose a very concrete threat to Christianity. In 1242, after reducing Georgia to tributary status, the Mongol general Baiju led his forces against the Seljuq Sultan of Anatolia. The following year, the Seljuq army was defeated, causing a large number of mercenaries, former subjects of the Khwarazmian dynasty,⁴¹ to flee towards Jerusalem. The city, that was, at the time, under the shaky control of the Latin Kingdom established there during the First Crusade, was sacked and left in ruins.

An even more direct menace came at about the same time from the north-western Asian frontier. Between 1240 and 1241, Poland and Hungary were attacked, and their major cities were raided. The Mongols retired without proceeding to annex the territories they had ravished, nor carrying their military operations further into the European territory,⁴² but their pressure on the eastern edges of Christianity was not to relent for decades. Internal divisions in the Mongol camp prevented further attacks in the years that immediately followed the raids, but a military campaign was again conducted

⁴¹ The Muslim dynasty that had ruled Greater Iran throughout the High Middle Ages, and had been attacked and displaced by the Mongols in 1220.

⁴² The reasons for this sudden retreat are not certain. One traditional explanation is the one that sees the evacuation as a consequence of the sudden death of the Gran Qan. While such hypothesis can't be discounted, other plausible explanations have been formulated in more recent years – such as the one that sees the retreat as a consequence of the exhaustion of the Hungarian plains, which couldn't sustain the Mongol army any longer. The Mongols might have also had, from the start, a limited objective, probably because of their lack of insight on the actual divisions within Christendom (which could have turned it into an easy prey). For an in-depth discussion of the different hypotheses and a more detailed overview of the Mongol invasion, see Peter Jackson, *The Mongols And The West, 1221-1410*, Harlow [etc.] : Pearson Longman, 2005, chapter 3 (“The Mongol invasions of 1241-4”).

against Prussia and Poland in 1259. While no other major Mongol strike against Europe followed, further minor raids were conducted against both Poland and Hungary throughout the 1280s and the 1290s.⁴³

The reaction of the Christian political and intellectual élite to the expansion of the Mongol Empire was not as ready as it might be expected. The earliest reports about the rising power of the Mongols had reached Rome in the 1520s, relayed by Syrian Christians and by the missionaries stationed in Hungary, who had been in touch with the Nestorians of central Asia. Probably as an effect of the long-standing isolation of Latin Christianity, though, the threat was not immediately perceived in its full force. Also due the weight of legendary traditions such as the one of Prester John, the news only vaguely fed the hope in the possibility of an alliance with a strong Asian force against the Muslims in Asia Minor.⁴⁴

The incumbent invasion of Hungary was what finally gave reality, in the eyes of the European leadership, to the Mongol power. At the beginning of 1238, a Hungarian Dominican, brother Julian, came back from a missionary trip to the Volga regions and Russia, relaying second-hand information about the Mongol advance. He also brought back a letter that had been found in the hands of a group of Mongol emissaries, imprisoned by the Grand Duke of Suzdal, Iuri. It was a request of submission, directly addressed by the Gran Qan, Batu, to Bela IV, king of Hungary.

⁴³ For a very general overview of the military campaigns directed by the Mongol against Europe, see Peter Jackson, "The Mongols and Europe", in David Abulafia (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 5, c.1198-c.1300*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.703-719.

⁴⁴ See in this regard Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 31.

Julian reported to the king and to the papal legate at the Hungarian court, relating about the Mongol military tactics and about their victories in Asia. A copy of the letter, which had raised considerable worry at court, was forwarded to King Bela's uncle, Patriarch of Aquileia, and from there further divulged throughout Europe. The earliest extant manuscript, transcribed in the German Benedictine monastery of Ottobeuren and dated 1241, includes, together with the letter, a number of documents concerning the Mongols and the copy of a prophecy, clearly associated with their advance, which anticipated dire times for Europe.⁴⁵

Soon after the diffusion of the letter, news of the devastation brought on Poland and Hungary by the Mongol hordes reached the Christian leaders. By the time of his election, in 1243, Pope Innocent IV had been in possession of two letters from King Bela relating about the raids, and he had had occasion to talk with various refugees from West Asian lands that had been under attack. The alarming reports he collected prompted him to send no less than three embassies to the Mongols, between March and April 1245, not even waiting for the opening of the Council of Lyons, bound to be held the same year.⁴⁶

Other European leaders soon followed on his steps. In 1248, Louis IX, king of France, who had travelled to Cyprus preparing for a campaign against the Saracens of Egypt, made his first contact with the commanders of the Mongol army stationed in Asia Minor. His

⁴⁵ The prophecy was in any probability of Hungarian provenance and, while it was to circulate for centuries, even long after the downfall of the Mongol power, it was likely produced in direct connection to the incumbent invasion. Surely, it was perceived as such by European readers of the time, testifying a growing conscience of the Mongol menace amongst the Christian population. On the prophecy and its fortune, and on Julian's letter, see Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of Enlightenment*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009 (in particular, chapter 1 "The Mongols are coming").

⁴⁶ The most renown of which was the one led by the Franciscan Giovanni da Pian del Carpine. On the Papal embassies, see Peter Jackson, *The Mongols And The West*, cit., chapter 4 ("A remedy against the Tartars").

attempt at invasion turned out to be disastrous, but the promising character of such diplomatic exchanges encouraged him to pursue further relationships with the Mongols. Soon after, in 1249, he dispatched his first emissary, André de Longjumeau, as an avowed diplomat to their capital, Qaraqorum. In 1253, he promoted a second mission, headed by the Franciscan William of Rubruck, sent not in a diplomatic capacity but with a more strictly missionary purpose. These missions paved the way for a long series of diplomatic and missionary trips, travelling to the Mongol Empire along the two main extant routes through Western Asia (a northern one, crossing Poland, and a southern one, lying across Syria).

By the mid-thirteenth century, the European Christian leaders still appreciated the potential role of the Mongols as an Asian ally of Christianity. From a religious point of view, given their known tendency to tolerate and recruit members of different religious sects, the Mongols were often associated, by contemporary Christian scholars, with heterodoxy,⁴⁷ and were deemed as a more approachable counterpart than the Muslims. The diplomatic and religious missions organized by Christian leaders set out with the aim of accumulating knowledge about the ambitions and the military tactics of the Mongols, but also in the hope of spreading and affirming the Catholic faith amongst them. This intention, above in the earliest years of the intercourse, was coupled with the underlying ambition of negotiating a military cooperation against the Muslims.

Such ambition was mainly born of the belief that, as most of the political powers with which the Mongols had been conflicting were

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*. Some observers had instead associated them with the Jews, in a far less positive light – that is, as an internal threat to Christendom. This was probably at least in part related to the prophecy that, as mentioned before, had been circulating in Europe at least since the 1240s, which, amongst other things, predicted the liberation of the Jews from captivity.

Muslim, an anti-Muslim (and therefore, possibly, pro-Christian) campaign was deliberately being conducted. In this sense, the victories obtained by the Mongols in Asia Minor raised remarkable optimism in Europe throughout the second half of the thirteenth century. However, the ups and downs of the diplomatic intercourse maintained with the Mongols by the Christian leaders would soon make it apparent that such belief idea was, in large part, a misconception: that the subjugation of the Muslim power was more an incidental step in the Mongol ambition towards the construction of a universal empire than a final objective.

The contacts established by Louis IX during his Egyptian campaign, in 1248, had been, as mentioned above, of a rather promising nature. The Mongol general Eljigidei had taken the initiative in establishing them, sending an embassy to the King of France to propose joint operations against the Muslims. Such overture, however, had been prompted by immediate and practical military circumstances, more than by a real correspondence of intents with the Christian leader. The aim of the Mongol general had been, in fact, to direct the crusading army towards Egypt, so as to deflect Europe's military effort from territories that were more immediate military targets for the Mongols, such as Syria.⁴⁸

This became apparent when André de Longjumeau and William of Rubruck reached the Mongol capital, as King Louis IX's emissaries. Their reception at the Mongol court was, in spite of all previous contacts, tepid and both emissaries weren't able to accomplish any diplomatic success of remarkable sort. Andrew of Longjumeau returned to France bearing a request for annual tributes to King Louis IX, while William of Rubruquis failed in his attempt to convert the Grand Qan to

⁴⁸ Peter Jackson, "The Crisis in the Holy Land in 1260", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 376 (Jul., 1980), pp. 481-513, p. 483.

Christianity.⁴⁹ This made the Christian leaders more wary in their subsequent interactions with the Il-Qans. While their stance towards the Mongols remained, all in all, cordial and hopeful throughout their diplomatic intercourse, it showed also an extreme degree of caution.

The abort of the negotiations promoted by King Louis IX was not the only motivator to caution for the Christian leaders. Even though internal divisions had prevented the Christian leaders from organizing a joint military reaction against the raids in Poland and Hungary,⁵⁰ the attacks of 1241 and 1242 had been enough to move them to a certain degree of distrust. In a letter dated 1247, Emperor Frederick explicitly mentioned the Mongols as enemies. And, by 1260, Pope Alexander IV advocated the need of a crusade against them, warning the fellow leaders of Europe that their pretenses of friendship towards Christianity were merely part of a military tactic.⁵¹ At a more popular level, a significant section of the literature of the time was depicting the advance of the Mongols in an apocalyptic light. The growing power of the Il-Qans was related to the prophecies of the seventh century Syriac work the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, and their military triumph was equated to the coming of the Antichrist.⁵²

These factors contributed in making the attitude of Christianity towards the Mongol power far more ambivalent and complex than it had been in the first half of the thirteenth century. In 1259, when Hülegü, younger brother of the Great Qan Möngke, attempted – and only briefly succeeded – at invading Syria, a conflict with the Egyptian Muslims ensued. In spite of their own strife with the Muslim, however,

⁴⁹ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 33.

⁵⁰ In 1241, Pope Gregory IX had actually called for a new crusade in response to the menace, and an army, led by the Emperor's son Conrad IV, was gathered by the German bishops. The troops, though, ended up being employed, instead, in an intestine strife. On the crusade, see Peter Jackson, "The crusade against the Mongols (1241)", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, volume 42/ issue 1, 1991, pp. 1-18.

⁵¹ Peter Jackson, "The Mongols and Europe", cit., p. 716.

⁵² Peter Jackson, *The Mongols And The West*, cit., pp. 143-146.

the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem kept a neutral stance towards the conflict, and didn't offer any military help even when the Mongols were forced to retire eastwards. A few years later, around 1263, negotiations for a military cooperation were initiated, again by Hülegü, with Pope Urban IV – at a time when internal conflicts in the Mongol front urged the Qan princes to put a forced stop to their universal ambitions and to seek aid from external allies. The Pope, however, opted for a stalling attitude, claiming that an alliance would be built only after Hülegü's conversion to Christianity. Later on, in 1287, the diplomatic efforts of the Nestorian envoy Rabban Bar Sauma bore, similarly, no significant fruit.⁵³

As a consequence of Christianity's caution and internal divisions, as well as of the Mongols' own agenda, the results of the intercourse between Europe and Asia in the thirteenth century were, from a diplomatic point of view, all in all disappointing.⁵⁴

On the other hand, the religious missions, which were carried on well into the fourteenth century, granted, for the first time in centuries, a consistent flow of information between Asia and Europe. The majority of the missionaries sent to the Mongol Empire compiled reports of the travels – and often proved to be keen observers. Their writings provided European readers with the transcription of their

⁵³ For a more complete overview and an insight on the mechanisms of the diplomatic interchange between the Mongols and the Christian leaders, from the thirteenth century onwards, see chapter 7 (“An ally against Islam : the Mongols in the Near East”) of Peter Jackson, *The Mongols And The West*, cit..

⁵⁴ This has prompted some commentators to describe the careful responses of the Christian leaders to some of the Mongol overtures throughout the thirteenth century in terms of a “missed opportunity”. Peter Jackson argues, however, that given their ambitions, an alliance with the Mongol could easily have turned out unprofitable to Europe, in the long run. In this regard, see Peter Jackson, “The Crisis in the Holy Land in 1260”, cit.

first-hand experience of the Mongol Empire – the first direct source of knowledge on Asia produced since the fall of the Roman Empire.⁵⁵

The work that inaugurated this new tradition of writings on Asia was the *Historia Mongalorum*, composed by the Franciscan Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, the first envoy sent from the Papacy to the Mongols, upon his return to Lyons in 1247. The scope of his work was still somehow limited, in comparison with later writings. Giovanni only traveled as far as the headquarters of the Grand Qan, near Qaraqorum, and at a time when the influence of different Asian cultures had yet to plant deep roots in the Mongol society. While he wasn't able to accumulate significant knowledge on the Mongol Empire in its entirety, however, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's work marked

a transition in medieval literature on Asia, for it is primarily an itinerary and a factual description of what he and his companions saw, heard and surmised. He does not quote earlier writers except for Isidore, or incorporate in his narrative many of the traditional fables about Asia. He heard about Cathay [China], learned that it bordered the sea, and was apparently informed about its language, religion (somewhat mistakenly), and arts.⁵⁶

That is not to say that the *Historia Mongalorum* lacked any similarity to the previous literary tradition on Asia. In his depiction of China, which he didn't visit himself, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine adopted, for example, a somewhat idealized approach, that called back

⁵⁵ For a more complete, albeit general, overview of the literature connected to the European missions to Asia during the Mongol Era see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., pp. 30-48.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

to a utopian imaginary quite popular in the European Middle ages: the myth of a virtuous and superiorly happy nation, living at the eastern edges of the world – a narrative which was born of the Greek and Latin tradition and had lived on in most of the medieval encyclopaedic literature, as well as in legendary traditions such as that of Alexander. This wasn't the only myth of classical origin that crept into the father's writing – descriptions of Cynocephali, Monopods and other monstrous creatures were included, albeit relegated to the representation of lands removed from the itinerary actually followed by the writer.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Giovanni's descriptions of the Mongol camp and his considerations on the political and military organization of the Mongol power, based strictly on personal observation, opened a whole new perspective on the representation of Asia.

When he left for his missionary trip in 1253, William of Rubruck was surely familiar with Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's work. The report he wrote for King Louis IX about his own mission, titled *Itinerarium fratris Willielmi de Rubruquis de ordine fratrum Minorum, Galli, Anno gratia 1253 ad partes Orientales*, was very similar in approach and opened an even richer window for the European reader on the complexity of Asian society.

While Giovanni had gone no further than the Mongol camp, William had actually been able to enter the city of Qaraqorum, and was the first European traveller to provide a detailed depiction of the structure of the Mongol capital, as well as of the exteriors and interiors of its buildings. He also included a description of the Qan's palace, presented in an overall unimpressed tone, that challenged a secular imaginary of mythical, golden palaces built in the East.⁵⁸ His report focused on a wide variety of social matters, ranging from diet, to clothing, to funeral

⁵⁷ Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, cit., pp. 59-60.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 66-67.

practices. Given the nature of his mission, one of his main interests was, of course, religion. He wrote extensively on the Mongol religious customs, on Buddhists and Buddhism, and, as could be expected, reserved a special section of his report to the Nestorians of Asia, and to the Christians dwelling in the court of the Qan.

While, again, not completely devoid of references to the classical myths, William of Rubruck's work was overall able to immortalize the diversity of Mongol Empire in a more objective way than that of his predecessor. He included descriptions of the Tangut and the Tibetan people that had been annexed to the Mongol Empire during the first decades of its expansion. Like Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, the Franciscan didn't get to travel as far as China, but he was able to identify what his contemporaries knew as "Cathay" with the land of the "Seres" of the classical sources, and to make some perceptive considerations on Chinese writing. In this sense, his work constituted a further step away from the traditional narratives on Asia.

The first European missionary report of some note to include a first-hand description of China was however to be composed several decades after William of Rubruck's voyage, by the Franciscan missionary Odoric of Pordenone.

Odoric had left Europe sometime between 1316 and 1318, when the roots of a Christian mission had already been planted in China with considerable stability.⁵⁹ His voyage brought him through India,

⁵⁹ The first Christian missionary to actually reach China had been Giovanni da Montecorvino, sent to the Mongols by Pope Nicholas IV in 1289. Father Giovanni had traveled through India and crossed Qaraqorum, and had finally settled in the new Mongol Capital, Qanbaliq, located in the site of modern Beijing. There, favorably received by the Mongol authorities, he had founded a Franciscan mission. Despite the opposition often met by the father from the local Nestorians, the Christian community that he gathered grew steadily throughout the last decade of the thirteenth century. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, it was big enough to require the aid of further missionaries, causing another Franciscan, Arnold of Cologne, to be promptly dispatched to Qabaliq. In 1313, three Franciscan bishops sent by Pope Clement V, Gerard Albuini, Peregrinus de Castello and Andrea da

Quanzhou, Hangzhou and Yangzhou, and finally to Qanbaliq, where he arrived around 1325. He stayed in the Mongol capital for about three years, before embarking on his return trip. The exact itinerary of his journey back to Europe is not clear, but he seems to have gotten to visit Tibet and some of its peripheral areas.⁶⁰

He was back to Italy by 1330, after more than ten years of permanence in Asia. His travel report, related to a fellow Franciscan at St. Anthony's Convent (Padua) and commonly known as *Itinerarium de mirabilibus orientalium Tartarorum* (or, more simply, *Itinerarium*),⁶¹ is probably the most complete and rich of the European missionary accounts compiled during the Mongol era.

The work retained only thin links with the medieval traditional narratives on Asia. Odoric did mention, in reference to his return trip, having passed through the "Land of Prester John" (possibly speaking of modern inner Mongolia),⁶² but he also specified that it was basically different from the way it had been depicted in previous sources.⁶³

Perugia, consecrated Giovanni as first archbishop of Qanbaliq. Several missionaries were to join this first group in Qanbaliq in the following years, including Odoric of Pordenone himself.

⁶⁰ On Odoric's travel itinerary, see Vladimír Liščák, "Christianity in Mongolian China and mission of Odoric of Pordenone", *Archiv orientální / Oriental Archive*, Vol. 77 No.1, 2009 (available at the url: http://anthrop.sci.muni.cz/UserFiles/Clanky//2011/82_Odoric-of-Pordenone-and-His-Account-on-the-orientalium-partium.pdf Last access: August 24, 2012).

⁶¹ The original manuscript being lost, there is actually no certainty about the original title of the work. The report is also commonly known as *Descriptio orientalium partium* or simply as *Relatione*. Other titles found in the existing manuscripts include *Diversæ Historiæ*, *De ritibus hominum et condicionibus huius mundi*, *De mirabilibus orientalium Tartarorum* and *De (rebus) mirabilibus*. An assessment of Odoric's travel relation, and an overview of the scholarly debate over the veracity of the *Itinerarium* are included in *ibidem*, pp. 4-9 and in ID, "Odoric of Pordenone and His Account on the *orientalium partium* in the Light of Manuscripts", *Anthropologia Integra*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 2011, pp. 63-74. (available at the url: http://anthrop.sci.muni.cz/UserFiles/Clanky//2011/82_Odoric-of-Pordenone-and-His-Account-on-the-orientalium-partium.pdf Last access: August 24, 2012).

⁶² Vladimír Liščák, "Christianity in Mongolian China", p. 4.

⁶³ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 41. Odoric was the last medieval traveler to openly place the land of Prester John in Asia.

Odoric included descriptions of the Malabar coast, of Java, Sumatra, Champa, and of all the major Chinese cities he visited on his way to Qanbaliq. He focused mostly on the religious panorama of the localities he visited, taking note, above all, of the presence of Christians and Muslims, but included also comments on customs and society, and on some geographical aspects – such as the types of cultivations and the species of animals he encountered. Curiously, his narrative didn't reserve much space to the missionary efforts of his fellow Franciscans in Qanbaliq, except by mentioning the number of conversions, above all among the authorities. He seems to have frequented the Qan's court regularly – a sign that the Franciscans were welcome there – and he described the way it was organized and the ceremonies held there in remarkable detail.⁶⁴

Diplomats and missionaries weren't, actually, the only travellers to participate in the new flow of exchanges between Asia and Europe. By 1279, when they defeated the Southern Sung Dynasty, the Mongols had managed to unify virtually the entirety of the Asian continent under their dominance. Even with the internal strifes that derived from the division of the Empire into a confederation of rival Qanates, by 1261-1262, the new order granted an overall stable and peaceful political asset to Asia, that made it relatively safe to travel. This also opened a

⁶⁴ The most recent English translation of William of Rubruck's report, complete with introduction and full scholarly annotations, can be found in Peter Jackson and David Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255*, London : The Hakluyt Society, 1990. Both Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's work and an older translation of William of Rubruck's account (together with a few letters from other missionaries, including Giovanni da Montecorvino) can be found in Christopher Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955. An English translation of Odoric of Pordenone's account was realized in 1866 by Sir Henry Yule and can be found, with an introduction by Paolo Chiesa, in Henry Yule, *The Travels of Friar Odoric: 14th Century Journal of the Blessed Odoric of Pordenone*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

huge operation field for trade – one where the role of the intermediaries that had traditionally conducted the commercial exchanges under the Muslims dominance became inconsequential.

The merchants, particularly the Italians, that had been operating in the outposts acquired during the Crusades era and around the Black Sea, were quick in taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the new Asian order. By the mid-thirteenth century, the most resourceful of them had already started to deal with luxury goods – textiles, gems and gold, mainly from Persia, India and Central Asia – purchased not merely in response to the European demand, but also, and mostly, as a way to appeal to the Asian market. The Qan princes proved to be avid purchasers of this kind of products, as the gold and the textiles were at that point (as an effect of both commerce and the tribute system) one of the bases of their economical system.⁶⁵ The direct involvement of the Qans in the exchanges raised the stakes for the European commercial enterprise, further promoting its infiltration eastwards.⁶⁶

While the role of the Polo brothers as pioneering figures in this new trade is widely recognized,⁶⁷ drawing a definite timeline of its development is not easy. Even in the new era, the merchants seem in fact to have mostly kept the details about their commercial transactions and about the routes they covered under extreme

⁶⁵ An in depth analysis of the role played by the Mongols in the trans-Eurasian exchanges (with a particular emphasis on the role of the textiles) is offered by Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and exchange in the Mongol Empire: cultural history of islamic textiles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of the expansion of the European trade in Asia in the first half of the thirteenth century, see Robert Sabatino Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, cit., chapter 4 (“The Uneven Diffusion of Commercialization”) and particularly pp. 106-112 (“From Greenland to Peking: the Explosion of the Italian Trade”).

⁶⁷ On the role of Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, who were amongst the first European merchants to ever reach the city of Peking, in the expansion of the Italian trade in Asia, see Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, cit., pp. 72-93.

reserve.⁶⁸ The majority of the information available about their movements is derived from writings not directly concerned with the trade itself, such as the above mentioned missionaries' or diplomatic reports. These kind of sources, however, often limit themselves to register the presence of the European merchants living and working in the provinces of the Mongol Empire, and don't include much more than sparse and obscure information about their activities.

Given this lack of contemporary merchants' reports and commercial documents, it cannot be said, all in all, that the experiences accumulated by the merchants operating in East Asia came to influence the late Medieval European imaginary of Asia in a significant way.

A few exceptions to such trend can, however, be mentioned.

Sometime between 1310 and 1340, the Florentine professional merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, agent of the Bardi company, wrote *La pratica della mercatura*, a work meant as a sort of handbook for commerce. The book included the description of one of the routes followed by the European travelers to China – the one from Crimea to Qanbaliq, that had once been covered also by the Polo brothers. Pegolotti himself had never travelled to China, but he had collected reports from a number of other merchants, possibly fellow Florentine citizens, as by that time at least the Florentine Frescobaldi company had reportedly began to import silk from China.⁶⁹ He was therefore able to trace the various stages of the journey and to give advice on equipment that was necessary to face it, and also to collect practical

⁶⁸ In any probability, as the result of a deliberate choice, at least, in the case of the Genoese merchants. See in this regard Robert Sabatino Lopez, "European Merchants in the Medieval Indies: The Evidence of Commercial Documents", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Nov. 1943), pp. 164-184.

⁶⁹ Robert Sabatino Lopez, "European Merchants in the Medieval Indies", cit., p. 166.

information on how to conduct the transactions – such as lists of the spices commonly sold in Europe that could be purchased in Asia, a list of the products that could more easily be placed in Asia, and the current Chinese prices for silk, given in Genoese currency.⁷⁰

Pegolotti's book was very practical in scope. Being directed essentially to merchants, it wasn't meant to exert an impact on the more generic European readership. Of a very different nature was instead the other, and most notable source on Asia produced by the hands of a European merchant – that is, the *Divissament du monde*, Marco Polo's account of his family's and his own experience as merchant, diplomat and administrator in the Mongol Empire.⁷¹

Marco left Europe in 1271, in the company of his father Niccolò and his uncle Maffeo, at about the time when the merchants' "rush to the Farther East" (as defined by Sabatino)⁷² was beginning in full force. The two brothers had travelled from their outpost in Crimea to China already in 1260, and had been received, in Qanbaliq, by the Grand Qan, Qubilay, himself. The Qan had entrusted them with a request for the pope, to send learned European men to the Mongol capital in order to instruct the court about European religion, politics and military tactics. The Polo brothers, complying with Qubilay's request, had travelled back to Europe and sought audience with the newly elected Pope in

⁷⁰ Pegolotti actually put a lot of stress on silk, a sign of how important a good it had become for Europe, whose own production wasn't, apparently, enough to meet the demand. Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, pp. 45-46.

⁷¹ Marco Polo's work was, actually, only partly an exception to the merchant's tendency to reserve. As underlined by Olschki, the account carefully avoided any open reference to the commercial activities of Marco's family in Asia. Even the first encounter between Berke Qan and the Polo brothers, who hadn't at the time been invested with any official capacity, and who conducted with him what at all effects was a commercial transaction, was conveniently veiled under the pretense of an exchange of courtesies amongst equals. Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, pp. 76-77.

⁷² Robert Sabatino Lopez, "European Merchants in the Medieval Indies", cit., p. 164.

Rome, managing to bring back with them, together with Marco, two Dominican Friars.

The two missionaries actually chose to stop and turn back halfway on the voyage to Qanbaliq, leaving the Polos empty-handed. Nonetheless, when they arrived back in the Mongol capital, the Polos were received again by the Qan. Both the two brothers and Marco were welcomed into the Qan's services, as it was customary for the Mongols to employ strangers, as well as men from the populations under their dominance (Arabs, Turks, Persians, Qidan, Nüzhen), into their administration, so as to diversify its ranks.

It was precisely Marco Polo's role as a member of the Mongol administration – a role that he retained for seventeen years – that allowed him to travel throughout China, visiting even some of its most peripheral regions, and collecting the knowledge and the experiences that he included into his work. This was composed a few years after his return to Venice, between 1298 and 1299, in the prisons of Genoa, where Marco had ended up after having being captured during a battle between Genoa and Venice.⁷³ It was dictated to a fellow prisoner, Rustichello da Pisa, who, as an author of romances, impressed some of the stylistic peculiarities of the genre on the narration, such as the use of the Vernacular (French, intermixed with some Italianisms).

As for the contents, the book was easily the most complete and rich of the narratives on Asia produced in the thirteenth century.⁷⁴ The

⁷³ According to the *Navigazioni et viaggi* of Giovanni Battista Ramusio, the naval Battle of Curzola.

⁷⁴ I will not dwell in excessive detail on Marco Polo's work, given also the richness of the literature on the matter. One of the most used and renowned English version of Marco Polo's work is *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition*, 2 vols., based on the third, annotated edition of the Henry Yule's translation of the work (dated 1903), as revised, in 1920, by Henri Cordier. The work is available for free on the Gutenberg Project site (url: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10636/10636-8.txt>, last visited on August 28, 2012). As a further reference on Marco Polo's journey, see Laurence Bergreen, *Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu*, New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007. For an analysis of the contents of Marco Polo's

narration of the itineraries covered by Niccolò, Maffeo and Marco was enriched by a variety of accurate descriptions of the provinces of Asia. Contrary to many contemporary religious travellers, Marco Polo didn't particularly dwell on the variety of the religious creeds inside the Mongol Empire (even though he described, on occasion, the Buddhist practices he had occasion to witness). He proved however to be a peculiarly keen observer when it came to portraying the complexity of the political and administrative system of the Empire, its internal power structure, its infrastructures and means of communications, the architecture of its cities, and also – an uncommon element, still, for the travel narratives of the thirteenth century, but befitting Marco Polo's role as administrator – its natural resources. In this sense, the structure of his account can be said to fit both in the realm of travel relations and in that of geographical works, an approach that, as underlined by Ricardo Padrón,⁷⁵ was close to that of many much later – mostly, early modern – travel narratives, on which the work itself exerted a fundamental influence.

The *Divissament du monde* was peculiar also in that it underlined the cultural variety and complexity of East Asia in a more clear-cut way than what the earlier travel relations had done, and in that it introduced European readers, for the first time, to some peripheral regions previously unknown. The book shed some light on the cultural divide between what some previous writers already had identified as

work, in relation to the wider context of Europe's "discovery" of East Asia, see Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, cit. and John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999.

⁷⁵ In tracing the purpose of Marco Polo's work and its relationship with the literary genres of the time, Padrón defines it as "geography organized as a journey", suggesting its similarity with the cartographical genre of the itinerary map. He underlines, on the contrary, its fundamental difference with the maps of the Renaissance period, which put the readers in the position of a detached observer – while Marco Polo's narrative treated them as travelers, moving through the routes he describes. Ricardo Padrón, "Mapping Plus Ultra: Cartography, Space, and Hispanic Modernity", *Representations*, Vol. 79 No. 1, 2002, pp. 28-60.

“Cathay” (that is, Northern China), and Southern China (“Mangi”, according to the Mongol terminology) that, as mentioned before, was conquered with the defeat of the Sung in 1279). Moreover, albeit yet tentatively, it traced the geography of the Southern Asian regions and seas.

Marco Polo also mentioned the existence of Japan, under the name “Cipangu” – a rendition of the Chinese denomination *Jih-pen-kue*. Marco, himself, hadn’t visited the archipelago, and the information he included in his account, collected during his voyages to the easternmost parts of the Chinese continent and during his stay at the Mongol court (where the invasions of the archipelago, attempted respectively in 1274 and 1281, were being planned), was in many respects inaccurate. He greatly overestimated Japan’s distance from China and misjudged the position of the archipelago, placing it in the middle of the Ocean – rather than relatively close to the continent – and opposite to the southern provinces of China.⁷⁶ He, moreover, unrealistically stressed its commercial isolation, at a time when, surely enough, Japan had developed a rich history of maritime relationships with eastern Asia.⁷⁷ His account also projected on Japan some of the myths it had contributed to dispel about China. His description of the palace of the

⁷⁶ This was maybe because Southern China was where he obtained the information – assuming that the distance he heard mentioned was referred to a land positioned in an exactly opposite location to the region where he found himself at the time. João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, “Japan and the Japanese in printed works in Europe in the sixteenth century”, *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies*, No. 014, June 2007, pp. 43-107.

⁷⁷ As underlined by Amino Yoshihiko, regardless of the official policies of the central State, the private merchants and sailors of Japan, particularly those of the *saigoku* – where the maritime populations played a fundamental influence on the local economy, had long entertained unofficial exchanges with different regions of Asia, so that even the perception of the boundaries of the Japanese State from the part of the population was blurred. It was precisely by the time of the Mongol invasions of Japan that, as an effect of both the policies of the Kamakura *bakufu* and of the response to the external menace, the Japanese population began to develop a more definite conscience of its separation from the external world. Amino Yoshihiko, *Higashi to nishi no kataru Nihon no rekishi* (History of Japan narrated from the East and the West), Tōkyō, Kōdansha, 1998.

Emperor as entirely roofed and decorated in gold was a call back to the fabulous Eastern palaces of the literary tradition on Asia. Nevertheless, the *Divissament du mond* was the first European book to ever make a recognizable reference to Japan.

Given their origin and approach, and the quality of the information they included, the missionary reports and, even more prominently, Marco Polo's *Divissament du monde* surely held the potential to question the traditional Medieval representations of Asia. Their effective impact on the contemporary European readership, however, can be estimated only by considering their diffusion, and the way they were actually perceived by readers.

We know that the *Historia Mongalorum* circulated for some time as a separated work, in manuscript form, mainly amongst Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's circle.⁷⁸ A few years after its composition, between 1256 and 1259, it was, moreover, included into a well known encyclopaedic work of the time – the *Speculum Historiae*, by Vincent de Beauvais, a world history in thirty-one books, based on a combination of secular and profane sources. Part of the information included in William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium* was similarly added by Roger Bacon's to his natural science treaty, the *Opus Maius*, that didn't reach, however, a remarkable level of popularity, until much later, in 1733, when its first proper edition was published. Odoric of Pordenone's *Itinerarium* was easily the most popular work out of the missionary reports, as testified by the huge number of manuscripts – over one hundred and thirty – that have survived up to our time.

Both the *Speculum Historiae* (and, consequently, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's account) and Odoric of Pordenone's *Itinerarium* became,

⁷⁸ Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, cit., p. 58.

moreover, source material for the compilation of the *Book of Sir John Mandeville*,⁷⁹ one of the most well-known examples of travel literature of the late Middle Ages. The work was presumably composed between 1356 and 1357,⁸⁰ in Anglo-Norman French. It was subsequently translated into eight different vernacular languages and in Latin, and widely circulated throughout Europe. More than three hundred manuscript copies of it, in different versions, remain to this day.⁸¹

As for Marco Polo's account, its status as a well-known work can, similarly, hardly be questioned. The book, which would become known, throughout Europe, as *The travels of Marco Polo*,⁸² was widely circulated even before the author's death, in 1324, in many different versions and translations. This is testified not only by the huge number – around a hundred and fifty – of manuscript copies of the work that have survived up to our days, but also by chroniclers, such as Ramusio, that reported of its vast diffusion, and by the number of direct and

⁷⁹ This was the common medieval designation of the work often referred to in modern editions as the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* – on the base of a print edition dated 1586. On Mandeville's work and the way it represented the "East", see Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East : the Travels of John Mandeville*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997. On its circulation and reception, see Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences. A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville (1371-1550)*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003.

⁸⁰ The text itself declares that its author, John de Mandeville, a knight native of St. Albans, England, composed the book by one of these dates (according to the version), supposedly on the base of his travels through Asia and Africa. While part of the narration could be ascribed to personal experience, however, a huge section of the work is actually acquired by other popular travel narratives of the time. The main sources used for the work, aside from Odoric of Pordenone and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, are listed by Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East*, cit., pp. 9-10. Even the author's identity, as no contemporary mention exists of a John Mandeville, has been the object of a long scholarly debate, summed up by Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*, cit., pp. 2-3.

⁸¹ Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East*, cit., p. 8.

⁸² Some alternative titles are *The description of the world*, and the Italian title *Il Milione*, derived from a nickname that used to be commonly associated with the Polo's family.

indirect references to the work included in other pieces of travel literature composed until the end of the Middle Ages.⁸³

One must wonder, however, about the nature of the readers that had access to such works. The *Speculum Historiae* was circulated in its original Latin version. And, while in the case of Odoric's *Itinerarium* a few translations into European vernacular languages were produced,⁸⁴ the vast majority of the manuscripts that have survived to our day are in Latin, a sign that the readership of the work might have been limited to the learned – namely, the section of the population belonging to clerical or university circles.

In the case of the *Book of Sir John Mandeville* and of the *Divissament du monde*, the choice of vernacular as language of composition is in itself a sign that the works were meant to cater to a wider audience than the one usually approaching the Latin works. However, the books could hardly be defined “popular” in the modern sense of the term. Latin, by the end of the fourteenth century, was no more the most commonly used language in literature, and a number of genres, ranging from romance to history, had begun to take on the vernacular as the main language of writing. This was so that they would be accessible to a section of the population that was not literate in Latin, a section that, however, didn't include, by that time, the lower classes, nor, necessarily, the middle-classes that had been slowly emerging since the beginning of the Commercial Revolution era. The public of the manuscripts, a highly costly and elite media in

⁸³ On Marco Polo's influences on contemporary travel literature, see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., pp. 35-39.

⁸⁴ Twenty-four manuscripts were produced in Italian, nine in French and seven in German throughout the fourteenth century, and one Spanish manuscript was created in the fifteenth century. Vladimír Liščák, “Odoric of Pordenone and His Account”, cit., pp. 65-66. See *ibidem*, pp. 65-70, for a more in-depth analysis of the different existing versions of the manuscript and their history.

comparison to some of the later categories of printed books, was more likely to consist in members of the aristocracy – who weren't always, above all in the case of knights, familiar with Latin.⁸⁵ In the case of the *Divissament du monde*, the fact that *this* was the target audience was even explicitly stated in the opening formula, which, as was common for the romance literature of the time, catered openly to the nobility.⁸⁶

Some of the books would actually stand the test of time, and eventually undergo the passage from manuscript to print, in an era when literature had become growingly accessible also to the lower strata of the population. The first printed copies of Odoric of Pordenone's *Itinerarium*, for instance, would begin to appear at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and at least six different editions would be produced by 1600.⁸⁷ Even more numerous would be the editions of the *Book of Sir John Mandeville* – first printed in 1515, and reproduced more than sixty times before the end of the century – and of the *Travels of Marco Polo* – that first appeared in print even earlier, by 1477, and was reproduced in various versions until the first attempt to collate the different manuscripts was made by Giovanni Battista Ramusio, in his collection of travel literature. Up to the end of the Middle Ages, however, the literature connected with the commercial, missionary and diplomatic contacts between Europe and the Mongols was unlikely to exert an influence over the lower, and even the middle strata of society.

Moreover, popular traditions with a deeply rooted background, such as the one of Prester John or that of Alexander, as well as the literary classical and biblical myths, still retained much of their influence,

⁸⁵ Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*, cit., pp. 4-5.

⁸⁶ See in this regard Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, cit., p. 47.

⁸⁷ Vladimír Liščák, "Odoric of Pordenone and His Account", cit., p.70.

acting as a counterbalance to the new images of Asia. Works such as the *Image du monde* by Gautier de Metz, or the *Trésor* by Brunetto Latini, published as late as, respectively, 1245-1247 and 1260, were still very much indebted to the Latin writers. With some notable exception, such as the above mentioned John of Mandeville's narrative (which, however, still mingled the new source materials with some of the more established ones), the majority of the fourteenth century authors who included images of Asia in their works largely drew from them, as well as directly from the classics. Some writers, like Dante, did include mention of the Tartars in their works, but did so without challenging in any substantial way the traditional images of Asia.⁸⁸ At the same time, the veracity of Marco Polo's account, the most popular of the travel narratives, was questioned by many of his contemporaries. The work, also given its format, was actually perceived more as a romance than as an objective geographical reference. It is not by chance that the geographical information included in the book would not even be incorporated in world maps until late in the fourteenth century, with the Catalan Atlas of 1375.⁸⁹

Cartographical and geographical works were actually, in general, very late in accepting the influence of the travel narratives of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was in the fourteenth century that most of the portolan charts that have survived to our days were produced, by the sailors travelling along the Mediterranean coasts and on the Black Sea. Contrary to the *Mappaemundi*, the portolan charts were very practical in scope, laid out for everyday use from the part of the sailors themselves. Objectivity was a requirement for them, and, in this sense, they contributed in a significant way to laying the

⁸⁸ On the representations of Asia in fourteenth century European literature, see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., pp. 74-80.

⁸⁹ Some data from Marco Polo's account were, however, included in an earlier portolan chart, the Laurentian portolan, dated 1351. *Ibidem*, pp. 66-67.

foundation for the later developments of cartography as a science. Given the very different premises on which their construction was based, however, *Mappaemundi* didn't immediately prove prone to receive their influence. The above mentioned Atlas of 1375 and some other Catalan and Majorcan maps of the late fourteenth century did include information derived from the charts, as well as, as mentioned above, from the factual travel narratives of Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone. Thanks, above all, to the contributions of the Jewish merchants, who were able to travel with relative freedom through the lands governed by the Muslims, they were able to include strikingly objective information on Northern Africa, even though they still failed at conveying a convincing picture of the Southern African coasts or of the asset of the Indian Ocean (which was considered a landlocked sea throughout the Middle Ages). These maps were, however, more an exception than a rule. It would be mostly in the era of the "great discoveries" that the use of empirical data in map making would become more common even in the case of world maps – even though the fifteenth century, as we'll see, would bring some contribution in this regard.

For all of these reasons, while the *Pax Mongolica* caused a flow of new, factual information on East Asia to reach Europe, it cannot be presumed, all in all, that it was enough to generate a remarkable shift in the perception of the "East" in the minds of the general European population.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Mongol Yuan Dynasty started to succumb, first to the pressure of rebellions and political struggles, and then to the Ming Dynasty, that progressively extended its control over China, conquering the last resistance in 1388. The fall of the Mongols was paralleled by a new rise of the Muslim power in West Asia, which

would culminate, in the following century, with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople of 1453. This was coupled with Europe's own economic struggles and internal strifes – in particular, the series of conflicts known as the Hundred Years' war, which would erupt by 1337 – that caused most European leaders to project their attention and efforts inwards.

1.3. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: THE DECLINE OF THE LAND ROUTES AND THE PORTUGUESE NAVAL EXPLORATIONS LEADING UP TO THE ERA OF THE “GREAT DISCOVERIES”

All the above mentioned factors contributed to a decline, throughout the fifteenth century, in the use of the commercial land routes across the Asian continent, and in a consequent momentary break in the relationships between Europe and Central and Eastern Asia. It is possible that some travellers ventured, at some time during the century, through one of the old routes to China, but no record exists of such voyage. Sporadic merchants, such as the Venetian Niccolò de' Conti, did reach India via land, and left accounts of their travels. These were, however, scattered reports, and generally meant for limited audiences as, in an era when the Catalan merchants had begun to growingly challenge the Italian primacy in commerce, the urge for reserve was felt even more strongly than before.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ As also demonstrated by the fact that, with the exception of one account by Ludovico di Varthema, published in 1510, none of these accounts gained remarkable fame even in the era of print. An overview of Niccolò de' Conti's and other travel accounts of India produced in the fifteenth century is given in *ibidem*, pp. 59-65.

On the other hand, ever since the second decade of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese embarked on the path that would lead to the construction of their seaborne empire. Throughout the century, the Portuguese Crown promoted a series of voyages of exploration, both by land and by sea, along the Atlantic coast of Africa, which would culminate in Vasco da Gama's achievements of the late 1490s and in the opening of the commercial sea routes linking Europe and Asia.⁹¹

The impulse behind the Portuguese enterprise of the fifteenth century has often been identified with the country's own naval history and richness in expert sailors. As underlined by Boxer,⁹² however, the importance of the sea for Portugal, as opposed to other European nations, cannot be overestimated. The country had few natural harbours and, even though the sea played an important role in its history, it was not, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, a pre-eminently maritime nation. Its population was mostly composed by peasants, with a general shortage of deep-sea sailors and a definite prominence of the agricultural activities over the seagoing occupations. The foundation for the Portuguese maritime exploit was more a combination of strategic and economic factors. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, Portugal was relatively affluent, but overall backward in comparison to the richest core of western Europe. The country was, however, being favoured by a long period of peace, as opposed to the neighbouring countries, preoccupied, for the greatest

⁹¹ While the Portuguese maritime enterprise was the most notable, the Portuguese Crown wasn't actually the only political entity to dispatch travellers to Asia during the fifteenth century. The Venetian Seignory, in particular, promoted several embassies towards Persia, seeking an alliance against the Turks after the capture of Constantinople – and some of the ambassadors were able also to report news, albeit vague, of Eastern Asia. See in this regard Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 64.

⁹² Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825*, London : Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1969, pp. 13-14.

part of the century, with foreign and civil wars. Open on one side on the vast operational field of the Atlantic Ocean, and on the other on the Mediterranean, with its flourishing trade, it was prompted to find in the sea those opportunities that were not available in its mountainous hinterland.

The Portuguese Crown focused, at first, mostly on the North-West African coast, where the Portuguese shared a long history of trade relationships and hostilities with the Muslims. In 1415, Portugal conquered the Moorish Island of Ceuta, on the Straits of Gibraltar, gaining control over a strategic African port and a fundamental Muslim centre for commerce. The conquest was partly meant to provide corsairs with a better field of action against the Muslim trade, at the same time shielding Portugal from possible invasions by the Muslims, and granting protection from naval raids both to the Italian merchants that travelled towards Northern Europe and to the Portuguese that traded in the Mediterranean Sea. The main ambition of the Crown was however, with little doubt, obtaining at least partial control on the African gold trade, that originated from the Upper Niger and Senegal rivers and crossed the Sahara by means of camel caravans. The capture of Ceuta would provide Portugal with an African base, to help bring the Crown's influence over the Saharian land routes and, possibly, allow the Portuguese to extend their territorial control over Morocco, from which easy access could be gained to the Sahara.⁹³

In the end, however, the benefits of the conquest didn't come up to the Crown's expectations. Holding the city against the Muslims put a considerable strain on the Portuguese finances, and the effort to extend the Portuguese power on inland Africa brought no appreciable result in

⁹³ On the capture of Ceuta, and for in-depth account of the Portuguese advance along the African Coast up to the 1480s, see Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, pp. 46-153.

return. Nor did the attempt to control the commercial routes, as the Muslim moved their trade from Ceuta to other centres. This was what prompted the Portuguese crown to seek an alternative way to extend its control on the African commerce, by advancing along the Atlantic coast of the continent. Between 1418 and 1425, the Portuguese proceeded to occupy the previously uninhabited Madeira Islands, and by 1419 they had begun the exploration of the coast of Africa. The progress was slow at first – the then known southern limit of the Atlantic Ocean, around Cape Bojador, was only crossed in 1434, after numerous failed attempts. However, the first, rocky years of exploration were functional to the accumulation of experience, both in the field of nautical science, and as far as the routes and the conformation of the African coast were concerned. By the fourth decade of the fifteenth century, the advance was progressing at a steady pace, and when Henry of Portugal, who had been the first promoter of the explorations, died, in 1460, Portugal was already concessionary of all the commerce along the West African coast, and had engaged in slave trade along the Sahara littoral, as a way to finance further explorations. The Portuguese had also managed to divert to the coast part of the gold trade along the Saharian land routes – as they would continue to do, in growing proportions, throughout the second half of the century.

The strategic and economic benefits of the explorations weren't, however, the only motives behind the progress. The crusading ardour against the Muslims was still, undoubtedly, a factor, albeit not as incisive as the quest for gold. And an even more relevant impulse to the explorations derived from the quest for Prester John, which, as further proof of the weight still retained by the Medieval popular traditions on Asia, remained one of the main openly declared inspirations for the Portuguese voyages of discovery throughout the

fifteenth century.⁹⁴ As underlined by Boxer, the mixed nature of the motivations behind the Portuguese enterprise emerges very clearly in the Papal Bulls that were promulgated in rapid succession by the mid-fifteenth century, so as to grant the official support of the Roman Church to the Portuguese advance. In particular, the *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455 insisted on the cause of Prince Henry of Portugal's intention to circumnavigate Africa being his ambition to make contact with the inhabitants of the "Indies", said to "honour the name of Christ".⁹⁵ The use of the generic term "India", as in the famous letter of 1165, marks the still ambiguous nature of the imaginary location of the realm of Prester John. Up to the thirteenth century, the kingdom had mostly been vaguely placed somewhere between Central or Eastern Asia. As an effect of the European encounter with "Cathay", however, its position had progressively shifted, in European writings, to Eastern Africa, where, as already mentioned,⁹⁶ a Christian stronghold had been believed to exist for centuries, in Ethiopia. Ever since 1402, a number of Ethiopian Coptic emissaries reached Europe, further reinforcing this belief. As the Portuguese advance progressed in the Asian Seas, however, the term "Indies", in reference to the location of the kingdom might have verged again on identifying, generically, Asia, or India proper, thus motivating the further eastern penetration of the Portuguese naval effort.⁹⁷

The search for the kingdom of Prester John, mixed with the ambition to participate in the Asian spice trade, worked as a central motive in particular for João II of Portugal, who became king in 1477,

⁹⁴ For a more complete overview of the influence of the legend of Prester John on the Portuguese naval enterprise, see Robert Silverberg, *La leggenda del Prete Gianni*, cit., chapter 6 ("I Portoghesi e Prete Gianni").

⁹⁵ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 20-24. The bulls included the *Dum Diversas*, promulgated in 1452, the *Romanus Pontifex*, dated 1455, and the *Inter Caetera*, of 1456.

⁹⁶ See paragraph 1.1.

⁹⁷ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., p. 20-24.

and who was the chief promoter of the quest for an alternative route to Asia via Africa. During the first years of his kingdom, he supported the enterprise of the explorer Diogo Cão, who was able to sail as south as the Tropic of Capricorn, without, however, managing to find the passage around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, and into the Indian Ocean. A number of exploration voyages through the interior of Africa were also dispatched from the Portuguese Atlantic bases in the same years, bringing, however, little to no results. The Sahara region proved too dangerous, and opposed much more human and natural obstacles when approached from the Atlantic coast than when approached from the Mediterranean.

By 1485 or 1486, notice was reported to Europe of the existence of an African king named Ogané, who held “as high a position among the African people as the pope did among the Christians”,⁹⁸ and who was easily identified with Prester John. This prompted a new round of voyages, starting with the attempt to penetrate the African inland, by Alfonso de Paiva and Pero de Covilhã. The two left Portugal together in 1487, the first charged with the task of bringing letters from the Portuguese King to “Prester John” in Ethiopia, and the second with that of collecting information about the ports and routes of the Indian Ocean. They travelled via Egypt, where they split for their respective destinations, but Paiva died before being able to perform his mission. Pero de Covilhã was instead able to reach the west coast of India, and after a two-year-long voyage that brought him from Cannanore, to Calicut, to Goa, he travelled back to Cairo, where he was met by two emissaries sent by João. After reporting to them, he was ordered to complete the task of his previous companion and therefore proceeded to Ethiopia. There, he was received by the king and assigned lands and

⁹⁸ Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., p. 159.

honours, but also prevented to leave again until his death, that happened more than thirty years later. A few months after the departure of Alfonso de Paiva and Pero de Covilhã, the sea expedition guided by commander Bartolomeu Dias also left Portugal, in the hope of managing to circumnavigate the African continent. Dias did round the Cape of Good Hope at the beginning of 1488 and was able to report back to Portugal, where he returned by December of the same year, that the “Indies” could effectively be reached by sea.

Covilhã and Dias’ voyages were shortly followed by Christopher Columbus’ enterprise. The explorer came back to Europe by 1493, having unknowingly paved the way to previously uncharted territories, but with the conviction of having discovered a group of islands on the fringes of Eastern Asia (among which, according to contemporary chronicles, Marco Polo’s Cipangu was assumed to be included).⁹⁹ As underlined by Scammell,¹⁰⁰ both the outcome and the premises of Columbus’ enterprise set it apart from the other explorations by his contemporaries. While the voyages of Dias, Covilhã, and of their predecessors had been sponsored by the Portuguese Crown, as parts of an almost one-century-long exploration effort, Columbus, a man of obscure birth who had been refused the Portuguese patronage, had sailed mostly out of his own initiative, albeit at Spanish service. Yet, his expedition was inspired by very similar motives. On one side, the aspiration to find a sea route to Asia, in order to gain easier access to territories that were expected to enshrine great wealth and exciting economical opportunities. On the other, the religious impulse – the desire of extending the bounds of Christendom and of freeing West Asia from the Muslims.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.166.

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Vaughan Scammell, “After Da Gama: Europe and Asia since 1498”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 3, 2000, pp. 513-543.

Columbus' expedition had the effect to ignite the rivalry between Portugal and Castile. The contention was actually the culmination of a contrast that had been lurking in the background of the Portuguese exploration for the most part of the century. Castile had been advancing claims on some of the territories over which Portugal had extended its influence – one of the major objects of contention being the canary islands, which Castile had started colonizing by 1402. Moreover, throughout the 1470s, Castile had actively attempted to trade in the Atlantic waters near the African coast, that had first been sailed by the Portuguese, and that the Portuguese Crown considered reserved territory, by right of the Papal Bulls that had sanctioned its advance. The tension was temporarily solved with the Treaty of Alcáçovas, signed in 1479, which granted the Canaries to Castile, assigned in turn to Portugal the Azores, the Madeiras, the Cape Verde Islands and all “lands discovered and to be discovered”,¹⁰¹ and committed Castile to forbid any subject to sail towards the Portuguese possessions without Portuguese license. The terms of the Treaty of Alcáçovas, however, essentially referred to Africa, while Columbus' success brought for the first time Asia into the picture. The conflicting claims of the two powers over commerce and land possession in Asia were solved in June 1494, with the Treaty of Tordesillas, that established a circular line of division, running from pole to pole 370 leagues west of Cape Verde Islands, and splitting the known world into two spheres of influence.¹⁰² All territories east of the line were to pertain to Portugal, while the western sphere was assigned to Castile, that, given the still uncertain geographical outline of the world, presumably hoped to extend its

¹⁰¹ Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., p. 152.

¹⁰² The full text and translation of the Treaty, as well as a related bibliography, are available in Frances Gardiner Davenport, *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies*, Clark, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2012, pp. 84-100.

influence on Eastern Asia and the land of “Cipangu” – that was believed to have been reached by Columbus – and on its gold.¹⁰³

The Treaty of Tordesillas officially sanctioned the Portuguese exploration of Asia. Both Columbus’ achievements, and those of Dias and Covilhã before, encouraged João successor, Manuel I, to keep pursuing the search for the spice trade and for the realm of Prester John. It was under his patronage that Vasco da Gama sailed in July 1497, following the route around the southern tip of Africa and into the Indian Ocean that had been opened by Dias, and bearing letters addressed to Priest John and to the Raja of Calicut. His return, in 1499, marked the start of the full-fledged European exploration of the Asian seas.

In spite of their long-lasting effects on Europe’s relationship with Asia, little to no information about the fifteenth century explorations of the Atlantic African coast and of the African and Western Asian inland was made available to the contemporary European public. Given the economic and strategic motives behind the expeditions, the Portuguese Crown proved prone to keep the discoveries and the achievements of the travellers it sponsored under strict reserve, even in the case of the voyages that could potentially hold the highest resonance.¹⁰⁴ There is, for example, no contemporary full-fledged report of Dias’ enterprise – which would only be accounted for, and still in a rather rough and incomplete way, by João de Barros, in the following century. In the case of Covilhã’s voyage, there isn’t even any certainty that a detailed

¹⁰³ The Portuguese, on the contrary, were probably convinced that the division would mostly assign water to Spain, reserving a larger portion of Asia for them.

¹⁰⁴ Albeit not always with success – as demonstrated by the fact that ever since the 1470s not only the merchants sponsored by the Spanish Crown, but a number of European sailors of various provenance had begun to appear on the Atlantic African coast, mining Portugal’s monopoly on the trade conducted in such regions. Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 54.

account ever came in possession of the Portuguese Crown. While a report was dispatched by Covilhã to king João from Alexandria, where the traveller had stopped before heading to Ethiopia, there is, in fact, no definite proof that it ever reached its destination (and surely, if ever, its contents were never divulged outside the court).¹⁰⁵

Given such reserve, and the shortage of travellers moving on the land routes to Asia independently from the Portuguese patronage, all in all the fifteenth century didn't add in a significant way to the amount or the quality of the factual knowledge on Asia available either for the learned or for the general contemporary European population. On the contrary, the information accumulated about the easternmost parts of Asia by European diplomats, missionaries and merchants throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries largely fell into oblivion, due to the lack of contacts with such regions.¹⁰⁶ A number of late medieval writers did attempt at building world geographies (one of the earliest examples being the *Imago mundi* by Pierre d'Ailly), but, with few exceptions,¹⁰⁷ they relied on classical and medieval traditional sources, largely mingling the narration with myths.

¹⁰⁵ The report included information both on India and on the Arab trade, and in particular on the Arab shipping techniques, such as the way they made use of the monsoons. Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius argue that the way Vasco da Gama's voyage was later conducted makes it actually hard to believe that the contents of Covilhã's report were ever available to João or his successor. Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., p. 165.

¹⁰⁶ From 1405 to 1433, the Chinese Ming Dynasty had actually promoted a series of naval expeditions in the Indian Ocean, under the command of the fleet admiral Zheng He, as a way to bring its peripheral regions under the influence of its tributary system. Lack of economic motivation from the Chinese part, and the later ban on commerce, prevented however a further promotion of the naval explorations, which might have resulted in the establishment of contacts with the Portuguese travellers pursuing the route around the Cape of Good Hope. On Zheng He's voyages, see Louse Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. A more concise reference can also be found in John B. Hattendorf (ed.), *The Oxford encyclopedia of maritime history. Volume 4, Siebe, Augustus - Zheng He*, Oxford [etc.] : Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Such as Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, author of the *Historia rerum ubique gestarum* (1461), who largely relied on Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone, as well

At the same time, however, the fifteenth century was characterized by some fundamental developments in the field of cartography. Old-styled *mappaemundi* were still being produced as late as in the 1470s – a 1472 edition of Isidore de Seville’s *Etymologiae* was, for example, accompanied by a map representing the world in tripartite form, one of the later examples of *mappamundi* that has survived up to our days. This cartographical genre underwent, however, a progressive disappearance, and appears to have been completely replaced by 1500. This happened mostly under the influence of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, whose study was revived, in the contest of European geography, ever since the early years of the fifteenth century. More than forty manuscripts of the work, produced throughout the century, remain to our days, and the work was also first given to print in 1475, an edition shortly followed by many others.¹⁰⁸

The fundamental influence exerted by the *Geographia* on fifteenth century cartography lied in its use of geometry – in the form of the grid of latitude and longitude – as a spatial armature for the representation of the surface of the Earth. Such use of geometry

allows the mapmaker to do something that his or her medieval counterpart could not readily do. That is, he or she can model, with an accuracy that would only grow between 1500 and 1800, the relationships of objects and locations on the surface of the Earth, conceived as a geometric grid. That

as on fifteenth century authors such as Niccolò Conti. Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 70.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 67-68. It must be taken into account, however, as remarked by Lach, that such copies of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, which are also the earliest extant ones, are probably revised versions of his original work, compiled in the tenth or eleventh century by some unknown Byzantine scholar. This is why the maps included in the work not always collate with the descriptions.

geometric armature, moreover, in itself inscribes something that we cannot readily identify, an empty space that is entirely distinct from a “blank spot.” That space is not merely the blankness produced by ignorance of an undiscovered geographical or hydrographical feature – a “negative emptiness” – but the abstract space into which geographies and hydrogeographies are plotted – a “positive” emptiness. It subtends the entire surface of the map, but its “positive emptiness” – its substantial independence from the objects and locations it serves to plot – only becomes visible when we realize that it logically extends far beyond the borders of the image. It extends into that vast part of the spherical Earth that is not represented here, but whose existence is presupposed by the geometry of the grid.¹⁰⁹

The fifteenth century revival in the Ptolemaic studies posed, in this sense, the basis for the development of cartography as an independent science – and for the construction of world maps as representations of the world rather as symbols for it.

At the same time, however, many of the conventional representations of the *Geographia* contradicted the factual geographical knowledge provided by both Marco Polo’s account and the portolan charts, which were being produced in growing numbers as a result of the naval explorations of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The *Geographia* perpetrated, among others, erroneous notions about the conformation of the Indian and Southern Asian coasts, and about the Indian Ocean, represented as enclosed by land – therefore feeding the belief in the impossibility to reach Asia by circumnavigating Africa (an assumption that, as mentioned above, would be dispelled by Dias’

¹⁰⁹ Ricardo Padrón, “Mapping Plus Ultra”, cit., pp. 30-31.

enterprise). It also greatly overestimated the eastward extension of the Asian continent, postulating the existence of unknown land beyond the easternmost regions of China – an idea which would constitute one of the very basis of Columbus’ voyage, as well as of his subsequent belief that the lands he had discovered belonged to Asia. Given the weight of Ptolemy’s name, in a century where classical authors were consistently being reevaluated, such notions retained a lot of influence on most mapmakers, in spite of all the evidence pointing to the contrary.

Only a limited number of world maps integrated the notions included in the *Geographia* with information brought to light by the more up-to-date accounts and charts. One of them was the *mappamundi* drawn in the 1450s by Fra Mauro, in the Venetian monastery of San Michele.¹¹⁰ The work was one of the most important cartographical achievements of the fifteenth century. It largely drew on the classical authors (Ptolemy, but also Plinius and Solinus), but relied also on the medieval narratives of Niccolò de Conti and, to a lesser extent, of Marco Polo. While its representation of Eastern Asia was still far from realistic, and heavily based on traditional sources, the influence of the more recent travel narratives was evident in the way it pictured India and the Indian Ocean. Fra Mauro was also the first mapmaker to include in his work a representation of Japan – named “Isola de Zimpagu” and placed north of Giava. This was one of the very few unmistakable representations of Japan included in a fifteenth-century map. Another one was that included in a now lost map by Paolo Toscanelli, dated 1474.¹¹¹ Henricus Martellus’ world map and Martin Behaim globe, both almost exclusively based on traditional

¹¹⁰ For an in-depth treatment of Fra Mauro’s map, its sources and its reception (linked also to the general reception of Ptolemy’s *Geography* in Venice), in the context of fifteenth century mapmaking, see Angelo Cattaneo, *Fra Mauro's Mappa Mundi and Fifteenth-Century Venice*, Turnhout : Brepols, 2011.

¹¹¹ Adriana Boscaro, “Le conoscenze geografiche dell’Europa sul Giappone alla fine del XVI secolo”, *Anno 1585: Milano incontra il Giappone*, Milano, 1990, pp. 101–110.

sources, likewise included “Cipango”, exaggerating, however, Marco Polo’s inaccuracies, to the point that the country was located in the southern hemisphere.¹¹²

Fra Mauro’s map is probably the most complete compendia of the knowledge of the Earth that was available to the contemporary learned population. One can speak only in terms of learned population, as, as underlined by David Woodward,¹¹³ this was still the only designed audience for world maps. In spite of the influence of Ptolemaic studies, European maps of the fifteenth century were still far from being a tool of common, practical use, or something that a private citizen would purchase. They were mostly meant to be approached by specialists, or destined to be hanged in public places. This is not to say that the public was totally oblivious of their existence. Woodward mentions, for example, a *barzelletta* (song) very common by the 1450s, which implied a knowledge, from the part of the audience, of the distinction between the *mappaemundi* and the portolan charts.¹¹⁴ However, it wouldn’t be until the sixteenth century that the production of printed atlases and the birth of the cartographic industry would turn maps into a commercial object, familiar to a significant section of the European population.

All in all, the fifteenth century posed a number of fundamental landmarks in the progression of the relationships between Asia and Europe, which, if not immediately, would eventually result in a

¹¹² João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, “Japan and the Japanese in printed works in Europe”, cit., p. 43.

¹¹³ David Woodward and Emanuela Casti (ed.), *Cartografia a stampa nell’Italia del Rinascimento. Produttori, distributori e destinatari*, Milano: Edizioni Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002 (originally in English, *Maps as Prints in the Italian Renaissance. Makers, Distributors & Consumers*, London: The British Library, 1996), pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁴ “Aggio visto lo mappamondo e le carte di navigazione. Ma la Sicilia mi sembra la più bella del mondo. Ho visto tutte le isole del mondo, ma per l’isola più bella – Cecilia – non si trova su nessuna carta. È venuta dall’altro mondo.” *Ibidem*.

growing conscience, among the general European population, of the “reality” of Asia.

The treaties of Alcáçovas and of Tordesillas worked as majorly important premises for the Portuguese exploration of the Atlantic Ocean, but also marked the beginnings of European modernity. In their aftermath, control over the sea trade routes became a central point of the European expansion strategies. Consequently, the Roman and Canon laws that regulated international affairs in Europe were progressively remoulded so as to legitimise conquest and mass conversion – and all that those encompassed, including slavery, and, sometimes, genocide.

While actually, as we’ll see, as far as the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries are concerned the real entity of the power held by the Portuguese over the territories facing the Indian Ocean is debatable, what is sure is that with the treaties – and the subsequent enterprise by Da Gama – a door to Asia was opened for European travellers, that was never to be closed again. The naval exploration of the Atlantic Ocean paved the way for the access of Portuguese ships to the Asian Sea routes, and for the involvement of European merchants and sailors in the Asian trade. Following Da Gama’s steps, and advancing along routes already established by native sailors, European merchants would settle into the existing Asian trade centres, mingling in an already thriving economy and reporting about it to Europe. Missionaries would soon follow on their wake, building up an even more stable flow of information from Asia to Europe. Both kind of travellers would, for the first time in significant numbers, settle, often permanently, in various regions of Asia. Their reports about their travels and activities would contribute to the accumulation, in their native countries, of a whole body of direct *factual* knowledge, that would revolutionize the traditional perception of Asia.

As I'll try and illustrate in more detail in the following chapters, The coming to the forefront of a *factual* knowledge of Asia, as a substitute for the mythical and religious visions of the world dominant throughout the Middle ages, didn't necessarily mean that Asia would be represented, in European literature, in an *objective* way.

Still, the knowledge collected by missionaries and other travellers would challenge the traditional myths on Asia, that had been reaffirmed and still largely perpetrated throughout the fifteenth century – even though some of the traditional narratives would only temporarily be set aside and still, at least partly, retain their weight until much later.¹¹⁵ By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the progressive diffusion of print in Europe would turn travel and geographical literature into an object of commercial diffusion, granting to the new narratives on Asia a popularity previously unthinkable of. It was in this context that the first direct contacts between Europe and Japan happened, and the earliest first-hand reports on Japan began to circulate throughout Europe, resulting in some of the most rich accounts on the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Tokugawa period that have survived to our days.

¹¹⁵ Influences of the Prester John legend have, for example, been argued to be found in Russian representations of Japan as late as in the nineteenth century. See Clarence Augustus Manning, "Prester John and Japan", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 42, 1922, pp. 286-294.

2. EXPANDING TRADE – IBERIAN MERCHANTS AND IBERIAN LAY WRITINGS ON ASIA AND JAPAN IN THE ERA OF THE “GREAT DISCOVERIES”

2.1. PORTUGUESE NAVAL EXPANSION AND TRADE IN THE ASIAN SEAS

2.1.1. The *Estado da India*

When Vasco Da Gama left Europe in 1497, aiming for the circumnavigation of Africa, the pioneering quality of his voyage was, apparently, not something that even his patron, Manuel I of Portugal, was able to predict. Preoccupied with both internal and international struggles, the king had provided him with less than 200 men – many of whom died during the voyage – and with a very little capital of diplomatic gifts and trade goods. Da Gama himself was a figure of only minor value at court, and surely not one properly trained to deal with foreign rulers and dignitaries. Not by chance, the mission brought no remarkable result in terms of the establishment of diplomatic contacts – both on the African coast and in India.¹¹⁶ On the contrary, Da Gama’s antagonistic attitude towards the natives and his openly suspicious stance regarding all Muslims established a climate of mutual hostility that would hinder even future relationships – so that violence and

¹¹⁶ See Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, cit., pp. 57-58.

aggression would remain, throughout all the early phases of the Portuguese expansion, a significant aspect of the intercourse between Portugal and Asia.¹¹⁷

In all other respects, however, Da Gama's mission was, from the Portuguese perspective, a success. His diplomatic and commercial achievements were not remarkable, but he nevertheless returned from his voyage bearing spices and Indian products for a value that yielded about 6,000 per cent of the expenses that had been necessary for his mission.¹¹⁸ His enterprise proved without reasonable doubt that the route around Africa could be profitably followed in order to reach India – and therefore the cities where the spice trade originated.

The voyage prompted, as a consequence, a series of further missions, aimed at gathering information about the geography of India (and East Asia in general) and about commerce in the Indian Ocean. The first one left no later than six months after Da Gama's return, under the command of Pedro Alvares Cabral,¹¹⁹ and reached Calicut in about six months.

The Portuguese Crown's major interest was in the pepper trade, which at the time was mostly based in Calicut, and inserted in a complex commercial network, constituted by a number of well-defined communities of merchants – held together by kinship, origins and,

¹¹⁷ Even though more recent writings have partially reconsidered the emphasis put on violence by the more traditional historical narratives on the Portuguese enterprise in Asia. See in this regard, Anthony Disney, "Vasco da Gama's Reputation for Violence: The Alleged Atrocities at Calicut in 1502", *Indica*, 32, 1995, pp. 12-28.

¹¹⁸ Earl J. Hamilton, "The Role of Monopoly in the Overseas Expansion and Colonial Trade of Europe Before 1800", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 38 No. 2 ("Papers and Proceedings of the Sixtieth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association"), 1948, pp. 33-53, p. 37.

¹¹⁹ Who would, in a detour from the original route followed by Da Gama, become the first Portuguese to set foot in Brasil. The fact that he nonetheless employed about half of the time that had took Da Gama's enterprise to cover roughly the same distance is in itself a testimony to the progress in geographical and navigational knowledge achieved thanks to

often, religious ties. Most of the ports of the region included enclaves where the different communities – including Hindus, Jains, Jews, Armenians and Muslims – resided, paying taxes to local authorities but autonomously administering their affairs.¹²⁰ The network was mostly dominated by Muslim traders, both of Arab and of Indian origin (respectively based in the western and the eastern sections of the Indian Ocean). Their monopoly – grounded in the pacific interaction with the populations residing in the Indian coastal regions (of Muslim and Hindu faith alike) – immediately appeared to Cabral, and to the ones who followed, as a solid one, and one that would hardly be broken by means of sheer commercial competition.¹²¹ This realization – combined with Da Gama’s and, subsequently, Cabral’s failure at establishing profitable diplomatic relationships – prompted the representatives of the Crown to resort, almost immediately, to violence. Cabral himself engaged in a conflict with the Muslim merchants based in Calicut, which quickly escalated in the bombardment of the city.¹²²

In order to handle the Portuguese Asian affairs, in 1505 the Portuguese nobleman Francisco de Almeida was appointed viceroy and sent to Asia, formally establishing the *Estado da India* – a title that would come to encompass the totality of the possessions acquired by the Portuguese in Asia, from eastern Africa to the sea of Japan. The “state” was to function as an Indian Ocean base from which to enforce Portuguese control over the Asian trade. In accordance to the treaties of Alcáçovas and Tordesillas, and to the Papal bulls that had sanctioned the Portuguese advance in the territories east of the Cape

¹²⁰ Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, cit., p. 60.

¹²¹ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 45-46.

¹²² Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, cit., p. 61.

Verde Islands, it was to claim sovereignty over the Asian Seas, as well as over all the Christians residing in the territories facing them.¹²³

Given the hostile climate faced by the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the main necessity detected by the Portuguese Crown's representatives of the *Estado* was to secure a number of fortified harbours, that could work both as commercial outposts and as naval and military bases – both to conquer and defend against local competitors. After the appointment of Almeida as viceroy, the capture of the key bases for the Portuguese expansion was accomplished in a matter of no more than ten years. By the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, supremacy had been secured over the east African coast, and forts had been built at Sofala and Mozambique (respectively in 1505 and 1507). In 1510, under the lead of Almeida's successor, Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese were able to conquer the landlocked island of Goa, a strategic harbour involved both in the Cambay-Cape Comorin trade and in the horse-trade that interested the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar. Electing Goa as his headquarters, Albuquerque proceeded then to the capture of Malacca (1511) and of Ormuz (1515), which granted the Portuguese control over the Persian Gulf and access to the South China sea.¹²⁴

¹²³ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹²⁴ For a more in-depth narration of the steps that led to the Portuguese capture of their principal bases in the Indian Ocean, see Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., pp. 243-271. The rapidity with which the *Estado* was able to seize control over such a succession of strategically fundamental ports depended in great part on the favourable premises they found for their expansion in the Indian Ocean. The major political forces of the area, such as the empires of Egypt, Persia and the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, possessed, at the time, no armed ships. Nor did the independent trading harbours, such as the above-mentioned Ormuz and Malacca, which, given the fact that the mercantile communities residing there were usually not particularly keen on defending the city against external attacks (and were, on the contrary, ready to pay taxes to the eventual conqueror), constituted a particularly vulnerable target when attacked from the sea. (Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portugese Overseas Expansion*, cit., p. 60). As for

While the central bulk of the Portuguese possessions was seized in this early phase, even after the death of Albuquerque in 1515, and at least up until 1580 – when the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns were united under Philip II of Spain (resulting in a temporary end of independence for Portugal) – the territory under the direct control of the *Estado da India* kept expanding.¹²⁵ A number of minor fortified and unfortified harbours were secured throughout the century – notably Bassein (in 1534), Diu (in 1535) and some of the ports in the Kanara region (Onor, Mangalore and Barcelor, conquered between 1568 and 1569).¹²⁶ In many cases, moreover, the Portuguese were able to establish merchant communities even in locations over which they couldn't obtain sovereignty – such as Cochin, Calicut, Chaul, Solor and Ternate – sometimes obtaining formal cessions of territory by local

the Muslim traders that dominated the commercial routes, their ships, while comprising large vessels apt for sailing in the ocean, were usually more frail than the Portuguese ones (as no iron was used for their construction), and not provided with an artillery that would allow them to counteract a Portuguese attack. At the time when the Portuguese began their expansion, moreover, conflicts were blooming in full force in various areas of the Indian Ocean region – on the east African coast, between Malindi and Mombasa, in India, between Calicut and Cochin, in the Moluccas, between the Sultan of Ternate and the Sultan of Tidore, and between Turkey and Persia. This reduced the local authorities' space for resistance, and gave also ground to the Portuguese Crown's representatives to play on the rivalries, enacting a game of alliances – with Malindi against Mombasa, with Cochin against Calicut, and with the Sultan of Ternate against the Sultan of Tidore – that helped them to gain a more solid position among the local powers and a dominant position in trades such as those of pepper and clove. Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 44 and 50-51.

¹²⁵ For a more in-depth account of the expansion of the Portuguese power after 1515, see Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., pp. 272-300 and Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portugese Overseas Expansion*, cit., pp. 92-161.

¹²⁶ Greg Barrett, "An exploration of the role of Portugal in the economic integration of Asia and Europe with a focus on the pepper market", paper presented at the *Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, Economic Integration: Historical Perspectives from Europe and the Asia-Pacific region* (ANU, Canberra, Australia, 16-18 February 2012), available at the url: <http://apebh2012.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/apebh-text-of-paper-barrett.pdf> (last access: October 24, 2012), p. 2.

rulers, and sometimes abiding by informal agreements with them.¹²⁷ Their territorial bases came to include a huge number of trading posts (*feitorias*), various fortified strongholds (*fortalezas*) and, more rarely, some urban settlements (*ciudades*), usually assigned to the control of autonomous town councils. Through such possessions, albeit scattered, the Portuguese managed to extend their influence on a vast section of the Indian Ocean.¹²⁸

In spite of it being referred to as an *Estado*, the vast maritime area over which the Portuguese came to extend their influence was therefore hardly a unit characterized by political homogeneity. While most historians refer to it in terms of a colonial empire, therefore, some object to the use of such definition, arguing that the Portuguese control extended mostly over trade, without affecting the Asian territory in a significant way.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ John Villiers, "The Estado da India in Southeast Asia", in Malytt Newitt (ed.), *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986, pp. 37-68, p. 44. Boxer describes this kind of agreements as a limited form extraterritoriality granted to the Portuguese by local leaders, underlying how that was a common occurrence for the foreign mercantile communities settled along the shores of the Indian Ocean. Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., p. 48

¹²⁸ The system of *feitorias* had actually already been applied by Portugal in Europe – in localities such as Bruges and Antwerp, where the Portuguese held strong commercial interests – and along the West African coast during their voyages of exploration throughout the fifteenth century. The first *feitoria* to be built in India was set up in Calicut in 1500, but the initiative resulted in the killing of most of the staff involved. Another one was set in Cochin in 1502, making the city the centre of the pepper trade for the Portuguese in India. See Greg Barrett, "An exploration of the role of Portugal in the economic integration of Asia and Europe", cit., p. 4. Massarella underlines also how their model of expansion, based on the "control of a number of carefully chosen centres through which the sinews of trade passed, obviating the need for territorial conquest", emulated the way the Genoese and Venetians had created their "trading-post empire" in the eastern Mediterranean and Black-Sea. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere. Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 18.

¹²⁹ Villiers argues, for example, that the Estado presented itself as a "scattered and often inchoate confederation of territories, military and commercial establishments, individuals, goods and interests, administered, controlled or protected, directly or indirectly with varying degrees of completeness by the Portuguese crown or by others on behalf of the crown. Indeed, there were some places in the area that, in spite of

In any case, surely, the *Estado da India* came to employ a set of institutions that rivalled in complexity that of later colonial empires. In order to enforce its regulations, to protect its headquarters, to build and maintain its forts and ships, to collect taxes and other revenues, and to purchase the trade goods, a vast, dedicated body of royal bureaucrats was needed, as well as all the professional sailors and armed forces necessary to back them up.¹³⁰ This system of administration required in turn, in order to be kept in place, huge financial resources – resources that the Portuguese Crown, at the time, could provide only partially. This made it necessary, for the *Estado*, to develop a certain level of self-sufficiency, that primarily came from the revenues (rents, tributes and licences) collected from its harbours and trading posts – where local monopolies on products such as opium,

being in practice under Portuguese jurisdiction, were not formally considered to belong to the *Estado da India* at all did not depend on the definition of its territorial limits”. He adds that its “claims to sovereignty were based not upon any hegemony it might gain over areas of lands and their population, but upon its mastery of the open sea and dominance of the shipping lanes that linked those lands together”, so that “it is perhaps better defined not as an empire at all in the sense that the contemporary Spanish empire was or the Dutch and British empires later became, but rather as an enormous commercial network”. John Villiers, “The *Estado da India* in Southeast Asia”, cit., p. 38. Diffie and Winus, among others, counteract to such objection, by pointing to the fact that territorial possessions captured by the in Asia were consistent, albeit scattered. Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winus, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire*, cit., p. 46.

¹³⁰ A central role in the administration of the *Estado* came to be played by the *feitores* (in later years also known as *provedores*) – commercial agents, usually acting also as Crown’s ambassadors, who were put in charge of the management of a *feitoria* on a four-year term, supervised by a *vedor geral da fazenda* (chief crown fiscal officer). The administrators of the *Estado* responded, in turn, to the *Casa da India* (House of India), the Portuguese crown administration in charge of Portugal’s non-European trade, which held the responsibility for all exports to and from Asia – taking care of all practical aspects, from the storing of the merchandise, to arranging the shipments to and from the Indian Ocean. The *Casa da India* exercised a crown monopoly on a number of products, among which spices – such as pepper (declared royal monopoly in 1504), cloves (1522) and cinnamon – occupied a chief role. See Malytt Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, cit., p. 70. For an in-depth account of the responsibilities and the structure of the *Casa da India* see Greg Barrett, “An exploration of the role of Portugal in the economic integration of Asia and Europe”, cit., pp. 5-6.

indigo and palm-wine, were also enforced –¹³¹ and through tributes exacted from the Asian merchants shipping and trading along the Indian Ocean routes. The representatives of the *Estado* set in place, to this end, a complex custom system, based on the concession of trade licences (*cartazes*).¹³²

The Portuguese control over trade could, on the other hand, never be totally effective. Their ships were not exempt from losses from corsairs attacks, and occasionally succumbed to insurgences and acts of resistance from the part of local authorities (such as in the case of Ternate, which had to be abandoned in 1575). Moreover, as illustrated by Boxer,¹³³ the vastness – and great dispersion – of the Portuguese possessions inevitably put a great strain on the *Estado da India* in terms of man-power, so that enforcing the monopolies and the custom system and channelling the trade through the ports over which the *Estado* exerted direct control was not always easy. Nor it was always possible to control the goods' supply, as geographically limited as they

¹³¹ Greg Barrett, "An exploration of the role of Portugal in the economic integration of Asia and Europe", cit., p. 5.

¹³² According to this system, Asian merchants travelling in the Indian ocean were compelled to sail through the ports directly controlled by the Portuguese authorities. There, they would receive licences, specifying the characteristics of their ships, the goods they carried, and their destinations, and they would pay in exchange to the *Estado's* institutions an amount of taxes proportional to their cargoes. The system not only facilitated the collection of revenues, but was also functional in forcing the Asian merchants to abide to the restrictions imposed by the Portuguese administrators over monopoly products. Asian (and particularly Muslim) ships found travelling without a licence, or otherwise illegally transporting goods, were liable to be confiscated – with their crew killed or enslaved – or sunk. K.S. Mathew, "Trade in the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese system of Cartazes", in Malytt Newitt (ed.), *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986, pp. 69-84.

¹³³ In many cases, Portuguese carracks found themselves to be crewed only by a few Portuguese sailors, and to be manned almost completely by African and Asian slaves. Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 48-59. The situation was only worsened by the fact that, as underlined by Derek Massarella, in Portuguese society a premium was usually placed on *fidalgos* (men of noble blood), while sailors were considered socially inferior – a social structure that, in the long run, turned into a major hindrance for an empire based on its naval power. The Portuguese administrators, moreover, weren't always apt to their task – as they proved in many occasions more keen on cultivating their personal interests rather than the national cause. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p.18

might be.¹³⁴ The lack of resources and man-power weren't the only elements hindering Portuguese authority. Political circumstances were also a factor in the equation, one which occasionally forced the Portuguese Crown's representatives to opt for a more prudent – or “light” enforcement of their regulations, so as to maintain good relationships with those local powers whose support was essential for keeping their supremacy in the region. This was the case, for example, with Persia, whose alliance worked for the Portuguese as a fundamental counterbalance to the Turkish power. The need to soothe Persian authorities was the reason why, in spite of the Portuguese control over the Persian Gulf, Muslim traders continued, to an extent, to roam freely through the area.¹³⁵

Such losses and limitations were not enough to shake the foundations of the Portuguese seaborne empire, but they were effective in limiting the measure of its control on trade, above all as far as its capacity to annihilate the local competition for certain products was concerned. They were the reason why, ultimately, the creation of the *Estado da India* was enough to affect the panorama of Asian trade in the sixteenth century, but not to revolutionize it.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ The monopoly on cloves was, for example, maintained with great difficulties, and didn't manage to impact significantly on the organization of the trade. In the case of Indian pepper, on the other hand, the authorities of the *Estado* did overall manage to control the sea transport, but did not buy the product directly from the producers: middlemen of various origins (Muslims, Hindu and also Christians) collected it and sold it to them, and were therefore able to extract some profits from the trade, in spite of the monopoly. Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “Did Vasco da Gama matter for European markets?”, *Economic History Review*, V. 62 No. 3, 2009, pp. 655–684, p. 673.

¹³⁵ See in this regard Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., p. 59.

¹³⁶ As underlined by O'Rourke and Williamson, the Asian production came to be affected in a significant way by the European demand for spices only late in the sixteenth century, so that, by 1600, European purchases still accounted for a mere 25% of its total amount. Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “Did Vasco da Gama matter for European markets?”, cit., p.672.

In spite of such hindrances, however, the weight of the Portuguese enterprise in the Indian Ocean cannot be underestimated. As shown in the previous paragraph, the authorities of the *Estado* did manage to dominate the maritime trade in the regions West of Malacca – and above all in the areas close to their main bases, where their naval power was at its strongest – in a direct way, and to a significant extent. Their position in the Indian Ocean, moreover, was what opened them access to the seas East of Malacca – namely, the maritime area, encompassing East and South-East Asia, known as Greater China Seas region – were, however, their authority was of a much different nature.

2.1.2. Trade and piracy in the China Seas

Throughout their advance in the Indian Ocean, the authorities of the *Estado da India* had only vaguely heard about the Chinese (whom they had been referring as the “Chijns”). The capture of Malacca was what first made the Portuguese familiar with them, as well as with the other populations of the China Seas region, and their thriving commercial activities.

The city was a big window toward eastern Asia, and the most important emporiums along the trade route connecting the Indian Ocean and the Greater China Seas region. When the Portuguese first reached it, in 1509, several Chinese ships were stationed in its harbour, and when, two years later, they battled for its capture, some Chinese junk masters – acting independently from orders by the Ming central authorities (who, however, did not intervene to defend the city, in spite of its being part of the Chinese tributary system) – were instrumental in their success. In Malacca, the Portuguese interacted also with the

merchants they identified as the “Gores” – who were possibly inhabitants of the Ryūkyū Islands, or even of Southern Japan – and through them they surely heard, if only vaguely, of the Japanese archipelago itself.¹³⁷

West of the city, the Portuguese found themselves faced, much as in the Indian Ocean, with a solid commercial network, controlled by different communities of seafarers in close relationship with one another, and trading along well-established trade routes. The region encompassed a vast complex of seas – extending in longitude from the South China Sea to the East China Seas, and in latitude from the Japanese Inland Seto Sea to the Southeastern Asian seas of Sulu, Java, Celebes, and Banda. It

combined both diversity and cohesion. On the one hand, there was the multiplicity of peoples, cultures, languages and histories of Japan, China, and Southeast Asia; on the other hand, the seas were a unifying conduit for the transmission of goods, peoples, germs, ideas and religions. Like Braudel’s Mediterranean, the China Seas tied an area of heterogeneous civilizations together through commercial and cultural exchange. [...] The China Seas region blended peoples and cultures from not only Asia but from around the world in a maritime melting pot. It provided an area of transit and a source of income for untold numbers of people. Despite their different languages and ethnic origins, the indigenous groups of “sea peoples” – the ama of Japan, the Dan (Tanka) of Southern China and the “sea gypsies” (Orang

¹³⁷ As testified in one of the most important of the reports composed at the time, the *Suma Oriental* by Tomé Pires. The term “Gores” probably derived from the Arab “Al-Ghur” – which in turn was possibly a rendering of the word “Ko-ryo” (or “Kao-Li”), the Chinese way of referring to Korea. See Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., pp. 20-21.

Laut), Iranun, Balangingi, and Bugis of insular Southeast Asia – shared a common maritime culture and life experiences that distinguished them from their countrymen living on shore. Throughout history, people continuously moved in and out of the region – migrants, sojourners, emigrants, missionaries, traders, sailors and slaves – first from India, China and Southeast Asia, and later from Japan, Europe and Africa.¹³⁸

Many of the seafarers operating in the area were devoted to “piracy” – a term which is to be intended, in the context of the Greater China Seas region, in a broader sense than the one of “illegitimate armed robbery” usually applied to it in Europe.¹³⁹ It encompassed a variety of maritime activities – raiding, but also transport, trade and/or smuggling – which didn’t fall under the direct control of the land élites of the regions, and were therefore at times construed as illegal by them, but which weren’t necessarily conceived as such by the populations living in the maritime areas, prone to consider the sea as a lawless space.

The groups of seafarers engaged in such activities were of many different origins – Chinese, Korean, Japanese and South-Asian – and were referred to, by the land-based authorities of the sixteenth centuries, with many names, ranging from *haidao* (or, alternatively, *haizei*, *haifei*, or *haikou*, “sea bandits”) in China, to the Japanese equivalent *kaizoku* (海賊), to the term *wokou* (倭寇), used by the Chinese, more specifically, in reference to the groups of pirates raiding

¹³⁸ Robert J. Antony, “The shadowy world of the Greater China Seas”, in Robert J. Antony (ed.), *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers: Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Anthony Reid, “Violence at sea: Unpacking “Piracy” in the Claim of States over Asian Seas”, in Robert J. Antony (ed.), *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers*, cit., pp. 15-26, p. 15.

and creating disturbances along their shores.¹⁴⁰ They often cultivated stronger relations with each other than with the land-based populations of their respective territories – sea didn't function as a border, for them, but as a way of communication, through which they created cultural and commercial connections that eluded the limits of existing political structures and went far beyond the official relationships entertained by the states' central authorities.¹⁴¹ In the foreground to their exchanges stood the tributary relationships entertained by the Japanese *ritsuryō* State, by Korea and by other countries of the area with the dynasties of China, but such relationships, however rich and decisive in transmitting Chinese cultural influence to the region, weren't the only, nor necessarily the most relevant contacts occurring in the area.¹⁴²

In Japan, the role of the *kaizoku* groups had come to be, by the sixteenth century, pretty much integrated in the power structures of

¹⁴⁰ The terms translated into the Korean equivalent *waegu* (왜구) and in the Japanese equivalent *wakō* (倭寇), still commonly used in historiography but presumably not adopted by contemporary Japanese – as underlined by Robert J. Antony, “The shadowy world of the Greater China Seas”, cit., pp. 7-8. The *woukou* were mostly construed as Japanese, but were actually predominantly Chinese seafarers of the Southern coastal regions, with only a minority of Japanese and other natives of areas traditionally trading with China. For an in-depth treatment of the *wakō*'s activities throughout the sixteenth century see Kwan-wai So, *Japanese piracy in Ming China during the 16th century*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1975.

¹⁴¹ The maritime populations of Japan, for example, had constantly maintained, since the Jōmon period, private forms of commerce and cultural relationships with the coastal regions of the Chinese continent. In particular, ever since the second half the ninth century, the pirate groups who emerged as a regional feature of northern Kyūshū and of the area of the Seto Inland Sea – and not as much of Eastern Japan, where groups of land-based horse-raider bandits, known as *shuba no tō* (賊馬の党), were much more common – cultivated much closer cultural relationships with the Korean sea traders than they did with the inhabitants of mainland Japan. See in this regard Amino Yoshihiko, *Higashi to nishi no kataru Nihon no rekishi*, cit. Amino Yoshihiko has written extensively on the role of the sea as a bridge between Japanese maritime populations and the other coastal area of the Greater China Sea region. See in particular, Amino Yoshihiko, *Umi to rettō no chūsei*, Tōkyō, Nihon Editasukuru Shuppanbu, 1993 and ID., *Nihon shakai no rekishi*, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1997.

¹⁴² Amino Yoshihiko, *Umi to rettō no chūsei*, cit., pp. 3-4.

the state. In the past, they had occasionally set themselves against the central authorities (as in the case of the rebellion led by Fujiwara no Sumitomo 藤原 純友 in the tenth century). In the political and military turmoil of the Sengoku period, however, not only they had found themselves freed from the pressure of the Japanese state, but they were also growingly sought for as allies by the *daimyō* competing for power in the archipelago, for those maritime activities – fighting sea battles, managing coastal holdings, collecting goods and people – that were necessary to enforce their authority at sea, and which their direct subordinates weren't able to perform on their own. The *kaizoku* were able to take profit of the *daimyō*'s needs, obtaining legitimization and establishing themselves as sort of sea lords.¹⁴³

Quite different was the situation in China, where the central authorities, faced with the impossibility to rein the commerce, attempted to stop it completely, by enforcing a ban against shipping and overseas trade. Ever since the second half of the fifteenth century, private exchanges were officially prohibited for all the coastal populations, and only the ships participating in the official tributary missions from Japan were allowed to land, at intervals of several years.¹⁴⁴ As it turned out, however, the restrictions were not really effective in containing private trade, above all in the southern provinces where,

¹⁴³ The process is described in Peter D. Shapinsky, "From Sea Bandits to Sea Lords: Nonstate Violence and Pirate Identities in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Japan", in Robert J. Antony (ed.), *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers*, cit., pp. 27-42.

¹⁴⁴ The bans were the result of a growing disdain towards commerce from the part of the Ming government. As underlined by Massarella, the ascendancy of Neo-Confucianism in the imperial bureaucracy had resulted in the relegation of the merchants to the bottom level of the social hierarchy, and in the stress, in the imperial policy, on the employment of resources for internal affairs and for defense against external menaces (such as that of the Mongols, who once again came to put their pressure against the Chinese northern border in the fifteenth century), rather than in the huge financial burden imposed by sea travels. The restrictions were moreover justified by the fact that China's wealth, as a territorial power, depended more on taxes from land than on the revenues extracted by commerce. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p.20.

in spite of the risk of repercussions, many of the seafarers kept venturing through the old routes – often backed up by conniving local officials.¹⁴⁵

The Chinese sea bans were the fundamental reason why, while in possess of a level of naval technology that would allow them to sail into long oceanic routes (as they had done under Zheng He's command in the first half of the fifteenth century),¹⁴⁶ the Ming war-junks never actually came to threaten the Portuguese hegemony over the Indian ocean. They were however, contrary to the Muslim ships travelling along the Indian Ocean routes, more than sufficiently equipped to pose a threat to the Portuguese carracks and galleons that roamed to the China Seas – as was made clear to the commanders of the *Estado da India* as soon as they tested their possibilities of expansion over the area.

The first scattered Portuguese attempts at a direct commercial intercourse with the Chinese coastal areas actually brought promising

¹⁴⁵ Not so different was the situation in Korea, where the Chosŏn government attempted, since the first half of the fifteenth century, to extend the state's authority over the private trade activities between the peninsula's coastal regions and Japan (and, particularly, Tsushima, with which the majority of the exchanges took place). A number of small ports were opened to Japanese merchants, where living and trading quarters known as *Waegwan* (Jap. *Wakan* 倭館) were organized, so as to grant a direct control over the foreign merchants. A further attempt to take over the reins of the commerce was made through diplomacy, with two treaties, signed between Chosŏn and the Sō *daimyō* of Tsushima (respectively in 1443 and 1512) and meant to regulate the annual amount of the exchanges. Outside the limits fixated by the Korean and Japanese authorities, however, unauthorized trade continued to thrive. Barbara Seyock, "Pirates and traders on Tsushima Island during the late 14th to early 16th century: as seen from historical and archaeological perspectives", in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Trade and Transfer Across the East Asian "Mediterranean"*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, pp. 91-124.

¹⁴⁶ See chapter 1, paragraph 1.3. Zheng He himself had actually only sailed to India in temporary disregard of a ban against overseas trade decreed by the first Ming emperor, Hongwu. His mentor – Hongwu's successor, Yonglu – had held ambitious plans for the expansion of China's foreign relations – hoping to reassert the influence of the Chinese tributary system on the area and to insert the Chinese continent a broader commercial network. His project, however, was more an exception than a rule in the general outline of Ming policy.

results. When, in 1513, Jorge Álvares – the first recorded European to reach China by sea – made his way to the island of Tunmen (Tamão, in the Portuguese nomenclature) in the Guandong area, he wasn't officially granted permission to land but, in all factuality, he was able set foot in the city and to sell most of his cargo to local businessmen, at a profitable price. Two year later, in 1515, Rafael Perestrelo led a commercial fleet to Canton, and likewise managed an exchange with the local population. These first successful commercial contacts prompted the Portuguese authorities to try and set up diplomatic relations. In 1517, the viceroy of Goa, Lopo Soares de Albergaria, sent to Canton the commander Fernão Peres de Andrade, who successfully established contacts with local authorities. When the commander headed out of the city, he left behind Tomé Pires, who had sailed with him as ambassador of the viceroy, in charge with the task of establishing diplomatic relationships with the Ming authorities in Beijing.¹⁴⁷

Pires did manage to reach the city where China's central government was settled. He didn't, however, achieve much in terms of his mission – mainly because, while he was in Beijing, an envoy came to the city from the Sultan of Malacca, lamenting the Portuguese advance on his city, and advocating a Chinese intervention. A decisive rupture in the diplomatic intercourse came, moreover, when the Portuguese tried, by force, to establish in the South China Sea the same order that they had achieved in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese that had settled in Tunmen after Alvares' landing strived to turn the island into one of their bases – building fortifications and using them as military and naval headquarters, so as to attack and rob

¹⁴⁷ On Portugal's early explorations of the South China Sea and of the Southern Chinese Coast, see Zhidong Hao, *Macau History and Society*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011, pp. 9-18.

Chinese ships and collect prisoners and slaves. The Portuguese behavior soon led to retaliation from the Chinese part. Pires was arrested (to die in prison a few years later), Tunmen was liberated and a ban was declared against commerce with the Portuguese. Between 1521 and 1522, in a succession of naval confrontations, the Portuguese ships were easily defeated, with many casualties, by the Ming coastguards fleets, and repelled to Malacca.

After the defeat, the Portuguese were quick in lowering their ambitions. They didn't attempt at establishing any further official contacts with the central Chinese authorities, and they generally threaded very carefully in the Chinese territories, avoiding to impose their presence as they had tried to do in Tunmen, in fear of a possible Chinese retaliation attack against Malacca.¹⁴⁸ In other words, even though "they [...] gained admission to the coveted China trade, it was on the terms laid down by the Chinese authorities and not on those imposed by themselves".¹⁴⁹

A more favourable turn in the relationships between China and Portugal only came in 1552, when the Portuguese merchant Leonel de Sousa reached the Kwangtung coast. Sousa realized the necessity to comply with Chinese practices, striving to remove the violent reputation that the Portuguese had accumulated in the previous years, and, above all, making sure to openly recognize Chinese sovereignty by paying duties over the commerce. Sousa found an open-minded counterpart in the vice-commissioner for the maritime defence circuit (*haitao*), Wang Po, leading, by 1554, to an agreement that legalized

¹⁴⁸ A fear that was not entirely misplaced, as Chinese ships actually loomed outside the city from 1523 to 1527, as a way to warn the Portuguese off other possible attempts at conquest in the China Seas. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 49.

the trade with the Portuguese.¹⁵⁰ Following this agreement, in 1557 the Portuguese were finally able to obtain from the local authorities permission to create a local outpost, in Aomen (Macao), which was thereafter elected as their East-Asian headquarters.¹⁵¹

2.1.3. The Portuguese encounter with Japan

In the years that intervened between their defeat from the Chinese fleets and their settlement in Macao, however, individual Portuguese seamen were still able to keep on, albeit covertly, exploring the Asian Seas. Some of them, moreover, managed to build themselves a niche in the private trade that, in spite of the bans, was being carried on in the Chinese Southern provinces – so that, by the time they finally managed to build a settlement in Macao, they had already been able to develop a close network of contacts with local Chinese and Japanese pirate.

¹⁵⁰ See in this regard Frederick W. Mote and Denis C. Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 8, The Ming Dynasty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 343-344. Sousa would later become, in 1558, governor of Macao, and captain in charge of the commercial voyage from Macao to Japan. See paragraph 2.2.4.

¹⁵¹ The Portuguese had first reached Macao in 1533, and strived to build a community there because of its especially favourable position on the trade routes crossing the China Sea. It was, presumably, thanks to bribing that they initially obtained from local officers the permission to settle, but the Ming government subsequently showed tolerance towards their presence, in spite of the previously declared, ban for a number of practical reasons – mainly, the defence that the Portuguese sailors could offer against local rebels and pirates (at a time when the Chinese armed forces had their hands full with internal uprisings), and the possibility to exact taxes and custom dues from their activities. On the other hand, the Ming authorities never officially recognized their position there: while they came to somehow acknowledge their presence (by creating the Barrier Gate in 1573, so as to isolate the city, and by nominating, in 1587, a civil magistracy meant to govern the Chinese inhabitants of the city), they never recognized them as vassals, nor ceded Macao as a colony. On the issue of the Portuguese sovereignty over Macao, see Christina Miu Bing Cheng, *Macau: A Cultural Janus*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1999, pp. 22-26.

It was through one of these covert voyages that the first recorded landing of Portuguese natives in Japan took place. In 1543, a Chinese junk carrying three Portuguese merchants shipwrecked on the island of Tanegashima, in south-eastern Kyūshū. The Europeans on board seemingly made a strong impression on the local population of Tanegashima,¹⁵² and during the time necessary for the repair of the ship, they were not only able to participate in the lucrative commercial exchange engaged by its crew with the local population – where most of the junk’s cargo was sold at a highly profitable price – but were also received in the residence of the local lord Tanegashima Tokitaka (種子島時堯), in Akōgi.

One may wonder if this encounter was actually the first one to happen on Japanese soil. In the above described context of thriving cultural and commercial exchanges, the Portuguese merchants almost surely had, even before the 1540s, repeatedly come in contact with Japanese natives – and it’s not unthinkable that some of them might have wanted to try their fortune and venture towards the archipelago. There is, however, no record of any such enterprise. It is not impossible, of course, for unrecorded direct contacts to have occurred on the archipelago, but the encounter at Tanegashima could have as easily been the actual first European landing in Japan. Possibly, merchants from the Ryūkyū Islands and Japan – the “Gores” with whom the Portuguese had dealt ever since their arrival in Malacca – purposefully misdirected their European competitors, so as to protect their trade. More simply, though, the Portuguese might have refrained from pursuing the route to the archipelago because it would have been an

¹⁵² In spite of being a large junk, with a crew of roughly a hundred people mostly consisting in Asian sailors, the ship was, significantly, nicknamed *nanbansen* (南蛮船, literally “ship of the southern barbarians”, based on the title with which the two Portuguese were identified by the population of Tanegashima). Olof G. Lidin, *Tanegashima: The Arrival of Europe in Japan*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2002, p. 3.

hazard for them to venture in yet other unknown waters without a solid expectation of profit – as not only, as seen before, their resources were limited (both in terms of finances and manpower) but their position in the China Seas was not as secure as in the Indian Ocean.¹⁵³

Either way, the encounter at Tanegashima held some unprecedented consequences for Japan. The lord of the island, upon receiving the three Portuguese, showed interest in the muskets they were carrying with them and, after a demonstration of their use, agreed to purchase one, or possibly two of them, for a considerable sum – so as to be able to reproduce and use them in his ongoing battle with the Nejime lord for control on Yakushima Island. The weapon, which was to be named *tanegashima teppō* (種子島鉄砲, sometimes simply abbreviated in *tanegashima* or *teppō*) thereafter became a key factor in the wars that divided the *daimyō* of Japan, giving a significant advantage to all the domains (starting with Satsuma, to which Tanegashima was tributary) that were able to afford its production.¹⁵⁴

The encounter wasn't influential to Japan only. The European merchants were promptly roused to interest by the possibilities for gain that they had spotted on the island, and word of their discoveries quickly spread among other Portuguese, so that, even before the end of the 1540s, many travellers had followed on their wake.

Among them was, notably, Fernão Mendez Pinto, a Portuguese of lowly origins who, in search for fortune, had reached India in 1537, and made a living out various activities, ranging from soldier, to merchant, to missionary. Pinto stayed in Asia until 1558, and, in the intervening years travelled four times to Japan, the last one in official capacity – as

¹⁵³ Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 23.

¹⁵⁴ See Olof G. Lidin, *Tanegashima*, cit., for an in-depth take on the diffusion of *teppō* in Japan between 1543 and 1549 and for a (partial) translation of the main Japanese materials – the *Teppōki* (“Record of the Musket”) and the *Tanegashima kafu* (“Chronicle of the Tanegashima Family”) dealing with the arrival of the Portuguese in Japan.

ambassador for the viceroy, in charge with the task of establishing diplomatic relationships between the *Estado da India* and Japan. He would use the first-hand knowledge collected during his travels for his renown account, the *Peregrinação*, one of the richest sources on Asia produced by the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁵⁵

Another notable traveller of the time was captain Jorge Álvares,¹⁵⁶ who reached Japan with his three-ships fleet in 1546 and travelled extensively along the coast of Kyūshū (without, however, significantly penetrating inland). Álvares was author of another narrative on Japan – produced upon his return to Malacca in 1547 under open request by the Jesuit Francis Xavier – and also brought back from Kagoshima the Japanese convert Yajirō, whom he introduced to Xavier himself. Both his report and Yajirō’s direct testimony about Japan would become, as we’ll see, instrumental for the establishment of the Jesuit mission in the archipelago.

In the long run, Japan ended up offering to the Portuguese merchants one of their most crucial sources of profit in the China Seas – and one of the utmost financial importance for the very survival of their enterprise in the East Asia.

The period from about the mid-sixteenth century up to the first half of the seventeenth century, is known as East Asia’s “silver century”. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the demand for silver in China was rising at a steady pace, as the result of the growing diffusion of

¹⁵⁵ Pinto entertained close relationships with the Society of Jesus and helped their cause, after befriending Xavier on his third trip to Japan (in 1551) and lending him the money for the construction of the first Christian church to be built there. For an English translation of Pinto’s account and for an in depth-treatment of his life and travels, see Fernão Mendez Pinto and Rebecca D. Catz, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. More will be said on Pinto’s account in paragraph 2.2.

¹⁵⁶ Not to be misunderstood for his namesake, who had reached China in 1513 and was by the 1540s long dead.

money-use.¹⁵⁷ The Chinese production of silver couldn't, however, match such need as, after a mining boom in the early sixteenth century, the level of productivity of the local mines fell to an inappreciable amount. On the other hand, by the 1530s, a number of gold and silver mining sites began to be opened throughout Japan – making the archipelago one of the primary producers in the Great China Seas area. Their development, undertaken by the warring *daimyō* in response to the financial necessities imposed by their military operations, resulted not only, as underlined by Kobata,¹⁵⁸ in the creation of a unified gold and silver-based currency system – perfected by the seventeenth century, thanks to the high value attributed to the two metals as monetary exchange and to the unified financial system set in place by the Tokugawa – but also in the integration of Japan into the world silver market.

While Japanese silver was not directly exported in Europe, its selling came in fact to occupy an important position both in the East Asian trade per se and in the European East Asian trade. In 1539, the tributary exchanges between China and Japan were put to a stop, but this didn't put off the trade between the continent and the archipelago

¹⁵⁷ Which was, in turn, the result of a revolution in commerce, caused by the “monetization of public finance as well as private exchange, dissolution of servile social relations and the emergence of free labor markets, regional specialization in agricultural and handicraft production, rural market integration, and the stimulus of foreign trade”. Richard Von Glahn, “Myth and Reality of China's Seventeenth-Century Monetary Crisis”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 56 No. 2 (“Papers Presented at the Fifty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Economic History Association”, 1996, pp. 429-454, p. 432.

¹⁵⁸ Kobata Atsushi, “The Production and Uses of Gold and Silver in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Japan”, *The Economic History Review* (New Series), Vol. 18 No. 2, 1965, pp. 245-266. Kobata has written extensively both on the mining activity in Japan and on the exchanges carried in the China Seas. On mining, aside from the above cited article, see ID, *Nihon kōzanshi no kenkyū* (Study on the History of Japanese Mining), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968. On the silver trade, see ID., *Kingin bōekishi no kenkyū* (Study on the History of the Bullion Trade), Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppan kyoku, 1976.

was.¹⁵⁹ On the contrary, the exchanges thrived, left in the hands of Asian private seafarers – in particular, merchants from the Southern Chinese provinces, such as Chekiang, Fukien and Kwangtung, who, eluding the bans, traded Chinese products in exchange for the metal. By the end of the 1540s, hundreds of ships were routinely travelling back and forth from the continent to the archipelago.¹⁶⁰

The growing illicit trade elicited concern in the Ming authorities, and this caused the enforcement of the Chinese bans over commerce to be further tightened. By the beginning of the 1550s, on the orders of emperor Jiajing, more than a thousand pirate boats were sunk, and their crew were killed. Moreover, a compulsory system of neighbourhood mutual-monitoring, known as *pai jia*, was put in place in the Chinese coastal provinces, so that any person found engaged in illicit maritime activities would be sentenced to death, possibly together with his family members and neighbours.¹⁶¹ The measures against the Chinese pirates weren't able to put a complete stop to their illicit activities, but they did favour the Portuguese, who, ever since having come into contact with Japan, had strived to profitably find a place in the trade, much as they had done in the other clandestine exchanges of the area. And when, in 1567, the bans were finally relented again, ending the prohibition on private trade for any commerce *but* the one with Japan – the Portuguese were not only able

¹⁵⁹ The Chinese confiscated the cargo of the tributary Japanese ships, and turned down any subsequent attempts from the Japanese part to reprise the trade. After the official fall of the Ashikaga *bakufu*, none of the three unifiers further pursued the establishment of tributary relationships with China.

¹⁶⁰ William S. Atwell, "International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy circa 1530-1650", *Past & Present*, No 95, 1982, pp. 68-90, p. 70.

¹⁶¹ James Kai-sing Kung and Chicheng Ma, "Voyages of Discovery and the Rise of Piracy in Sixteenth-Century China", August 2012, pp. 1-33, available at the url: http://ihome.ust.hk/~sojk/Kung_files/Piracy_China.pdf (last access: November 10, 2012).

to retain control of the most valuable part of the trade, but also came to exert a virtual monopoly over it.

The exchanges with Japan soon emerged as a most profitable venture for the Portuguese merchants. The demand for Chinese products grew steadily, also bolstered, in the later decades of the century, by the subsequent rise to power of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu. Not only both leaders actively sought the development of mining technology and of foreign trade as a way to finance their military ambitions, but the newfound stability of the unifying process left room for a prosperity unknown in the Sengoku period, which caused luxury products to be increasingly sought for.¹⁶² The desirability of the trade soon prompted the authorities of the *Estado da India* to set up a more defined and centralized structure for the exchanges: while for the first decade of the commerce individual Portuguese ships had been carrying their private ventures to Japan in something of an unregulated way, in the 1550s, by the time the outpost in Macao was created, the reins of the commerce were firmly taken in the hands of the Portuguese Crown.

A primary necessity for the authorities of the *Estado* was to regulate the commerce so that the offer of silk would not come to exceed the (albeit huge) demand in Japan, resulting in an uncontrolled lowering of the prices. The frequency of the exchanges was therefore limited to only one voyage per year, to be conducted, on a designated carrack (*náo*), by a captain-major directly appointed by the Crown. The captain was responsible for both the trip to Japan and the settlement in Macao. While he was out of the port, the outpost was theoretically bound to be

¹⁶² See Takase Koichirō, *Kirishitan jidai no bōeki to gaikō* (Commerce and diplomacy in the Christian era), Tokyo: Yagi Shoten, 2002, (especially chapter 1, paragraphs 1 and 2, pp. 3-50) for an in-depth treatment of the Macao-Nagasaki commerce and for figures about the volume of the exchanges, the profits and the prices. A more general overview is offered in Michael Cooper, "The Mechanics of the Macao-Nagasaki Silk Trade", *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 27 No. 4, 1972, pp. 423-433.

left in the hands of a *Senado*, put in charge of its government *ad interim*, but the Captain didn't actually always make the voyage himself, and often happened to sold the privilege to bidders – not without instances of corruption.¹⁶³ The regulations put in place by the Portuguese authorities in Macao weren't, of course, enough to obliterate every form of exchange from the part of Portuguese merchants operating outside the control of the Crown. The majority of the trade was effectively concentrated on the Macao-Nagasaki route – and both cities grew exponentially thanks to it, so that, when the commerce was put to an end, less than a century later, they had grown out of their status of small fishing villages, to become thriving ports – but while it was possible to control the flow of ships and goods leaving Macao, it wasn't as easy to prevent merchants from shipping goods to Japan via other countries. Still, the role of Captain was an extremely desirable one, as it granted, to whomever performed it, the right to retain – together with the incomes derived by his own private ventures – a percentage of about 10% of the profit made by selling the cargo in Japan.¹⁶⁴

The voyage of the carrack started from Goa, from where the designated ship usually left charged with Indonesian spices. It made a first stop in Macao, from where the crew had access to the annual Guangzhou trade fair, where they traded the spices for silk, as well as gold, ceramics, medicine, and other Chinese products. The ship then headed to Japan, where the Chinese products were traded for the Japanese silver. In China, the metal would be sold for more silk, to be

¹⁶³. Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, cit., pp. 63-64.

¹⁶⁴ Takase Koichirō, *Kirishitan jidai no bōeki to gaikō*, cit. p. 4.

shipped again to Japan or to be directed in Europe via Goa.¹⁶⁵ The round-trip from Goa to Japan could take a period varying from eighteen months to three years, according to the length of the stay of the ship in Macao and Japan (which, in turn, depended on whether the ship missed the monsoons).

In the Japanese archipelago, the commerce interested at first several ports of Kyūshū – most notably Hirado and Kagoshima, but also Yokose and Fukuda. Since the year 1570, however, Nagasaki became the chosen location for the exchanges. The local *daimyō*, the Christian convert Ōmura Sumitada (大村純忠), bestowed to the Jesuit fathers (who, as we'll see, had reached the archipelago by the end of the 1540s) the permission to build a port in the area – specifically so as to receive the Portuguese ships – and in 1580 handed to the Society of Jesus the right to manage it, in exchange for the custom dues paid both by the Portuguese and the Japanese merchants using it. The city retained its role of receiving end of the commerce until the final act of the *sakoku* 鎖国 put an end to the exchange, in 1640. And, for almost ten years, it also functioned as a sort of “semi-colony”, where the administration and military power was left in the hands of the Jesuits.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Japan, itself, was a silk-producing country. However, while the country had its number of high-skilled weavers (especially in the Kyoto region) high-quality raw-silk still lacked, due to its troublesome preparation, labour-intensive and requiring large spaces, cleanliness and discipline. Louis M. Cullen, *A History of Japan 1582-1941: Internal and External Worlds*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Jun 1, 2003, p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ The status of Nagasaki as a colony was however, much as in Macao's case, never made official. Even though the city fell under the administration of the Jesuits, its real sovereignty still pertained to the Ōmura family. See in this regard Yasutaka Hiroaki, *Kinsei Nagasaki shihō seido no ken'yū* (Study of the legal system of Nagasaki in the early modern period), Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2010, p. 119. For a close look on the circumstances that led to the founding of the port and to its administration by the Society of Jesus, see Diego Pacheco, “The Founding of the Port of Nagasaki and its Cession to the Society of Jesus”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 25 No. 3/4, 1970, pp. 303-323.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 took control over the port in 1587, during his campaign unification of Kyūshū – first leaving its administration in the hands of the Ōmura family and of another *daimyō* convert, Arima Harunobu and, by 1592, nominating a *daikan* 代官 (prefectural governor) to administer it in his name. Even after the imposing of Hideyoshi's direct rule over the port, however, the Jesuit fathers stationed in Nagasaki kept playing an important role as intermediaries in the commerce, mostly thanks to their skills in the Japanese language. The Society also participated in the commerce in a more direct sense, both officially – as the Jesuits in Macao were allowed, ever since 1578, to send a quota of silk to be traded in Japan along with the *náo* – and unofficially (in spite of a number of prohibitions issued by the Jesuit authorities against private trade for the members of the order). Their position as traders and intermediaries, at times, put the Jesuit missionaries in an awkward position, in between the requests of local Japanese authorities, willing to participate in the trade with their silver, and the Macao ones, who strived to strictly prevent any form of private, uncontrolled exchange. On the other hand, it provided them not only with a significant source of income – decisive for the sustainment of their mission – but also with the key to make their presence accepted by the Japanese authorities. Even those leaders, such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康, who showed signs of open aversion to the Christian religion, kept in fact a tolerant attitude towards the missionaries, in fear that removing them completely from the country would put the lucrative trade with the Portuguese merchants in jeopardy.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Michael Cooper, “The Mechanics of the Macao-Nagasaki Silk Trade”, cit., pp. 423 and 426.

Little they knew that the trade was of the utmost importance for the very survival of the outpost in Macao, so that the Portuguese would have probably accepted to keep on trading, even in the event of the expulsion of the Jesuits from the country. And so they actually did after 1614, when the persecutions against the missionaries began in full force and the Jesuit role in the commerce quickly declined.¹⁶⁸ The association of the Portuguese with Christian religion, however, was enough to imprison them in a regime of strict surveillance. By 1636, their presence in Japan had been limited to the artificial island of Dejima, in Nagasaki harbour.

The Shimabara rebellion (*Shimabara no ran* 島原の乱), fought between 1637 and 1638, only worsened their stance. The rebellion was the final culmination of a building unrest among the peasants of the Shimabara peninsula and the Amakusa Islands (later joined by the lordless *samurai* of the area), vexed by the excessive taxation.¹⁶⁹ The discontent was also exacerbated by the strict religious persecutions enacted by the Matsukura *daimyō* – in an area that had once belonged to the Christian Arima 有馬 family and where, in spite of the ban on

¹⁶⁸ Not without incidents. Emblematic is the case of the *Madre de Deus*, a Portuguese ship that reached Nagasaki in 1609, with a rich cargo, and was sunk (resulting in the death of 30 men). This was mainly the result of the opening of commercial relationships between the Japanese and the Spaniards of the Philippines and the Dutch respectively. Ieyasu apparently thought that even if the Portuguese decided to abandon the commerce, the Spanish would be able to supply the deficiency, and accordingly ordered to seize the ship. Resistance from the part of the ship's captain and crew led to its destruction. This constituted a huge blow both to the Nagasaki-Macao trade and to the Jesuit finances in Japan. For a full-fledged narration of the incident, and more generally of the dynamics between the Portuguese, the Dutch (and English) and the Spanish in Japan, see Charles Ralph Boxer, "The Affair of the 'Madre De Deus': A Chapter in the History of the Portuguese in Japan", in Charles Ralph Boxer, *Portuguese Merchants and Missionaries in Feudal Japan, 1543-1640*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1986.

¹⁶⁹ The taxation – imposed to cover the costs for a number of construction projects initiated by the local Matsukura 松倉 *daimyō* family – is said to have interested a huge variety of items, including burial holes, and to have totalled about 70 percent of the whole peasants' produce. Michael S. Laver, *The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Hegemony*, New York: Cambria Press, 2011, p. 129.

Christianity, a strong underground Christian movement still persisted. This is why when, in 1637, the unrest was brought to a climax with the assassination of the local *daikan*, and the uprising began in full force, the rebelling forces were immediately associated with Christianity.¹⁷⁰

As underlined by Laver, the connection between the Shimabara rebels and the Portuguese merchants of Dejima was not a close one – as it basically only amounted, so far as it’s known, to their sharing of Christianity – but it was enough to elicit repression from the part of the *bakufu*.¹⁷¹ The suppression of the rebellion and the final execution of its leader, the sixteen-year-old Amakusa Shirō 天草 四郎, precluded therefore not only to the final act of the persecution of the Tokugawa authorities against Christianity, which brought the end of the so-called “Christian century”, but also to the enforcement of a more strict policy of national seclusion (*sakoku* 鎖国), that directly involved the Portuguese – who, from 1640 onward, were officially banned from the country.

¹⁷⁰ To which point this was accurate is actually uncertain. Many of the local peasants’ families were Christians, and Christian images and symbols were used by the rebels, but it is doubtful how deeply the element of Christianity run in the rebellion as an ideological foundation and at an organizational level. The matter, and more generally the Shimabara rebellion, are discussed in Kanda Chisato, *Shimabara no ran: kirishitan shinkō to busō hōki* (The Shimabara rebellion: Christian faith and armed insurrection), Tokyo: Chūōkōron-shinsha, 2005.

¹⁷¹ Michael S. Laver, *The Sakoku Edicts*, cit., pp. 129-140.

2.2. PORTUGUESE COMMERCIAL EXPANSION AND CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION ON JAPAN IN EUROPE

2.2.1. Portuguese discoveries and developments in cartography

The more immediate effect of the Portuguese expansion in both the Indian Ocean and the China Seas – in terms of circulation of information on Asia – was, as far as the first half of the sixteenth century is concerned, its impact on the developments of cartography. Da Gama's voyage, already, provided European cartographers with a whole new body of information concerning the Atlantic coast of Africa, and that body soon expanded, to encompass knowledge on the coastal outline of the Indian Ocean and of the China Seas.

The Portuguese Crown strived to keep geographical notions secret, keeping all written reports and maps, in the utmost secrecy, in the archives of the *Casa da India*, but at least part of them were nonetheless bound to leak outside the circles of the royalty, and into the hands of foreign competitors. The opening of the trade route around the Cape of Good Hope had in fact created much distress among the leaders of the main competing commercial centres, and most of all among the Italian merchants that had, up to that moment, dominated the spice trade in Europe (through commerce with middlemen in the Levant).¹⁷² Growingly, spies were sent in the thriving commercial scenario of Lisbon, so as to gather information about the discoveries.

¹⁷² Braudel underlines how the Portuguese advance had, in particular, led to a big crisis for the Venetian merchants, whose primacy in commerce pretty much relied on the spice trade. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume 1*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 543.

One of such spies was the Italian Alberto Cantino, who, in 1501, reached the Portuguese capital, travelling on account of the Duke of Ferrara, Hercule d'Este. He was, in theory, to be engaged in horse-trading, but had been unofficially entrusted with the task of collecting intelligence about the Portuguese advance in the Indian Ocean. During his stay, he managed to bribe one unknown Portuguese cartographer into drawing for him a planisphere, including the most recently collected geographical information.¹⁷³ The planisphere, that has come to be known as the “Cantino map”, represented the whole known world – which did not, yet, include Japan, but comprehended, for the first time, all of the Americas (including the Brazilian coastline), the entirety of Africa, and a great part of Asia (including China and Indo-China). It was “the first map to project the sphere of the earth onto a plane (i.e. two-dimensionally) on a truly global scale”.¹⁷⁴

The Cantino planisphere represents, in other words, the earliest known example of “modern” world map, combining the impact of Ptolemaic studies (that, as seen in the previous chapter, had dominated cartography in the last decades of the fifteenth century) with that of the European Oceanic expansion. It was the expression of a new cartographical genre, cosmography (*cosmographia*), which came, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, to fully replace the tradition of Medieval *Mappaemundi*.

This genre was, in a way, a direct product of the geographical explorations. The newly encountered territories led to the expansion of the scopes and forms of cartography, not only as it inspired the inclusion of a new, universal range of territories, but also by provoking

¹⁷³ As stated in his letters to the Duke of Ferrara. On the Cantino map, see Tessaleno Devezas and Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues, *Pioneers of Globalization: Why the Portuguese Surprised the World*, Famalicão: Centro Atlântico, 2007, pp. 175-179.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

a redefinition of the geographical categories that had been established by Ptolemy's work (i.e. chorography, intended as the representation of limited territories; geography, intended as the representation, with the application of geometry, of ampler territories within the boundaries of the "inhabited world" – the *oikoumene* of the Greeks – known to Ptolemy – and cosmography, intended as astronomical cartography). By 1500, cosmography had evolved into a form of "universal geography", representing the surface of the earth in its entirety, with the application of both the mathematical standards previously adopted in geography and of the astronomical notions that had pertained to Ptolemaic cosmography – in other words, using parallels, meridians, tropics and poles as a reference grid so as to read and "contain" the whole world. The term geography was, in turn, applied to the representation of smaller regions – usually not vaster than provinces – characterized by political unity or by physical coherence.¹⁷⁵

Cartographers had, for their part, evolved into professionals who, contrary to their medieval predecessors (who often worked anonymously), were valued as the recognized authors of their works. Their stance was not that of "artists", or of "narrators", as in the case of the authors of the *Mappaemundi*, but that of scientists – who had to be versed in a variety of matters, ranging from geometry, to geography and astronomy. Their reputation was a primary requisite for the credibility of their works, as well as their sources. Among them, at least for the first half of the sixteenth century, the classical geographers – Ptolemy himself, but also Strabo and Pomponius Mela – continued to hold a significant weight. With the advance of the century, a growing influence was also derived from the nautical world maps

¹⁷⁵ Topography was also born, and joined chorography in representing single locations, such as fortresses and castles. See David Woodward and Emanuela Casti (ed.), *Cartografia a stampa nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, cit., pp. 20-21 and 29-36.

that, as a consequence of the discoveries, began to be produced alongside the regional portolan charts that had circulated in Europe ever since the fourteenth century.¹⁷⁶

The evolution of the standards for the representation of the surface of the earth wasn't the only development that interested cartography in the first half of the sixteenth century. It was precisely by this period that, starting with Italy, publishers began to turn maps, including world-maps, into commercial products of large diffusion.

The cartographical industry, born in Florence in the late fifteenth century, underwent a quick development in Rome and Venice (that took Florence's place in the industry when the city was deprived of the centrality of its role in the commercial network linking Europe to Asia by the opening of the routes in the Atlantic). By 1530, the two cities had become the two major cartographical producers in Italy and, more generally, two leading centres in the European publishing market – a role they were bound to maintain up to the last decades of the sixteenth century.¹⁷⁷ Their production underwent a steady growth,

¹⁷⁶ Disconnected from the classical sources, maps of this kind were more directly based on the routes traced with compasses by the sailors shipping through the oceans, and included a whole range of practical information (such as wind directions) that did not pertain to Cosmography. Cosmographers strived to find room for such knowledge into their works, but, throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, the two genres coexisted without entering into a successful combination. Only in 1569 they finally merged, in Gerard Mercator's work, which would become, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, a standard in map-making. Mercator produced a projection which "sought to reconcile the navigator's need for a straight-forward course with the trade-off inherent in flattening a globe". Mark Monmonier, *Rhumb Lines and Map Wars: A Social History of the Mercator Projection*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 7. See *ibidem* for a general overview on Mercator's work and its impact on contemporary geography.

¹⁷⁷ Venice was, quantitatively, the most productive printing centre. The market in Rome, however, developed for a longer period, as the production in Venice was put to an abrupt stop by 1575-1577, when the city was struck by a pestilence (that affected the publishing industry in general). Venice never regained its primacy after that, and publishers in the Netherlands came to dominate the market. David Woodward and Emanuela Casti (ed.), *Cartografia a stampa*, cit., pp. 16-19.

tied, conversely, with a flourishing commerce for the maps, that brought an expansion of the section of the public who had access to the works, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. By the 1560s, maps had completed their evolution from instruments used for travel, war, and administrations, or as pictorial decorations to be hanged both in public places and in the houses of the aristocracy (who had had an almost exclusive access to manuscript maps), into consumer and divulgation goods, penetrating the everyday life of a huge section of the European middle classes.¹⁷⁸

The expansion of the market was tied with an inevitable stylistic renovation of the maps. While the cartographical materials produced in the first decades of the century mostly still appear, in style and format, to be addressed to a restricted, wealthy section of the public, the advance of the century was marked with the progressive adoption of format changes – such as the abandon of Latin in favour of the vernacular, and the adoption of smaller dimensions. By 1565, moreover, the Venetian producers had opened to clients the possibility to order and purchase maps – originally conceived to be sold singularly – in bound-together compositions, put together according to the interests of the buyer. The practice would soon spread to other publishing centres, and the Roman (of French origin) publisher Antonio Lafréry was the first, in 1570, to add a front-page to such compositions, giving birth to the atlases genre.¹⁷⁹

The catalogue produced by Lafréry himself in 1572, for all the titles on sale in his house (*Indice delle stampe in vendita nella bottega*),

¹⁷⁸ As underlined by Woodward, a study of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century private inventories that remain to our day shows in fact how maps were largely collected in the residencies of the professional lay classes (and only in a lower measure in the houses of the clergy and the lower strata of society) – a sign that their possession must have been, much as in the case of art collections, a way for them to affirm their growingly relevant social status. See *Ibidem*, pp. 59-60 and 99-130.

¹⁷⁹ Thus known as *lafreeriani*.

counts more than 500 works, and is revealing, in itself, of how florid the commerce for cartographical products had grown out to be by the final decades of the century.¹⁸⁰

The direct consequence to such commercial growth was that maps came to play a growing role in the way the European public viewed the world as a geographical entity: they sealed the passage from the religious perception conveyed by the medieval *Mappaemundi* to a secular representation – one that implied the idea of a world which could be captured in a uniform, ordered image and over which dominance, both rational and material, could be systematically extended.

With the new cartography,

geometric space – abstract and homogeneous – came to be deployed for the first time in western culture. The consequences of this development were felt by Europeans and non-Europeans alike, especially as the universalist claims of the new, abstract spatiality empowered modern, western European culture at the expense of premodern others.¹⁸¹

In this sense, the new type of map, tied in the first place to the geographical explorations, created in turn further ground and motivation for the European expansion. How map collecting impacted

¹⁸⁰ Cristiano Collari, “Il secolo d’oro della cartografia italiana: variazione dei gusti e dinamiche dei valori delle incisioni geografiche del Cinquecento”, paper presented at the seminar *Le stampe antiche e la grafica moderna (Il valore del libro 2)*, October 4th, 2012. The paper can be accessed online at the following url: http://www.cultura.regione.lombardia.it/shared/ccurl/563/244/Collari_Il%20secolo%20d%20oro%20della%20cartografia%20italiana.pdf (last access: December 6th, 2012).

¹⁸¹ Ricardo Padrón, “Mapping Plus Ultra”, cit., p. 31.

the *effective* diffusion of up-to-date geographical knowledge is, on the other hand, doubtful. What reached the hands of the buyers was hardly what could be identified as the “current” geographical notions (which, even when sneaked away from the hands of the Portuguese, tended to be kept quite firmly in the hands of state leaders).¹⁸² Printers in Rome and Venice, for the most, marketed their products as “modern” and “new”,¹⁸³ but, as a matter of fact, they not always had the means to get in possession of truly updated information (and the majority of their clients, for their part, didn’t know enough about the discoveries to discern correct knowledge from outdated one).

The inability to capture the more up-to-date information in the maps printed and divulged in Europe is all the more evident in the case of Japan.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, cartographical representations of the archipelago had only seldom appeared in the planispheres produced in the second half of the fifteenth century. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, a growing number of maps and atlases began instead to include depictions of Japan, sometimes with the addition of brief geographical descriptions. The information they included, however, appears to be still very rough and inaccurate.

¹⁸² The Cantino map, itself, was never given to print or divulged to the general public. Completed by 1502, and sent back to the Duke of Ferrara, it was kept in the archives of the Ducal Library in Ferrara, and then, after 1598, in the palace in Modena where the D’Este family transferred. The map only came to light again in the nineteenth century, and is currently conserved in the Biblioteca Estense Universitaria of Modena. See Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues, Tessaleno Devezas and Tessaleno C. Devezas, *Pioneers of Globalization*, cit., p. 177. It can be accessed, in a high quality digitized version, on the library website, at the following url: <http://bibliotecaestense.beniculturali.it/info/img/i-mo-beu-c.g.a.2.pdf> (last access: November 42, 2012).

¹⁸³ Woodward underlines, for example, the use of adjectives such as “*nuovo, recente, vero, esatto, ricco, aggiornato*” in the majority of the titles published in Italy throughout the fifteenth century. David Woodward and Emanuela Casti (ed.), *Cartografia a stampa*, cit., p. 35.

One very early example of world map including Japan is the one realized by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller – whose first edition was published, presumably in 1000 copies, in 1507.¹⁸⁴ The map was part of an ambitious project put in place by the Gymnasium Vosagense, a group of humanists operating under the patronage of Duke René of Lorraine, who aimed at documenting the geographical discoveries perpetrated both by the Spanish and the Portuguese Crowns in the Atlantic Ocean, ever since the last decades of the fifteenth century.¹⁸⁵

Waldseemüller and the other members of the group were privy to some of the more up-to-date information brought back from the New World, including Amerigo Vespucci's account his voyage of 1501-1502.¹⁸⁶ Their knowledge about Asia, however, seemed to be far less current. In particular, the way Japan was represented on Waldseemüller's map still appeared to largely rely on the Marco Polo tradition, rather than on information directly collected by the Portuguese merchants and sailors travelling in the Indian Ocean. The country was represented as a single island, and named Zipangri, probably as a variation of the term "Cipangu". It was positioned in the Northern hemisphere – and not facing China's southern provinces as in

¹⁸⁴ Of such edition, only one existing copy is known. It can be accessed on line via the Library of Congress site, at the url: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/waldexh.html> (last access: December 1st, 2012)

¹⁸⁵ Together with, Waldseemüller's planisphere, a wall map in twelve sheets, the project included several related works, and particularly the *Cosmographiae introductio cum quibusdam geometriae ac astronomiae principiis ad eam rem necessariis*, a textbook on cosmography.

¹⁸⁶ The works include, as a matter of fact, the earliest mentions of the word "America" in reference to the New World – which was, for the first time, clearly represented as a separate entity from Asia (constituting a further step away from medieval cartographical convention). The map is, in itself, emblematic of the way the impact of the discoveries was combined in Europe with the conventions and theories already affirmed by the end of the fifteenth century, in order to create knowledge about the newly discovered territories. This process is amply illustrated by Christine R. Johnson, "Renaissance German Cosmographers and the Naming of America," *Past and Present*, Vol. 191, 2006, pp. 3-43.

Marco Polo's description – but its distance from the continent was still overestimated.

Even after the conquest of Malacca in 1511, which, as already mentioned, granted to Portuguese ships access to the Indian Ocean, cartographical representations of Japan remained scattered and imprecise. In 1528, a map of Japan was included in the first edition of the *Isolario* by Benedetto Bordone – a work aimed at offering a description of all the known insular countries of the time.¹⁸⁷ The book was representative of a cartographic genre born in Florence,¹⁸⁸ that had been developed throughout the fifteenth century, and would continue to flourish up to the end of the sixteenth century in Italy, with a significant literary impact abroad. The works of the genre were conceived as sorts of illustrated guides for travellers, and derived strong influences both by chorography, with its focus on description, and by Portolan charts, whose graphical influence was evident, particularly in the way the coastlines of the islands were traced.¹⁸⁹

While largely drawing from nautical maps for the depiction of the Mediterranean area and the Levant, Bordone's work reflected again a lack of access to up-to-date information about Japan. The archipelago, represented in the third section of the work (focused on the islands of the "Mare Orientale") was depicted as a single island, and named "Ciampagu", in open reference to Marco Polo. The weight of the *Divissament du mond* was also evident in the three-pages description

¹⁸⁷ Benedetto Bordone, *Isolario, di Benedetto Bordone Nel qual si ragiona di tutte l'Isole del mondo, con li lor nomi antichi & moderni, historie, fauole, & modi del lor viuere, & in qual parte del mare stanno, & in qual parallelo et clima giaciono*, Venice: Nicolo d'Aristotile [also known as Zoppino], 1528.

¹⁸⁸ The predecessor of the genre is usually identified with Cristoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber Insularium Archipelagi* (1420). See David Woodward, *Cartography in the European Renaissance. 1*, Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2007, p. 459.

¹⁸⁹ Eila M. J. Campbell, "Material of Nautical Cartography from C 1550 to 1650 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford", *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, Vol. 23, 1985, pp. 179-185.

which accompanied the cartographical representation of Japan – in terms of the geographical position and dimensions assigned to the country, as well as of the emphasis put on the richness of the country, and on the two failed attempts at invasion by the Mongols.

On the other hand, Bordone's work was likely one of the earliest printed works to spread notice of the existence of Japan to a wider section of the European public. It was the second *Isolario* ever put to print,¹⁹⁰ and the work that truly launched such cartographic form as a “commercially viable genre for large-scale publishing”.¹⁹¹

Only by the second half of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese entered into direct contact with the Japanese archipelago, more accurate cartographical representations of the country began to be produced and circulated in Europe.

Worth mentioning, among the cartographers of the second half of the century, is Giacomo Gastaldi, who was, up to his death in 1566, the most authoritative among the Italian cosmographers, and an inspiration for many successive map authors and publishers. Among his many influential works, Gastaldi authored 34 printed maps included, together with the 26 original maps, in the expanded edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia* (published in 1548 in Venice), meant as an updated version, produced in the light of the recent geographical discoveries, of the work of the classic geographer. He was also author of the maps included in the already mentioned collection of travel literature by Giovanni Battista Ramusio, the *Navigazioni et viaggi*, published in Venice between 1550 and 1556. Most notably, as far as

¹⁹⁰ The earliest one being one *Isolario* focused on the Greek islands, published by Bartolomeo da li Sonnetti, in 1485.

¹⁹¹ David Woodward, *Cartography in the European Renaissance. 1*, cit., p. 270. A second edition of the book was produced in 1534, and several others up to the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Japan is concerned, he introduced in printed maps the new name “Giapam” for the archipelago. In 1556, “Giapam” was represented as a single island on the map titled *Universale della parte del mondo nuovamente ritrovata* with which he contributed to Ramusio’s work. In the 1561 edition of his *Uniuersale Descrittione del Mondo* (published in Venice by Mattia Pagano), moreover, the section devoted to Asia included notice of the discovery of the Islands of “Giapan”, which was also represented in the xylographic planisphere accompanying the work (the *Cosmographia Universalis*).

Among the cartographers indebted to Gastaldi was Abraham Ortelius, author of the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* – an atlas (in the Lafréry format), which enjoyed considerable fortune ever since its first publication in Antwerp in 1570 – and of what was probably the most influential cartographic representation of Japan of the sixteenth century.¹⁹²

In the first edition of his *Theatrum*, Japan was still only included on general maps,¹⁹³ but by 1595 the work had been expanded, adding both a map of China, the *Chinae, olim Sinarum regionis, noua descriptio* (which, in itself, included a representation of Japan), and, for the first

¹⁹² I will limit myself here to an analysis of the printed cosmographies and geographies that were most influential in the evolution of the cartographical representation of Japan in Europe, but it is worth noting that several other cartographers included representations of Japan in their works. For a more complete overview of the earliest existing printed maps including the Japanese archipelago, see Lutz Walter, *Japan: a cartographic vision. European printed maps from the early 16th to the 19th century*, New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1994.

¹⁹³ It was depicted, as an archipelago, with the three main island of Honshū, Kyūshū and Shikoku, on three of the maps focused on Asia – the *Asiae Nova Descriptio*, where it was labelled as “Iapan”, and the *Indiae Orientalis Insularumque Adiacentium tiipus* and the *Tartariae sive Magni Chami Regni*, where it appeared as both “Iapan”, on the map, and “Zipangri”, in the added description. The 1570 edition of the work can be consulted online on the Geoweb catalogue of Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia, at the url: <http://geoweb.venezia.sbn.it/cgi-win/geoweb/archiweb.dll?service=direct&lang=0&uid=000004&session=000000&fld=B&value=001946> (last access: December 1st, 2012).

time, a map specifically devoted to the Japanese archipelago – the *Iaponiae insulae description*. This map of Japan had been composed and sent to Ortelius, around 1592, by the Portuguese Jesuit father Luis Teixeira, who was at the time working as a mathematician and cartographer for the King of Spain. Teixeira himself had never been to Japan, but he had presumably copied the map from some original work either by an author who had lived there and/or had familiarity with Japanese sources, or with a Japanese source in itself.¹⁹⁴ The map represented the three main islands of Japan, labelled Iaponia (Honshū), Bungo (Kyūshū) and Tonsa (Shikoku), and – even though no mention was included as of yet of Ezo, and Korea was wrongly represented as an island, the *Corea Insula* instead of as a peninsula – it overall offered a much more realistic overview of the Japanese archipelago than the one presented in previous representations.¹⁹⁵

Teixeira's map was long believed to be the earliest printed map – outside the realm of the *Isolari* – specifically devoted to the

¹⁹⁴ Probably some original Japanese map of the so-called Gyōgi type – i.e. the cartographical model imported in Japan, by the eighth century, by the Korean Buddhist monk Gyōgi-Bosatsu, considered to be the earliest maker of Japanese maps (one of the characteristic elements of this kind of map was the focus on the relationship between the capital and the provinces, designed as a series of oval-shaped territories around it. See George Kiss, “The Cartography of Japan during the Middle Tokugawa Era: A Study in Cross-Cultural Influences”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 37 No. 2, 1947, pp.101-119, p. 111. Among the possible sources for Teixeira's map Lach suggests the Madrid and Florence manuscript sketches (see below) and the manuscript work of Ignacio Morera (or Montera), the first European cartographer to have reportedly set foot in Japan. Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p.710. For a more general outlook on the Japanese sources used for the composition of European maps on Japan, see Nakamura Hiroshi, “Les Cartes du Japon. qui servaient de modele aux cartographes europeens au debut desrelations de l'Occident avec le Japon”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 1939, pp. 100-123.

¹⁹⁵ A 1603 edition of Ortelius' atlas, based on the 1595 edition (with all its additions) can be consulted online on the Geoweb catalogue of Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia, at the url: <http://geoweb.venezia.sbn.it/geoweb/iscgi/archiweb.dll?service=direct&lang=0&uid=00004&session=000000&fld=B&value=000852> (last access: December 1st, 2012).

representation of Japan. By the first half of the twentieth century, however, Mikinosuke Ishida had dismantled this assumption,¹⁹⁶ by bringing to light the existence of an earlier cartographical representation of the archipelago – a folded map in woodblock print, included in the second edition (dated 1586) of the work on Japan by the Swiss author Renward Cysat, published in the height of the editorial boom that had followed the arrival in Europe of the first Japanese mission.¹⁹⁷ The map is however, in comparison to the one by Teixeira, extremely inaccurate – representing, in particular, Honshū and Kyūshū as a single island. More than relying on some earlier cartographical source, as was the case with Teixeira’s map, it seems to be based on the Jesuit sources that had reached Europe up to that moment of which it constitutes a sort of visual compilation of.¹⁹⁸

Another early cartographical representation of Japan, displaying a similar connection with the Jesuit sources, is also the one produced by the Milanese local historian Urbano Monte. Monte had been among the

¹⁹⁶ In his article Mikinosuke Ishida, “A Brief Note on the Two Old European Maps of Japan Recently Discovered (A Woodcut Map of 1586 and a Manuscript Map of 1585)”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1938, pp. 259-265.

¹⁹⁷ The full title of the work was *Warhafftiger Bericht Von den New erfundnen Japponischen Inseln vnd Konigreichen auch von andren zuvor unbekandten Indianischen Landen. Darinn der heilig Christlich Glaub wunderbarlich zunimpt vnd auffwachst. Neben dem allen erfindet sich in diser Edition gruendliche anzeygung von der Japponischen Legation newlich gehn Romankom?en von etlichen Blitzeugen desz wah-ren Christ lichen Glaubens: von Brasilia vnd weytere beschreibung der Landschafften vnd Wesen der Neuwerfundnen Volckern sampt andern seltzamen Geschichten so in dem folgenden Inhalt desz gantzen Buchs mit kurzem gemeldet werden. Durch Renwardum Cysatum, Burgern zu Lucern au dem Italianischen in das Teutsch gebracht vnd jetzt zum erstenmal im Truck augangen.* Lucerne: Abraham Gemperlin, 1586. The work can be consulted online at the url: http://books.google.it/books?id=o2D8NRkleJoC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (last access: December 1st, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ As suggested also by the fact that the Latin description that accompanies the map includes mention of the arrival of Francis Xavier in Japan in 1549, and an enumeration of the twelve Jesuit colleges that had been built in Japan. Mikinosuke Ishida, “A Brief Note on the Two Old European Maps”, cit. pp. 260-261.

chroniclers of the Japanese mission to Europe,¹⁹⁹ and it was apparently on the first-hand knowledge about Japan he was able to collect through the encounter with the emissaries, as well as on the knowledge derived from the Jesuit letters from Japan that had been published in Europe up to that moment, that he based his cartographical representation. His xylographic map – titled *Descrittione e sito del Giapone* and put to print by the publisher Giacomo Piccaglia in 1589 – showed, similarly to the one by Cysat, many inaccuracies. The archipelago was represented as composed by only one main island, with a number of minor ones surrounding it, and the Inland Sea was basically absent. The numerous place names it included were also clearly derived from the Jesuit letters.²⁰⁰ The encounter with the Japanese emissaries was also the occasion that prompted Monte to write his *Trattato universale*,²⁰¹ a manuscript compendium – never published – meant to collect the more up-to-date cosmographical knowledge that had reached Europe by that time. The work was, in itself, quite unoriginal, as it was largely based on the classical writings that had been used as a major geographical source for the great part of the century. It included, however, a planisphere made of sixty-two separated maps, in which Monte's original map of Japan was included, with small changes.

The map of Japan included in the manuscript by Monte was not the only cartographical representation to undergo the fate of the never

¹⁹⁹ Monte was author of a manuscript diary of the embassy, compiled upon the passage of the mission in Milan, and is well known for the portrait of the Japanese visitors that he included in the chronicle. On his writings, see Benjamino Gutierrez, *La prima ambascieria giapponese in Italia : dall'ignorata cronaca di un diarista e cosmografo milanese della fine del 16. sec.* Milano: Stab. Tip. - Litogr. C. Perego, 1938.

²⁰⁰ For a more in-depth treatment of the Monte map, see Tiziana Guglielmetti, *Il Giappone nella carta di Urbano Monte del 1589*, in *Incontri tra Occidente e Oriente. Saggi IV*, Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 1979.

²⁰¹ *Trattato universale descrittione et sito de tutta la terra sin qui conosciuta et disegnata in 62 tavole a stampa (incisioni su rame realizzate da Leone Palavicino con l'aiuto di Lucio Palavicino), anno 1590.*

being published. The focus of the present work is on printed works, but it is worth noting that various manuscript representations of Japan were produced throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, often more accurate than the ones given to print and more largely divulged in Europe. Among them, are two sketch maps based on the Gyōgi type now conserved, respectively, in Madrid and Florence – the first one probably produced in Manila and later sent to Spain, and the second realized on occasion of the arrival of the first Japanese mission in Europe.²⁰² Worth mentioning are also the manuscript Portolan atlases by the Portuguese cartographer Fernão Vaz Dourado, realized between 1568 and 1580. The map of Japan (“Iapam”), included in the first version of the atlas,²⁰³ was, much as the one by Teixeira, evidently indebted to Japanese sources, and quite as detailed. The very same year of the publication of the first edition of Ortelius’ atlas, 1570, another version of Dourado’s atlas was being produced, where, in the twelfth folio, focused on the Northern East Indies, Japan was similarly represented as an archipelago with three main islands.²⁰⁴

Ultimately, however, even in comparison to published works such as the ones by Cysat and by Monte, the map realized by Teixeira was the one that exerted the most significant impact in Europe – both in terms of the general European public and of European cartographers. The two earlier works remained quite obscure, while Ortelius’ atlas was reprinted in numerous editions, throughout the sixteenth and well into

²⁰² See Hiroshi Nakamura, “Les Cartes du Japon,” cit. and Adriana Boscaro, “Le conoscenze geografiche dell’Europa sul Giappone,” cit. (on the mission and its editorial consequences, more will be said in the following chapters).

²⁰³ The map, the eight of the Atlas, is now conserved in the Library of the Palácio de Liria, in Madrid.

²⁰⁴ The 1570 atlas can be consulted online, on the Berkeley website, at the following url:

http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/dsheh/heh_br?Description=&CallNumber=HM+41
(Last access: December 10th, 2012).

the seventeenth century. It was, moreover, converted into growingly accessible formats – a testimony to its diffusion also outside the circles of learned readers.²⁰⁵

The influence of Teixeira's map on the way Japan was represented in Europe was a lasting one. As underlined by Lach, the map was the work that “integrated Japanese and Western cartographic conceptions and laid the basis for more accurate and detailed cartographical works”,²⁰⁶ and remained a fundamental model for the majority of the maps of the archipelago produced and divulged in Europe for over a century.²⁰⁷ Even the misrepresentation of Korea as an island was not to be corrected until a much later map of Japan (the *Iaponia Regnum*, by Martino Martini, dated 1655).²⁰⁸

2.2.2. Portuguese first-hand merchant reports and lay histories

It is significant of the way the Portuguese flow of Portuguese ships in the China Seas throughout the sixteenth century (both inside and outside the official Macao-Nagasaki trade), and in spite of the

²⁰⁵ From the original in folio edition, several smaller editions were produced, both in octavo and in sextodecimo, by the second half of the seventeenth century, so as to be “handier for travellers” (“per maggior commodità de' viaggiatori”), as stated in the front-page of the 1667 edition. (see <http://geoweb.venezia.sbn.it/cgi-win/geoweb/archiweb.dll?service=direct&lang=0&uid=000004&session=000000&fld=B&value=002527> last access: December 1st, 2012).

²⁰⁶ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, p.710.

²⁰⁷ Such as, for example, in the case of the seventeenth century editions of Gerard Mercator's atlas, the *Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura*. In the 1595 edition of the work, published posthumously a year after the death of the cartographer, Japan, called “Iapan”, is still only represented on the world map and the general map on Asia, as a single island. By the 1605 edition, a section on Japan had been added, titled *Iaponia sive Iapan Insula*, where the archipelago was represented according to the Ortelius-Teixeira model.

²⁰⁸ Adriana Boscaro “Le conoscenze geografiche dell'Europa sul Giappone”, cit., p. 104.

manuscript maps based on native sources that did reach Europe, published cartographical information on Japan was mostly indirectly derived by non-cartographical Jesuit sources – so that it was only by the end of the century, with Teixeira’s map, that a fairly realistic cartographical representation of Japan was given to print and to a larger diffusion.

A similar pattern can be observed, actually, in the case of printed pieces of travel literature about Japan. Given the thriving maritime commercial scenario of the China Seas, described in paragraph 2.1.2, Portuguese traders had, surely, been collecting a growing amount of information about Japan, even before their landing on the archipelago, and at least since the establishment of their outpost in Malacca. This kind of first-hand knowledge, however, hardly emerge from the published sources of the time, which include only a number of scattered and fragmentary references to the archipelago.

I have already mentioned Tomé Pires, a Portuguese apothecary at the service of prince Alfonso in Lisbon, who had travelled first to India and then, in 1511, to Malacca as a “factor of the drugs”. Sometime before 1515, probably in great part during his stay in India, and before his departure for the mission to China that would lead him to his death, Pires composed the *Suma Oriental que trata do Mar Roxo até aos Chins*, meant as an official report to King Manuel about the commercial possibilities offered by the newly encountered territories. The work was structured as an all-comprehensive work – systematically describing all of the sea-facing countries between the Red Sea and the Great China Seas area, and, upon completion, appeared as the earliest extensive narrative about the East Indies to ever be composed by a Portuguese.

The *Suma Oriental* included, into his large scope, a brief reference to Japan, mentioned in the variation “Jampon” (presumably based on Malay or on some Chinese coastal dialect)²⁰⁹ with an added brief description, that Pires might have derived from local traders, or from the “Gores” that regularly traded with the area. “Jampon” is put in comparison with the “Liu Kiu” (or “Lequeos” – i.e., Ryūkyū) islands, and said to be larger and more powerful, but not as extensively given to trade – even with China, of which it is stated to be vassal – because of the lack of the necessary ship-building technology. According to the description by Pires, the “Luçoes” actively purchased gold and copper directly by Japan, in exchange for their local products (cloth, fishnets, but also foodstuff, wax and honey).²¹⁰

The fact that the thriving maritime Japanese activities in the China Seas were apparently not known to Pires can easily be explained, again, by pointing to some purposeful misdirection inflicted on European competitors by the “Gores” themselves, or from Chinese Coastal merchants, who, as already suggested, might have wanted to protect their trade. And, probably, this misdirection had some part in the Portuguese temporary dismissal of Japan as a possible commercial partner, which prevented them from venturing towards the archipelago before the fortuitous landing in Tanegashima. What is

²⁰⁹ Donald Lach, *in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p.652.

²¹⁰ An annotated modern English translation of the *Suma Oriental* has been realized by Armando Cortesão, on the base of a codex he found in Paris in 1937 (a manuscript copy of the original one composed by Pires). The work was published, in two volumes, by the Hakluyt Society, also including the “Book” by Francisco Rodriguez, a Portuguese pilot who left a number of nautical maps and annotations, as well as panoramic drawings, that were originally incorporated in the codex. Tomé Pires and Armando Cortesão (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China, Written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515 ; And, The Book of Francisco Rodrigues : Pilot-Major of the Armada that Discovered Banda and the Moluccas : Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack, and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East Before 1515*, Nendeln: Hakluyt Society, 1944. The description of Japan is included in the first volume, fourth book (“China to Borneo”), p. 131.

striking is, however, that in spite of the growingly stronger position of the Portuguese in the China Seas, aside for the reference in Pires' work, mentions of Japan are conspicuously absent from the Portuguese reports composed in the first half of the sixteenth century.

João Paulo Oliveira e Costa argues that, at this point in history, very little was probably known about the archipelago even in India and eastern Asia – actually adhering, in this assumption, to Pires' own representation of Japan as basically isolated, and eclipsed from the eyes of the outside world by the Ryūkyū islands, which presumably functioned as a commercial intermediary for the archipelago.²¹¹ Given the context provided by the greater China Seas region, however, this is highly improbable, also considering that it is known that notice of the archipelago had actually reached Western Asia way as early as in the ninth century A.D., brought back from the Kingdom of Silla by Persian merchants.²¹²

The lack of references to Japan in European literature before the mid-sixteenth century can be more easily explained as a side-effect of the more general political stance of the Portuguese crown toward the territories belonging to its alleged sphere of influence. In other words, the lack of knowledge filtered into published works was probably the result of a deliberate policy of control on information from the part of the Portuguese authorities. The series of papal bulls issued in the

²¹¹ João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, "Japan and the Japanese in printed works in Europe in the sixteenth century", cit.

²¹² The merchants might have heard about the archipelago while on the Korean peninsula, or even have crossed the sea and personally reached it. The information they reported, still extremely vague and often erroneous, was the source for the Persian writer Ibn Khurdadhbih, who wrote of the archipelago in his *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik (Book of Roads and Provinces)*, composed between 844 and 886. He named it Wakwak, a rendition of *wa-koku* (another Chinese name for the archipelago), and described it, much as in later representations, as a land rich in gold. Derek Massarella, *A world elsewhere*, cit., p. 10.

second half of the fifteenth century, aimed at sanctioning the Portuguese rights in Africa and Asia, is in itself revealing of Portugal's monopolistic aspirations. It is likely that such a stance would also translate in the attempt to prevent information about the new Asian commercial routes from leaking in the hands of Spanish merchants and of other European commercial competitors.

How officially such a policy was handled is a matter of debate among historians.²¹³ What is more easily verified, however, are its effects on the editorial world – namely, the fact that, in spite of the impact of the Portuguese expansion in terms of the European integration into a wider market,²¹⁴ a comparatively small amount of new publications was issued in Europe, before the 1550s, about Asia. To quote Lach,

It is hard to believe that chance alone is sufficient to account for the fact that not a single work on the new discoveries in Asia is known to have been published in Portugal between 1500 and mid-century. [...] Treatises on Portugal's military and political establishments in the East were left unpublished, many of them not being printed until recent times. It seems highly likely that the chroniclers feared or

²¹³ Few facts are registered, such as the decree emanated by King Manuel on November 13, 1504, declaring that complete secrecy was to be maintained over the oceanic navigations, under penance of death. For a more complete overview of the measures taken by the Portuguese Crown to ensure secrecy, as well as for a rich bibliographical guide on the matter, see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., pp.151-154.

²¹⁴ The *economical* effects on Europe of the intercourse with Asia throughout the sixteenth century have been analyzed at length by Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson. For a general overview of the matter, see Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "After Columbus: Explaining Europe's Overseas Trade Boom, 1500-1800", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 62 No. 2, 2002, pp. 417-456 and ID., "Did Vasco da Gama matter for European markets?", cit..

were forbidden to include information in their account which was classified as a state secret.²¹⁵

The *Suma Oriental* had, itself, a very tortuous editorial history. Likely, Pires sent it back to Europe by the end of the 1510s, before leaving Cochin for China, but it wasn't until 1550, when Giovanni Battista Ramusio included a (still incomplete) translation of the work in the first edition of his *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, that the content of the book was finally put to print.²¹⁶

Nor was the already mentioned report by Captain Jorge Álvares to Francis Xavier ever published,²¹⁷ even if part of its contents later resonated in the letters written by the father himself.²¹⁸ The report was sent by Xavier to the central authorities of the Company of Jesus in Rome, from where it was further circulated among the members of the orders, becoming the first item in a huge pile of documentation

²¹⁵ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p.153.

²¹⁶ Ramusio's work, however, did not include the name of the author, which in part explains why the *Suma Oriental* has remained quite obscure until fairly recent times. For a more specific overview on the editorial history of the *Suma Oriental*, see the introduction to Cortesão's translation. Tomé Pires and Armando Cortesão (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, cit.

²¹⁷ See paragraph 2.1.3.

²¹⁸ Jorge Álvares' report included information about a wide variety of matters, ranging from the Japanese physical appearance, to religion, to architecture, to customs (food and forms of sustenance in general, houses, manners, execution of justice). He noted the treatment of foreigners from the part of the Japanese to be remarkably more open than that of other Asian populations – with the same hospitality expected whenever the Japanese were invited on board of the Portuguese ships. The focus of the report, probably because it was meant to be received by Xavier, was actually, for the major part, of topics on which the Jesuit letters themselves would dwell plenty (even if not always with the same conclusions). A transcription of Álvares' report can be found in Izawa Minoru, *El padre maestro Francisco Xavier en el Japon*, Tokyo: Sociedad Latino-Americana, 1969, pp. 240-257. An English summary of the text can also be found in Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951, pp. 32-36. Robert Richmond Ellis has put the contents of Álvares' report in comparison to those of Xavier's letters in his article "The Best Thus Far Discovered": The Japanese in the Letters of Francisco Xavier", *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 71 No. 2, 2003, pp. 155-169.

collected by the Jesuit on Japan – without, however, reaching out of the circles of the Society to the general public, like later reports by the missionaries would do.²¹⁹

Only by mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese policy of control on information grew to be more lenient. By that time, it had become clear that it would be impossible to stop other European competitors from coming to exert a growing influence on the East Asian trade – and the pressure of Asian sailors, merchants and pirates (who kept effectively challenging Portuguese dominance), had been doubled by that of Spanish sailors and merchants (to which Dutch and English seamen would add, as we'll see, from the seventeenth century onwards).

In the new economical (and editorial) climate some works that had been completed in the first half of the century but had not reached the hands of publishers (such as the *Suma Oriental* itself), and new ones based on information that had been collected in the previous decades, but that had never seen the light, could be finally put to print.

Two notable examples were the *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos portugueses*, a treatise about the expansion of the Portuguese empire, composed by the historian Fernão Lopes de Castanheda (1500-1559), and the *Decadas da Asia*, a work of similar purpose by the Portuguese humanist João de Barros (1496-1570). Castanheda's work was largely based on information personally collected by the author during a ten-year stay (from 1528 to 1538) in the Indies, and further expanded, upon his return to Portugal, by gathering first-hand accounts from travelers that had similarly ventured to Asia. Barros, on the other hand, had never personally lived in Asia (except for a brief voyage to Guinea), but he enjoyed the

²¹⁹ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p. 657.

patronage of the Crown and acted for a period as treasurer of the *Casa da India*, being therefore privy of part of the information collected in its archives. While the central bulk of Castanheda's history was ready by 1539 when he came back from Asia, and the same was true, apparently, for the basic draft of the one by Barros,²²⁰ both works were only published for the first time around 1550. The first volume of Castanheda's work was printed in 1551, and six others followed during his lifetime (to which an eight printed volume was added posthumously, by interception of Castanheda's son). The first volume was subject to translation into numerous European languages, and all the seven volumes published antemortem were issued into an Italian edition (translated by Alfonso Ulloa) in 1577. The first three books composing Barros' *Decadas* were published between 1552 and 1563, while the fourth was published posthumously (the draft of a fifth volume was also produced before his death, which was put to print as late as 1615). Part of the work was included, in translation, in the 1554 edition of Ramusio's *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, and the first two decadas were rendered into Italian by the same Ulloa that would later translate Castanheda, in 1562 – testifying a certain editorial success.²²¹

²²⁰ Charles Ralph Boxer, *João de Barros: Portuguese humanist and historian of Asia*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981, p. 98. Neither of the writers went, in fact, far enough to cover the first years of direct interaction between Portugal and Japan, and both works include only scattered references to the Japanese archipelago. Barros' work was later reprised by Diogo do Couto (1542-1616), a Portuguese historian who spent most of his life in India, and worked as keeper of the archives in Goa and as an official chronicler of the Portuguese Empire. He wrote eleven *Decadas*, (four of which were published during his lifetime, between 1602 and 1616)), but his history didn't add much about Japan to what Barros had written – while, in the meantime, a flow of Jesuit writings about the archipelago had already reached the European continent. See Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 1: Trade, Missions, Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 314-315.

²²¹ For a more in-depth overview in the editorial history of the works, also in light of other Iberian publications about Asia produced in the second half of the sixteenth century, see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., pp. 181-197. For a comparative insight on the contents of the works, see Charles Ralph Boxer, *João de Barros*, cit., pp. 97-129 ("The decades of Asia").

A more unfortunate editorial history awaited the already mentioned autobiographical account by Fernão Mendez Pinto about his journey in Asia between 1537 and 1558 – the *Peregrinação* – which was never put to print during the life-time of the writer, but only by 1614. A possible reason for such delay was the satirical stance adopted by the writer toward the political and religious institutions of sixteenth-century Portugal. Pinto's work is peculiar for his time, in that

the author is extremely critical – though never openly – of the overseas action of the Portuguese, whose self-proclaimed mission to conquer and convert all non-Christian people with whom they came in contact, was viewed, within the fiction of the work, as a false and corrupt ideal. This is what sets Pinto apart from his contemporaries, because he alone, had the courage to question the morality of the overseas conquests, which he condemns as acts of barbaric piracy.²²²

Pinto himself held a peculiar position among the Portuguese travellers stationed in the Indies by his time. As mentioned above, he sailed for India as a merchant – and actually amassed quite a fortune – but after meeting and befriending Francis Xavier, his activities became closely entangled with those of the Society of Jesus. He actually joined the order by 1554, and provided for an evangelical and diplomatic mission to Japan to which he, himself, took part (after having travelled to the archipelago as a merchant three times before, one in company of Xavier himself). Before returning to Europe, however, he willingly left

²²² Rebecca D. Catz, “Fernão Mendes Pinto and His *Peregrinação*”, *Hispania*, Vol. 74 No. 3 (“Special Issue Devoted to Luso-Brazilian Language, Literature, and Culture”), 1991, pp. 501-507, p. 501.

the Society, for reasons not completely clear,²²³ and, in his later writings, his stance towards the Jesuits actually appears to be quite critical. As observed by Rebecca Catz, he didn't limit himself to depicting the Muslims as evil – in the undertones common to much Christian literature – but he also extended a subtle criticism toward the warring stance of the Christian missionaries, ready to draw blood for their cause. In opposition, he represented the pacific pagans, the gentiles (and in particular the Chinese), as a sort of utopian society, governed by the laws of Gods in spite of having never heard of Christ.²²⁴

In light of Pinto's first-hand experience with Japan, his works convey a much richer image of the archipelago than the one delivered in Castanheda and Barros' works. All of his four journeys are included in the narrative of the work (as well as a brief description of the Ryūkyū islands). Pinto relates about the first encounter of the Portuguese with the Japanese in Tanegashima, about the events that piqued Xavier's interest toward the archipelago, and about the first phases of the Christian mission there. He assisted to (and related about) the religious disputation between Francis Xavier and the Japanese Buddhist Priests in Bungo, and also covered the diplomatic mission at the same court of Bungo, a few years later.²²⁵

Pinto's writings can, on the other hand, hardly be treated as a perfectly reliable account. As amply underlined by Olof G. Lidin in his

²²³ Fernão Mendez Pinto and Rebecca D. Catz, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, cit., p. XV.

²²⁴ Rebecca D. Catz, "Fernão Mendes Pinto and His Peregrinação", cit. Rebecca Catz deems this stance as exceptional, but it is actually interesting to note that – putting aside the criticism towards the missionaries' methods – many of his points were close to those made about the Japanese and Chinese population in the Jesuit literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century – as we'll see in the following chapters.

²²⁵ For an English translation of the section of Pinto's work centered on Japan, see Fernão Mendez Pinto and Rebecca D. Catz, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, cit., pp. 272-287 and 445-519.

overview of Pinto's four Japanese visits,²²⁶ truth and fiction are strictly interwoven in the author's narrative about Japan, as they are in his writings about Asia in general. This includes the very dates and circumstances of his voyages. If one were to take his narrative at face value, Pinto would have personally witnessed all the major occurrences in the first steps of the Portuguese intercourse with Japan. Pinto places himself as part of the first group of Portuguese landing in Tanegashima – together with a Diogo Zeimoto and a Cristovão Borralho. This is, however, doubtful, even if he must have reached Japan for the first time soon after. He also allegedly was, according to his writings, part of the crew that brought Yajirō from Japan to Xavier, and he was not far from the place where Xavier died in 1552. His later voyage is the more surely truthful one, as well as are his more general geographical view.²²⁷

After its publication, Pinto's work actually enjoyed great fortune in Europe for the great part of the seventeenth century. However, its mixed nature – chronicle, embellished with fiction – made it so that it was not received in the way the author had originally intended it. The account was viewed more as an imaginative adventure book than as a realistic portrait of the author's experience in Asia. Also due to such reception, its fame eventually faded, also due to the many faulty and revised translations.²²⁸

The presence of such an extensive narrative on Japan by a Portuguese man who wasn't (properly) a missionary is, all in all, more an exception than a rule, even as far as the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century are concerned.

²²⁶ Olof G. Lidin, *Tanegashima*, cit., pp. 69-88.

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²²⁸ Fernão Mendez Pinto and Rebecca D. Catz, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, cit., p. XV.

Even after the establishment of the Macao-Nagasaki trade, in fact, the quantity of first-hand material left by Portuguese merchants on Japan remained actually visibly scarce. One reason for this lack of written material might be that, while in Europe the restrictions about the publication of material related to Asia were eased, Portuguese merchants operating in East Asia still held some reserve about divulging information on the country that had become one of their most important sources of income in Asia, so as to prevent the arousal of an excessive interest in their European commercial competitors. As noted by Michael Cooper, moreover, not only few Portuguese merchants actually resided over long periods in Japan, meaning that the amount of knowledge amassed by Portuguese merchant was not necessarily significant, but also the difficulty in handling an efficient system for correspondence with Europe might have discouraged most of them from sending back information to their native lands (a fair point, considering that merchants lacked the kind of strategic motivation that would prompt, instead, the missionaries to perfect their system of intelligence – as we'll see in the following chapters).²²⁹

All this reasons prevented Portuguese merchants from becoming a primary source of information on Japan for the European public, even after the establishment of a steady flow of commercial relationships. On the other hand, it was in a climate more favourable to the circulation of information that, with the landing of Francis Xavier in Kagoshima, the institutionalized system for correspondence operated by the Society of Jesus came to include Japan, and it was precisely

²²⁹ Cooper notes also that, while in Japan, most of the Portuguese merchants were based in the same city, Nagasaki, making it also unnecessary for them to resort to correspondence on a regular basis for matters of practical communication (contrary to the Dutch and the British, who, as we'll see, were scattered on a number of bases on the archipelago). Michael Cooper, "The Brits in Japan", *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 47 No. 2, 1992, pp. 265-272.

through the Jesuits that a more in-depth knowledge about the archipelago began to be relayed to Europe.

2.3. THE SPANISH COMPETITION

2.3.1. The Spanish settlement in Manila

In the short term, the Portuguese accomplishments following Da Gama's return from his first voyage around Africa had managed to sideline the Castilians – who were still struggling, at the time, with making profit of their newly acquired territorial possessions in America. Already by 1519, however, the Spanish Crown, in the person of Charles I of Spain, had started promoting a new quest for the East Indies.

The voyage, put under the command of the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellano and bound to reach the “Spice Islands” in the Pacific, was not to be conducted around Africa – as the eastward route had been put under Portuguese control by the treaty of Tordesillas – but via Brasil. The expedition did reach the East Asian Seas and came, in 1521, in sight of the group of Islands that would by 1545 be known as the Philippines (*Filipina*).²³⁰ In 1524, at the congress of Badajoz, the Spanish Crown claimed sovereignty over them, as well as on the Moluccas and on a wide section of China's eastern coast.²³¹ In the

²³⁰ The expedition was also the first one to accomplish a complete circumnavigation of the world, even though Magellano himself never did see the end of it, ending up killed in the Philippine Islands.

²³¹ Arguing, to support its ambitions, that the line of demarcation established at Tordesillas run through the tip of the Malay peninsula. John M. Headley, “Spain's

following decades, several expeditions left the American continent for Asia and battles were engaged with the Portuguese in the area so as to bring consequence to the Spanish claims, but the failure to find a return passage from the East Indies through the Pacific put the Spanish at a serious disadvantage.²³²

At last, in 1545, the Spanish explorer Ruy Lopez de Villalobos was able to report a first victory against the Portuguese in the Moluccas,²³³ and, in 1565, an expedition commanded by Miguel López de Legazpi (accompanied by the Augustinian Andrés de Urdaneta) managed to extend the Spanish authority over the Philippines. In 1571, the islands were made headquarter of the Spanish East Indies – with Legazpi appointed as governor, and the city of Manila, founded on the location of a large agricultural and fishing village in the island of Luzon, elected as capital.

Manila soon grew as another fundamental centre for the East Asian bullion trade – where silver brought from Mexico and Bolivia was purchased by Chinese merchants in exchange for Asian products, such as silk and porcelain.²³⁴ It was mainly thanks to this role in the South America-China trade that the Spanish settlement in the city also attracted the attention of Japanese merchants.

Asian Presence, 1565-1590: Structures and Aspirations”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 75 No. 4, 1995, pp. 623-646.

²³² *Ibidem*, p. 628.

²³³ Thanks to an alliance with the sultan of Tidore, which counterbalanced the Portuguese alliance with Ternate (see paragraph 2.1.1.). Ternate would function as an operational base for the Castellians up to the second half of the century and the creation of the base in the Philippines.

²³⁴ A great number of Chinese immigrants made their way to Manila, to reap the profits of the commerce, so that actually, by the end of the sixteenth century, the city resembled more to a Chinese colony than to a Spanish outpost. On the administration of Manila and the Chinese presence, see John M. Headley, “Spain's Asian Presence, 1565-1590”, cit. pp. 633-635 and Daniel F. Doepfers, “The Development of Philippine Cities Before 1900”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31 No. 4, 1972, pp. 769-792.

Ever since the 1550s, the flourishing Portuguese commerce with Nagasaki made it clear for the Spanish just how profitable the establishment of commercial relationships with the Japanese archipelago could be. And, while Spain still needed to thread very carefully in the East Asian waters, so as not to break the agreements made in Tordesillas,²³⁵ even before 1571, a growing number of Japanese private traders began to venture towards the Philippines, and to engage in commerce with the islands of Luzon and Mindoro. The trade involved the purchase, from the part of Japanese merchants, of gold, honey and (later in the century, thanks to the growing Chinese presence in Manila) of raw silk, in exchange for silver. It lured the interest not only of the Spanish settlers of the Philippine Islands, but also of those Portuguese who weren't able to take part in the institutional Macao-Nagasaki trade, and therefore found in Manila an alternative way to ship their goods to Japan.²³⁶

The exchanges were, however, never made official. And in spite of the pressures of the Spanish merchants in Manila and of the huge number of Japanese ships travelling to and from the Philippines, the movement, at least as far as the sixteenth century was concerned, never became mutual. Even after the unification of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns in 1580 – when king Phillip II of Spain began promoting the establishment of diplomatic and religious contacts

²³⁵ Establishing the exact location of the line of demarcation for the spheres of influence established in Tordesillas remained a sensible issue between Portugal and Spain throughout the sixteenth century, and one that involved much bending of cartographical notions in favour of one part or the other. See in this regard both Henri Bernard and S. J. Tientsin, “Les Débuts des Relations Diplomatiques Entre le Japon et les Espagnols des Iles Philippines (1571-1594)”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1938, pp. 99-137 and John M. Headley, “Spain's Asian Presence, 1565-1590”, cit.

²³⁶ And, sometimes, even of those who did have the possibilities to take part in the official trade. In 1588, for example, the Portuguese captain Jeronimo Pereira renounced to the possibility of participating in the Nagasaki trade so as to sell his goods in Manila. Henri Bernard and S. J. Tientsin, “Les Débuts des Relations Diplomatiques Entre le Japon et les Espagnols”, cit., p. 119.

between Japan and the Philippines (so as to support the expansion of the Christian missions of Manila) – the military and civil authorities of the city remained cautious toward the perspective of an opening of the trade, in fear of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s desire of expansion.²³⁷

The fear was not unjustified. When Spanish vessels did reach the Japanese archipelago, circumstances were not always fortunate for them – the most notable instance being the so-called “San Felipe incident” (*San Feripe gō jiken* サンフェリペ号事件) of 1596: when the Spanish galleon San Felipe, travelling from Manila to Acapulco, shipwrecked on the coast of Urado 浦戸 bay, in the Tosa 土佐 domain, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered for the crew to be imprisoned, and for the cargo and the personal belongings of the people on board to be confiscated, and divided among himself and the *daimyō* of Tosa. The subsequent petitions from the part of the Spanish captain of the ship, Matias de Randecho, for the recovery of the cargo only served to reignite Hideyoshi’s aversion towards the Christians in Japan, giving way, on February 5, 1597, to the martyrdom of twenty-six Christians – six Franciscan missionaries who had acted as intermediaries in the negotiations with Hideyoshi (four Spanish, one Mexican and one Indian), three Japanese Jesuits and seventeen Japanese Franciscan laymen. Even though, by April of the same year, the San Felipe was repaired and its crew was accorded the permission to leave, Hideyoshi never agreed to return the cargo or the bodies of the martyrs, in spite of any subsequent diplomatic attempts from the part of the authorities in Manila.²³⁸

²³⁷ Charles Ralph Boxer, “The Affair of the “Madre De Deus””, cit., p. 8.

²³⁸ Hideyoshi’s hostility towards the Spaniards might have been at least partly provoked by their Portuguese competitors spreading alarming information about them in order to protect their monopoly. We know for example that in a note to Hideyoshi – written after having received the emissary sent to capital from the San

After Hideyoshi's death, Tokugawa Ieyasu kept, above all in the opening years of his rule, a more open attitude toward the Spaniards, as well as, more generally, towards all the foreign forces at play in the China Seas. Upon assuming his role as shogun, in 1603, he sent letters to the majority of the Asian countries, and most notably to Ming China, with which he aimed to resume official relationships. He also strived to establish a steadier trade flow with the European powers that were slowly emerging side-to-side to the Portuguese in the China Seas area, including the Spanish in the Philippines and in New Spain – offering to open harbours in the eastern Japanese coast to Spanish ships, proposing mutual commercial freedom, and asking for naval architects.²³⁹ Hideyoshi's attitude in the last years of his rule, however, had heightened the caution of the authorities in Manila, so that, even after his death, when his ambitions no longer menaced the Philippine islands, their approach to commerce with Japan remained cautious. In the long run, as in the case of the Portuguese, the Spanish merchants' associations with the Christian orders trying to penetrate the

Felipe after the shipwreck in order to ask permission to repair the galleon – Mashita Nakamori (増田長盛), one of Hideyoshi's more trusted administrators, warned him about the members of the crew, reporting that he had heard rumours among the Portuguese in the capital that the Spaniards acted as pirates in the China Seas, and that they aimed at extending their military power over Japan – so that the shipwrecked galleon had probably been sent in reconnaissance for that scope (and it is possible that the captain of the ship himself, in a fit of anger, suggested something along this lines, boasting that traders and missionaries were only an advance guard for an actual territorial conquest). For an in depth account and discussion of the San Felipe incident, see Matsuda Kiichi, "San Feripe gō jiken no saikentō" (A Reconsideration of the "San Felipe Incident"), *Seisen Jyodai Daigaku Kiyō*, Vol. 14, 1967, pp. 27-58. Several contemporary accounts exist of the martyrdom of the twenty-six Christians – notably the ones by father Luis Frois (in Italian edition, *Relatione della gloriosa morte di 26. posti in croce per comandamento del redi Giappone alli 5. di febraio 1597 de quali sei furono religiosi di san Francesco, tre della Compagnia di Giesù & dicisette christiani Giapponesi*, Rome: Zannetti 1599) and by Juan de Santa Maria (in Italian edition, *Relatione del martirio, che sei padri scalzi di San Francesco et venti Giapponesi christiani patirono nel Giappone l'anno 1597. Scritta dal R.P. fra Gio. di Santa Maria*, Rome: Niccolò Mutij, 1599).

²³⁹ George Bailey Samson, *The Western World and Japan*, cit., p. 132.

archipelago from the Philippines became a cause of tensions with the Japanese authorities, further limiting their agency in Japan – until in 1624, as a consequence of alleged intrigues hatched by the missionaries, the Spaniards were finally banned from the country.²⁴⁰

2.3.2. Spanish sources on Japan

All in all, given these premises, the Spanish settlers in the Philippines never became, even in the first decades of the seventeenth century, a real threat to the Portuguese predominance in the China Seas area. This also explains why the contribute of Spanish merchants to the amount of written sources about Japan circulated in Europe never assumed relevant proportions.

The Castellans had, possibly, already gathered indirect information about the archipelago, ever since the members of Magellano's expedition had reached the Philippine Islands in the first half of the century. The Venetian scholar Antonio Pigafetta, who had travelled with Magellano's crew and produced a direct account of the voyage, reported however only in passing of Japan, identifying it as "Zipangu", and misplacing it in the southern hemisphere – a sign that he probably still relied more on the information included in the *Divissement du Mond* rather than on reliable hear-say collected during his travels.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ For an overview of the commercial relationships between the Spanish in Manila and Japan in the seventeenth century, see Takase Koichirō, *Kirishitan jidai no bōeki to gaikō*, cit., pp. 88-120.

²⁴¹ An English, annotated translation of Pigafetta's account (first composed in vernacular Italian with the title *Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo*), is included, together with an overview of the fortune of the book and a general chronology of Magellano's voyage, in Antonio Pigafetta and Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (ed.

In 1546, only a few years after the first Portuguese landing on the Japanese archipelago, Villalobos and the men that accompanied his expedition were at last reportedly able to collect second-hand information about the archipelago, during their stay in Tidore.²⁴² Such knowledge was given written form in what is actually the earliest detailed European report on the Japanese archipelago – compiled by one of the members of Villalobos’ crew, the Spanish Garcia Escalante De Alvarado, and sent to the Viceroy of Mexico from Lisbon in 1548.²⁴³

As emerging from the report, the Castellans had been able to gather that Japan was divided in a number of territorial domains governed by *daimyō*, even though it wasn’t clear where the “king of all of them” resided. They had also learned that the villages on the coast were very small and relied on agriculture and fishing for a living, and that the chosen weapons in fighting were bow and arrows – which had apparently led Villalobos to conclude that the country didn’t have to be particularly rich (as the Portuguese had done before on the base of the information they had gathered in Malacca) and that a more lucrative commerce could perhaps be established with the Ryūkyū Islands, whose role in the East Asian trade at the time hadn’t yet come to suffer from the European competition. The Japanese language was reported to be close to Chinese, and, peculiarly, to German. As for the population, it was described as “white” (a characteristic that was

and translator), *First Voyage Around the World (1519-1522): An Account of Magellan’s Expedition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

²⁴² One primary source was the report by Pero Diez, a Galician from Monterrey who had actually been in Japan in 1544. Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p. 655.

²⁴³ An English translation of the report can be found in Erik Wilhelm Dahlgren, “A contribution to the history of the discovery of Japan,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society*, 11, 1912–1913, pp. 239–260.

particularly stressed in reference to local women) and peculiarly “well-disposed”.²⁴⁴

The account is still brief and not all the information included in it is accurate. On the other hand, as underlined by Lach, Escalante’s ability to compile a relatively detailed report right after the landing of the first Portuguese on the archipelago might in itself be seen as a sign that the Spaniards had collected more knowledge about Japan, in the decades preceding direct intercourse with the country, than what was actually circulated in Europe, due to the Portuguese policy of control over information.²⁴⁵

Aside from Escalante’s account about Japan, most of what has been left by Spanish merchants and diplomats and lay residents in the Philippines amounts to the contemporary epistolary exchange between the authorities of Manila and Philip II of Spain.²⁴⁶ The correspondence, started as early as the 1560s, bears testimony of the exchanges between Japanese traders and the Spanish settlement.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Such characteristics – whiteness, and good disposition – would actually recur, as we’ll see and comment in the following chapter, also in later writings by the Jesuit missionaries stationed in Japan.

²⁴⁵ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p. 655.

²⁴⁶ A sample of the correspondence – in the original Spanish language and Japanese translation – is included in Igawa Kenji, “Sei Pedro Batista to Shokuhō-ki no Nissei Kankei” (Saint Pedro Batista and the Relationships between Spain and Japan in the Shokuhō period), *Machikaneyama Ronsō* 44, 2010, pp. 25-46. The full text of the article is available at the url: http://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/11094/9077/1/mre_044_25A.pdf (last access: November 15, 2012). Among the most detailed accounts are those by the merchant Bernardino de Avila Girón, who resided, off and on, in Nagasaki between 1594 and 1619, and that of the shipwrecked diplomat Rodrigo de Vivero y Velasco. The Italian merchant Francesco Carletti also travelled from the Philippines to Nagasaki, where he stayed between 1597 and 1598 and left an account of Japan, never given to print.

²⁴⁷ A letter dated 1567, and written by Legazpi himself, already includes, for example, mention of Chinese and Japanese ships coming, on an annual basis, to the Philippines (and, as observed by Igawa Kenji, while it is not clear when these exchanges began exactly, the fact that they are referred to as “annual” implies a regularity that suggest they had been going on for some years, possibly ever since the mid-1560s, when the Spanish Crown had established its power in the area). See *ibidem*.

While the letters are helpful to contemporary historians to recreate the course of the relationships, however, they weren't reproduced in printed editions, and it is doubtful that the majority of them would have actually circulated among the European public.

Similarly, it is hard to establish to which point the account by Escalante was actually distributed outside the circles of the Iberian Crown. Surely, as it wasn't given to print, it didn't exert the same amount of impact that the narratives of the Iberian (Portuguese and Spanish alike) and Italian missionaries would effect on the European public as a whole starting from the second half of the sixteenth century.

By far more prominent, in the production of source-material (as well as in the commerce of the region) would be, in the seventeenth century, the role of the Dutch and English merchants, who similarly made profit of Ieyasu's favourable disposition towards commerce with the outside world, as will be illustrated in the last chapter.

3. CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND SOURCES ON JAPAN

3.1. THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN ASIA AND JAPAN

Religious ardour – mingled with the prospect of the economical benefits derived by the involvement in the African and Asian trade – had been, as mentioned in the first chapter, one of the greatest motivators for the progresses of the Portuguese maritime expansion in Asia. It should not surprise, in this sense, that missionary effort had come hand-in-hand with the Portuguese sea explorations ever since their early phases.

In 1418, prince Henry the Navigator had assumed the position of *regedor e governador* (ruler and governor) of the Order of Christ,²⁴⁸ paving the way for missionaries of different Christian orders to travel to Asia on the wake of explorers and merchants. The link between the Portuguese imperial ambitions and the evangelization aims of the Roman Church had then been formally asserted through the Papal Bulls issued throughout the second half of the fifteenth century. The bulls had granted the Portuguese Crown the right to administrate the newly “discovered” territories in the East Indies both in a civil and in an ecclesiastical capacity – effectively establishing the system of

²⁴⁸ The Order, a crusading militia, much alike the Templars, would thereafter be involved in the Portuguese maritime exploration both ideologically and materially, providing the Crown with the greatest source of funding for its maritime enterprise. See in this regard Earl J. Hamilton, “The Role of Monopoly in the Overseas Expansion”, cit.

patroado real (royal patronage), finally formalized in 1494 with the ratification of the Treaty of Tordesillas.

It was under the protection of the Portuguese Crown, as ratified by the Treaty, that the first Franciscan and Dominican missionaries settled themselves in India – respectively in 1500 and in 1503.²⁴⁹ In 1534, the Episcopal see of Goa was established, creating what would become the key structure for the administration of the Christian missions in Asia – including the one settled in Japan.²⁵⁰

At the beginning of the following decade, on September 27, 1540, Pope Paul III officially sanctioned, with the papal bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae*, the creation of the Society of Jesus. The *Formula* of the order, proposed by its founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), and by the nine fathers that formed the original core of the Society,²⁵¹ identified the purpose of the order with the defense and propagation of the faith. It indicated the ministries through which such purpose should be accomplished, strongly emphasizing the role of public preaching, lectures and more generally education – a characteristic of the Order that would find material expression, ever since the late 1540s, in the founding of the Jesuit schools. And required from the members of the Society the pronouncement of a particular vow, that

²⁴⁹ To them and to the Jesuits, the Augustinian order would follow much later, establishing an Indian mission only in 1572.

²⁵⁰ The See was to become, by 1557, an independent archbishopric and primatial See of the East, reference for a number of dependent dioceses, scattered in the different centres of the missions. By 1575, the dioceses of Cochin, Malacca and Macau had been established. The Japanese one, settled in Funai, was created in 1588 and assigned to the Jesuit bishop Sebastião Morais. See M. A. J. Üçerler, “The Jesuit enterprise in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Japan”, in T. Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the Jesuits*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 153-168, p. 155.

²⁵¹ Peter Favre, Francis Xavier, Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, Nicolás de Bobadilla, Simão Rodrigues, Claude Jay, Paschase Broët and Jean Codure. The *Formula* was approved by the Pope as presented, and only slightly revised in 1550 – adding clarifications and specifications and including changes in actual practice, but with no alteration of big consequence.

would bind them to travel anywhere in the world to perform their ministry, once so ordered by the Pope – giving birth to what was, in all respects, an order of itinerant missionaries.²⁵² Travel was, in other words, an integral part of the Society ever since its foundations, in a way that influenced its development and activities in an essential way.²⁵³ In accord to such premises, and also thanks to the connections the early members enjoyed – being in great part of Spanish and Portuguese origin and, therefore, in the privileged position of belonging to the countries that were leading the European exploration – the Society came to exert a pivotal role in the conduction of the Christian missions both in the Pacific and in the Atlantic areas.

The first Jesuit Father to set foot in Asia was one of the members of the original group of the Society's founders, Francis Xavier (1506-1552), sent by Ignatius on a mission to India in the very year of the creation of the Order, on specific request by the Pope and under the patronage of King John III of Portugal.

Upon reaching his destination, in 1542, Xavier was able to send back to Europe promising reports about the situation of Christianity in India, and also to forward a request backed by the Portuguese governor in Goa for the dispatch of other Jesuit Fathers to the country. The response from Rome was favourable, and the Jesuits were permitted to establish a solid presence in India. By the moment Xavier's death, about ten years after his arrival, forty or so Jesuit missionaries already had joined him in the effort of bringing evangelization to Asia. Moreover, by 1548, the Jesuit order took over the administration of the

²⁵² John W. O'Malley, *The first Jesuits*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1993, pp. 5-6.

²⁵³ See in this regard Steven J. Harris, "Mapping Jesuit Science: The Role of Travel in the Geography of Knowledge", in John W. O'Malley (ed.), *The Jesuits: cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773*, Toronto (Buffalo, London): University of Toronto press, 1999, pp. 213-240.

“College of the Holy Faith” in Goa. The institution, that had been founded by the secular clergy in 1541 and supported by lay benefactors ever since, soon grew out to be the nodal centre of the Society in Asia, exerting a role similar to that of the Jesuit colleges of Rome and Coimbra in Europe.²⁵⁴ It took in its hands the formation of the missionaries dispatched from Europe to Asia, the general direction of the various Asian colleges where they were eventually forwarded, and the sorting of the correspondence between Asia and Europe. Ever since 1556, moreover, it became the main Jesuit printing centre in Asia, with the setting up of the first moveable-type hand press brought by the Jesuits from Europe.

From Goa, Francis Xavier sailed for the Japan, so as to personally verify the conditions for the evangelization of the archipelago. That was the act that led to the establishment of the local mission in Japan – where the Jesuits would exert exclusive influence for the greatest part of the sixteenth century.

3.1.1. Francis Xavier and the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Japan

The encounter, in 1547, with the Japanese native Yajirō,²⁵⁵ who had fled from justice in Japan in Jorge Álvares’ ship, as well as the report received by Álvares himself,²⁵⁶ were the reasons that first motivated Francis Xavier to travel to Japan:

²⁵⁴ M. A. J. Üçerler, “The Jesuit enterprise in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Japan”, cit., p. 155.

²⁵⁵ Or Anjirō 弥次郎.

²⁵⁶ See chapter 2, paragraph 2.1.3.

Father Francis Xavier got notice of that [land] in the year 1542 [sic!], through certain Portuguese merchants coming from there: in whose company came a Japanese nobleman called Angero [Yajirō]. [...] He is very intelligent, and in little less than six months, brought to Goa by Father Francis, in the College of the Society of Jesus in that city, he learned the Portuguese language, to the point of being able to read it and write it, and in the spiritual matters, and he took much profit in the Christian doctrine, and was baptized and called Paolo di Santa Fede. Through the information gotten from him and from other merchants, Father Francis was persuaded that God would be much served in those lands [...] and he finally resolved to go himself, and left from Goa in April 1549.²⁵⁷

Xavier landed in Kagoshima in August 1549, accompanied by Yajirō himself, by two servants similarly converted to Christianity, and by the Jesuit Father Cosme de Torres (1510-1570) and the lay Brother Juan Fernández (1526-1567). He brought with himself letters by the Viceroy

²⁵⁷ “Hebbe notizia di quella il P.M.Francesco Xavuer l’anno 1542. per certi mercatanti Portoghesi, che di la venivano: in cui compagnia venne un’huomo nobile Giapanese, detto Angero, [...]. è molto ingenioso, et in poco più di sei mesi, condotto a Goa dal P.M.Francesco al collegio della compagnia di Iesu di quella città, apparò la lingua Portoghese in modo, che la leggeva, et scriveva, et nelle cose spirituali, et dottrina Christiana, fece gran profitto, et fu battezzato, et chiamato Paolo di Santa Fede. Hora per informatione di quello gentil’huomo, et di altri mercatanti, essendo il P.M. Francesco persuaso, che Dio saria molto servito in quelle parti [...] et finalmente si risolvette d’andare egli stesso, et partì di oa il mese d’Aprile del 1549.”, from the “Copia d’alcune lettere del padre Maestro Francesco Xauier, et altri padri della compagnia di Iesu, del Giapon nuouamente scoperto, et di Malucco, tradotte in Italiano, riceuute l’Anno 1552”, in *Diversi avisi particolari dall’Indie di Portogallo ricevuti, dall’anno 1551 fino al 1558 dalli Reverendi padri della compagnia di Giesu, dove s’intende delli paesi, delle genti, & costumi loro, & la grande conversione di molti popoli, che hanno riceuuto il lume della santa fede, & religione Christiana*, Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1558, folio 101. On Yajirō, his past and position in Japan, his experience in Goa and, later, as an interpreter for Xavier, as well as for a bibliography of the extant contemporary sources about him, see Ebisawa Arimichi, *Kirishitan shi no kenkyū*, Tokyo : Shin Jimbutsu Ōraisha, 1971, pp. 228-252

of the Indies and by the Governor of Malacca, planning to confer to his visit a quasi-official nature.

He originally intended to gain an audience with the “King” (the Ashikaga shogun) in Kyoto, so as to obtain from him official permission to preach and convert on the archipelago. However, as it became clear that the shogun held no real authority over the lands that he nominally controlled, Xavier and his companions soon shifted their interest to creating connections with the local *daimyō* authorities, so as to obtain from them permission to preach the Gospel in their territories (as well as, in many cases, material support).²⁵⁸ In such strategy, which would become the key to the success of the mission in the archipelago,²⁵⁹ the Jesuits were favoured, ever since the early years of their permanence in Japan, by their connection with the Portuguese merchants that conducted the silver and silk trade. The respect paid by the crew of the *náo* to Xavier, and to the Jesuits that succeeded him, impressed the Japanese authorities, leading many of the *daimyō* to seek the Christian presence so as to attract European merchants in their dominions.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ “When we arrived in Meaco [Kyoto], we strived for a few days to talk to the King, and ask him for permission to preach the Law of God in his Kingdom; but we weren’t able to talk to him; and knowing he wasn’t obeyed by his subjects, we chose not to care about such permission”. (“Giunti a Meaco, travagliammo per alcuni giorni per parlare al Re, e chiedergli licentia di predicare nel suo Regno la legge di Dio; ma non potemmo mai parlargli; e sapendo poi che non era obbedito dalli suoi, non ci curammo di tal licentia.”) From the “Copia d’vna lettera del P.M. Francesco Xauier, preposito provinciale della compagnia di Iesu nell’Indie, per tutti quelli di essa compagnia in Europa, riceuuta nel mese di Marzo. 1553” in *Diversi avisi particolari dall’Indie di Portogallo ricevuti, dall’anno 1551 fino al 1558*, cit. folio 120.

²⁵⁹ As it is not the main scope of the present work, would be impossible here to dwell in detail on the relationships established by the Jesuits and the *daimyō* of Japan, and on the role of local Japanese authorities in the support of the Jesuit mission. For an in-depth analysis of the matter, see M. Steichen, *The Christian Daimyos : A Century of Religious and Political History in Japan (1549-1650)*, Tokyo: Rikkyo Gakuin Press, 1903.

²⁶⁰ The close ties between the Christian religion and the Portuguese commercial interests in Japan are widely documented both in the Jesuit and the Japanese contemporary sources. See in this regard, and more in general about the relationship between missionaries, local Japanese authorities and Portuguese merchants, Charles

In the two years of his permanence on the archipelago, Xavier was able to create footholds for the mission in the Satsuma domain (Kagoshima, controlled by the Shimazu 島津 family), in Hirado (Nagasaki, controlled, as mentioned in chapter 2, by the Matsuura 松浦 *daimyō*) and Yamaguchi (controlled by the Ōuchi 大内 family), and to establish connections with Ōtomo Yoshishige 大友義鎮 (also known as Ōtomo Sōrin 大友宗麟), *daimyō* of Bungo (modern Ōita) – who would convert to Christianity by 1578 and become one of the most important Japanese supporters of the Jesuit mission.²⁶¹

Aside from working on getting the support of local authorities, Xavier took notice of the primary necessities for the survival and success of the mission – namely, the need for the missionaries to master the Japanese language, as well as gaining a deeper knowledge of native religion, and in particular Buddhism, so as to more efficiently convey the principles of Christianity and participate in doctrinal debates. The confusion in regards to Buddhism and the difficulties of the language actually gave way to some misunderstandings during the Father’s stay in Japan – most notably those derived by Xavier’s use of Buddhist terms in order to express Christian concepts,²⁶² which generated the tendency in many Japanese to view Christianity as a Buddhist sect, rather than as an entirely different religion. While this, in any probability, actually eased the acceptance of the missionaries in

Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, cit., chapter III (“Christianity and the Kurofune”), pp. 91-136.

²⁶¹ The Ōuchi *daimyō* proper, Ōuchi Yoshitaka, was actually forced to kill himself by one his vassals during Xavier’s stay in Japan, leading the missionaries to temporarily flee from the Yamaguchi territories. In the end, the Ōuchi name and control over the dominion was taken over by Ōtomo Hachirō, younger brother of Yoshishige, granting, again, protection for the Christians. Yamaguchi would however be abandoned again by 1557, when the Mōri family, unsupportive of the Christians, defeated the Ōuchi *daimyō* and annexed the territories to its dominions.

²⁶² In particular, Xavier’s use of the Buddhist term *Dainichi* (*Dainichi Nyorai* 大日如来, i.e. Mahāvairocana, central Buddha of the Shingon sect) in reference to the Christian God.

Japan, it generated a fundamental problem of understanding in the transmission of the Christian doctrine – one of which the Jesuit missionaries had to become aware early on.²⁶³

In 1551, Xavier departed from Japan, travelling to China (where he, however, would never be able to enter) and leaving Father Cosme de Torres in charge of the Japanese mission – of which he would be Superior up to his death, in 1570.

3.1.2. The growth of the mission

Xavier's departure marked the opening of a still in many ways unorganized phase of the Christian missionary activity in Japan. Under Torres' guidance, the mission was able to grow steadily. On the other hand, given the still limited number of Jesuit Fathers operating in Japan – who were, in turn, backed up only by a few Brothers and Japanese acolytes – managing the footholds of the mission, scattered as they were through the country, was no easy feat.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Leading Xavier himself, for example, to reject the term *Dainichi*, and adopt the Latin term *Deus* as an alternative. See Gono Takashi, *Nihon Kirishitan Shi no Kenkyū*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2002, pp. 40-41. As suggested by Ebisawa Arimichi, the use of Buddhist terms probably seemed like the logical choice at the time, as the Buddhist language provided for the only terms readily available in the Japanese language to be charged with the philosophical implications of religious salvation (Ebisawa Arimichi, *Nihon no Kirishitan Shi*, Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1966, p. 179). Partly responsible for the misuse of Buddhist terms was also, surely, Yajirō – who had been the one to introduce Buddhism to Xavier, in a grossly misleading way. Only superficially acquainted with Shingon Buddhism, he had in fact reportedly declared that the Japanese “all adore but one God, whom they call Doniche in their language” (“tutti adorano un solo Iddio, il quale chiamano Doniche in suo linguaggio”; the information he relayed is included in the letter written from Cochin by Father Nicolao Lancillotto in December 1548, reporting Yajirō's intelligence from Japan. Included, in Italian translation, in the *Nuovi avvisi dell'Indie di Portogallo, Ricevuti dalli Reuerendi Padri della compagnia di Giesu, tradotti dalla lingua Spagnuola nell'Italiana, Terza parte*, Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1562, folio 21.

²⁶⁴ The Jesuits operating in Japan could be divided into three categories: the Fathers (*padres* or *bateren* as they were commonly named by the Japanese), who handled the

Torres first settled in Yamaguchi, where, in 1552, the Daidōji temple was donated by the Ōuchi family to the missionaries, allowing them to turn it into Church. When the area was seized by the Mōri family, he moved to Bungo, where, aided by Luis Almeida (who had studied as a surgeon), he promoted the construction of an orphanage and an hospital. A division of the mission also came to be established, in 1560, in the Kyoto area, by Father Gaspar Vilela, who, after reaching Japan in 1556, distinguished himself as a true “pioneer in adaptation” – shaving his head, dressing in Japanese fashion, and learning to read and write in the Japanese language. He was able to succeed where Xavier had failed, obtaining from the Ashikaga family permission to preach in the area.²⁶⁵

real authority, and who included only Europeans up to Valignano’s time; the Brothers (*irmãos*, named *iruman* by the Japanese), who were mostly European but who came to include about seventy Japanese by the beginning of the 1590s; and the native acolytes and catechists (*dōjuku*), who were more than a hundred by the beginning of the seventeenth century. The *dōjuku* weren’t, strictly speaking, members of the Society, but exerted, in practice, a big role in the organization of the mission. Aside from these categories, there were household servants and caretakers, who didn’t belong to the Jesuits but nonetheless impacted on the budget of the Society. For an in-depth analysis of the structure of the mission and its evolution, see Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, cit., pp. 211-227. Among the leading European figures of this early phase, aside from Torres himself and the already mentioned Juan Fernandez, were Gaspar Vilela (1525-1572), Luis Frois (1528/32-1597), Balthasar Gago (c. 1520-1583), Luis Almeida (1525-1583), Francisco Cabral (1529-1609), Organtino Gnecci-Soldo (1530–1609) and Gaspar Coelho (1530-1590). Frois, active in Kyoto, would become the most prolific writer among the Jesuit missionaries in Japan. Notable, among the Brothers was the Japanese convert known with the Christian name Lourenço, the first Japanese layman to be received inside of the Society of Jesus. Baptized by Xavier himself in 1551, he was received in the Society in 1563 by Torres. He was active in the early phases of the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Kyoto, and was author of a report letter, dated June 2, 1560, which constitutes one the richest extant testimony about the establishment of the Japanese mission in Kyoto. See, in regard to Lourenço, Ebisawa Arimichi, “Irmão Lourenço, the First Japanese Lay-Brother of the Society of Jesus and his Letter”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 1942, pp. 225-233.

²⁶⁵ Vilela first approached the Buddhist monks of Mount Hiei, who exerted an exceeding amount of political and economical power in the city, so as to gain their permission to preach the Gospel in the area. Unable to persuade them, he proceeded, not without difficulties, to preach without official permission, until he was granted an audience with the shogun Ashikaga Yoshiteru, who granted him not only the permission to preach, but also exemption from taxes, also putting a stop to the open

Adaptation became a common line of action among the Jesuit missionaries, even if not, yet, with the coherence later brought by Valignano. Crucial in this early phase of the mission was also the solving of the matter of Christian terminology, which came to the forefront with new force after Xavier's departure.²⁶⁶ Father Balthasar Gago was the one who took it into his hands, promoting a linguistic reform that, as he himself explained in a letter sent from Hirado on September 22, 1555,²⁶⁷ aimed at removing from the use of the Fathers all the Japanese native words he deemed as “dangerous”, or “harmful” (i.e. theologically charged in a way that would generate misunderstandings about the true meaning of what was being preached). The fathers would substitute them with the original Portuguese or Latin term, expressed in *kana* (so as to avoid the meaning-charged *kanji*).²⁶⁸

opposition that the missionaries had been encountering by the majority of the Buddhist sects of the city ever since their arrival. Hubert Cieslik, *Gaspar Vilela: The Apostle of Miyako*, originally published in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 8, 1954, pp. 111-121, available online at the following url: <http://pweb.cc.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier/cieslik/ciejmj03.pdf> (last access: January 9, 2012).

²⁶⁶ The act of cession of the Daidōji openly referred to the Fathers as “bonzes” (sō 僧) and declared that they had come to Japan in order to preach the laws of Buddhism – revealing how the misunderstandings generated by Xavier were far from being dispelled. Moreover, the Fathers' deepening knowledge of Buddhism made them aware of subtleties in Buddhist terminology they hadn't been conscious of when they first adopted it, and that inherently complicated its use to convey a set of alien religious concepts. An example was the use of *hōben* 方便 – simplifications to the Buddhist teachings when delivered to the masses, but not accepted as true by the bonzes. See Hubert Cieslik, “Balthasar Gago and Japanese Christian Terminology”, originally published in *Missionary Bulletin*, vol. VII, 1954, available online at the following url: <http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier/cieslik/ciejmj02.pdf> (last access: January 9, 2012).

²⁶⁷ The letter is included, in Italian edition (“Copia d'vna lettera del P. Baldassar Gago scritta in Firando alli 23. De Settembre 1555. al padre M. Ignatio, Preposito generale della compagnia di Iesv.”), in the *Diversi avisi particolari dall'Indie di Portogallo ricevuti, dall'anno 1551 fino al 1558*, cit. folio 260.

²⁶⁸ This included a list of about fifty terms, to which other were added in later years. They included terms such as the above mentioned *Dainichi*, as well as *hotoke* 仏 (similarly used to express “God”), *jigoku* 地獄 (for “hell”), *jōdo* 浄土 (for “paradise”) and *tamashii* 魂 (for “soul”). For a more detailed insight on the language reformation by Gago, see Hubert Cieslik, “Balthasar Gago and Japanese Christian Terminology”, cit.

In the 1560s decade, the Jesuits came to be involved in the game-changing events that started the unification of Japan. They assisted to the rise of Oda Nobunaga 織田信長, the first of the three great unifiers, who conquered Kyoto in 1568, and appointed as a new governor Wada Koremasa 和田惟政, a supporter of the Christian mission (who allegedly intended himself to become a Christian). In 1569, thanks to Wada's intercession, Father Luis Frois (who had joined Father Vilela in Kyoto in 1563) was granted an audience by Nobunaga, sanctioning the beginning of a very advantageous relationship for the missionaries. In the long run, Nobunaga turned in fact out to be one of the most solid supporters of the Christian Fathers – with whom he shared a common hostility towards the Buddhist monasteries settled on the slopes of Mount Hiei, due to their overbearing influence on Kyoto's political and religious life.²⁶⁹

In 1576, a church was built in Kyoto,²⁷⁰ followed by another one in the outskirts of the city, two years later. The mission similarly progressed in Kyūshū, where the Jesuits came to exert a fundamental role as middlemen in the Portuguese-Japanese trade (which would culminate in the Valignano era, as seen in paragraph 2.1.3., in the assignation of the port of Nagasaki to the missionaries), while in Bungo mass conversions were achieved, thanks to the influence of the Ōtomo

²⁶⁹ The Nichiren Buddhist leader Asayama Nichijō 朝山日乗, who was in amicable relationship with Nobunaga, tried to turn him against the Fathers, and actually managed to have Wada removed from his position, but was never able to disrupt his relationship with Frois and to convince him to act against the Christians. See Hubert Cieslik, "Father Louis Frois: Historian of the mission", available online at the following url: <http://pweb.cc.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier/cieslik/ciejmj04.pdf> (last access: January 9, 2012). Nobunaga finally took a resolution against the monasteries in 1571, razing them and slaying the majority of the monks, so as to consolidate his power in the city, and move on to extend his control over the neighbouring areas. He maintained, on the other hand, a favourable stance towards the Christians, allowing the mission to grow.

²⁷⁰ Known as the *Nanbanji* 南蛮寺, and built on the site of a chapel that had been, since 1561, the centre of the Christian life in Kyoto.

family.²⁷¹ By the end of the 1570, about 150,000 people had reportedly been converted in Japan.²⁷²

3.1.3. Alessandro Valignano's influence and the shaping of the mission

The arrival of Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) on the Japanese archipelago inaugurated a new, much more organized phase in the mission. Much as Xavier had acted as the initiator of the missionary effort in East Asia, Alessandro Valignano played the central role in shaping it, most of all by allowing it to assume a new, localized, identity – partially independent from the European forms and adapted to Japanese (and, later Chinese) society and culture.

The Italian father was selected as Visitor to the East of the Society of Jesuit in 1572,²⁷³ by the at the time current Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Everard Mercurian. The appointment was the result of a deliberate policy aimed at, at least partly, freeing the activity of the Society in Asia from its dependence from the Portuguese Crown, which had come to weigh on the missions not only in the terms of the Portuguese patronage (according to which the Fathers were dependent to the Crown in terms of transport and subventions), but also through the overbearing authority of some members of the order who were

²⁷¹ For an in-depth analysis of the relationships between Buddhist monks and Christians and of the political events of the Nobunaga era in connection with the missionary life in Japan, see George Bailey Sansom, *A History of Japan: 1334-1615*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961, pp. 291-299 (“Christianity and Buddhism under Nobunaga”).

²⁷² J. S. A. Elisonas, “Journey to the West”, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 34 No.1, 2007, pp. 27–66, p. 31.

²⁷³ Valignano would maintain the position up to 1583, when for a four-year period he became provincial of India. He was nominated again in 1587, and then, in 1595, he became Visitor to Japan and China, a position he kept until his death.

closely connected with the Portuguese Royal family.²⁷⁴ Valignano was supposed to seize the rein of the missions in Asia in his own hands, and to challenge such authority. And he did manage that, by bringing with himself to Asia a chosen number of missionaries whose formation he had personally accomplished, and by nominating a special Indian procurator in Lisbon, who, among other things, got to manage the entirety of the correspondence to and from the Indies.²⁷⁵

Backed up by the General, and solid in his authority, when he reached India in 1574 Valignano could firmly take the reins of the mission in his hands. He was in Japan from 1579 to 1582, and then again from 1590 to 1592 and from 1598 to 1603. His first visit to Japan was probably the most influential in terms of the conduction of the mission on the archipelago, as it took place in a phase when, as mentioned above, the missionaries mostly enjoyed the support of Japanese authorities.

Quoting Adriana Boscaro, the measures taken by Valignano for the conduction of the mission in Japan can be summed up into six main points:²⁷⁶

- the promotion of the formation of a native clergy, through the foundations of seminaries, novitiates and colleges,²⁷⁷ and through

²⁷⁴ Namely, the cousins Leão Henriques and Luís Gonçalves (respectively confessor of the Cardinal Infante and of the King). The two, in spite of not being generals, had the last word over every missionary to be sent from Portugal to Asia. Moreover, the Portuguese provincial, who deferred directly to them, had authority to intercept and open all correspondence from Asia, except for that addressed as confidential to the general himself.

²⁷⁵ Andrew C. Ross, "Alessandro Valignano: the Jesuits and Culture in the East", in John W. O'Malley (ed.), *The Jesuits: cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773*, cit., pp. 336-351.

²⁷⁶ Adriana Boscaro, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone (1549-1639)*, Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2008. I refer the reader to such work for an in-depth analysis of Valignano's activity. In this chapter, I will only dwell briefly on the points that proved more relevant in term of the circulation of information about Japan in Europe.

²⁷⁷ Valignano promoted the foundation of training seminaries in Arima (Takaku), of a novitiate in Azuchi (Ōmi), and of a college in Funai (Bungo). The formation of the to-

the composition of the *Catechismus Christianae Fidei in quo veritas nostrae religionis ostenditur, et sectiae Iaponenses confutantur*;²⁷⁸

- the compilation of the *Avertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (Account of the customs of Japan, completed in 1581)
- the compilation of the *Sumario de las cosas de Japon* (Summary of Japanese matters, completed in 1583);
- the handling of the mission's financial matters, and particularly of the acquisition of the port of Nagasaki; the need for funds was a pressing reality for the mission by the time of Valignano's arrival, when the state of internal war in Japan made it difficult even for the most prominent of the *daimyō* supporters of the mission to offer much assistance to the Fathers
- the (already mentioned) Japanese embassy in Europe known as *Tenshō ken'ō shonen shisetsu* 天正遣欧少年使節 (boy's embassy to Europe of the Tenshō period), or simply *Tenshō shisetsu*; The Embassy, nominally sent by the *daimyō* of Kyūshū (but, in reality, carefully orchestrated by Valignano), was composed of four young boys: Mancio Itō, the thirteen-year-old chief emissary, a relative of Ōtomo Yoshishige; the thirteen-year-old Michael Chijiwa, cousin of the *daimyō* Arima Harunobu and Ōmura

be Fathers would consist in a two-year novitiate, followed by a specific philosophical and theological education in the college. Education in the seminaries was also open to the heirs of the samurai families who sought a Christian formation without aiming to enter the order – who could become valid supporters of the mission.

²⁷⁸ The manual, promptly translated from Latin to Japanese, included the confutation of a number of Buddhist concepts, as well as the explanation of Christian teachings such as the Ten Commandments, the Resurrection, the Last Judgment, Paradise and Hell. The Latin version of the work was given to print in Lisbon in 1586 (by Antonius Riberius). The work is very rare, but a copy can be accessed online at the following url:

http://books.google.it/books?id=XglJAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (last access January 9, 2013).

Sumitada; and, accompanying them, Martin Hara (13) and Julian Nakaura (15); they left Japan in 1582 and travelled through India to Portugal, Spain and Italy, returning by 1590, after having been received by a number of representatives of the European nobility, and most notably by the King of Spain and by the Pope, in 1585;²⁷⁹

- and, lastly, the diffusion of moveable-type print in Japan, through the printing press brought by the members of the above mentioned embassy in their return trip from Europe; the printing press was installed first in Goa and then moved to Japan, operating successively, according to the change in political circumstances, in Kazusa, Amakusa, Nagasaki (and later, when the persecutions began in full force, in Manila and in Macao); it would give birth to the so-called *kirishitanban* キリシタン版 (literally, “Christian prints”) literature.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ This is no place to dwell in an in-depth narration of the journey of the ambassadors (if not in relation to the literature connected to it and its impact in Europe). For a general overview of the embassy, I refer to the most up-to-date source on it, the work by Michael Cooper, *The Japanese mission to Europe, 1582-1590: the journey of four Samurai boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*, Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2005.

²⁸⁰ *Kirishitanban* included works in Latin, *rōmaji* or Japanese, of a number of different categories – such as Japanese works in simplified form, printed to ease the learning of the Japanese language for the missionaries; Christian works and, sometimes, European lay works translated in Japanese to divulge the Catholic doctrine or simple moral concepts in Japan; dictionaries. The materials are really rare, as most of them were destroyed during the persecutions. A very useful source to access *kirishitanban* material (and for getting an overview of their history and contents) is the *Laures Rare Book Database*, created by Sophia University: <http://laures.cc.sophia.ac.jp/laures/start/sel=9-1/> (last access: January 9, 2013). See also paragraph 3.2. One of the earlier works produced with the printing press, printed in Macao in 1590, was an account of the embassy, in the form 34 hypothetical dialogues between the ambassadors and some young Japanese left home. The work, titled *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam curiam, rebusque in Europa, ac toto itinere animadversis dialogus ex ephemeride ipsorum Legatorum collectus, & in sermonem Latinum versus ab Eduardo de Sande Sacerdote Societatis Iesu. In Macaensi portu Sinici regni in domo Societatis Iesu cum facultate Ordinarii, & Superiorum. Anno 1590*, was a sort of written counterpart for the enterprise

Both Valignano's strong support toward the formation of indigenous Fathers (a matter that caused some heated controversy among the missionaries in Japan upon his arrival)²⁸¹ and his compilation of the *Avertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* suited his ambition to develop the mission in a direction at least partly independent from European forms.

Through the *Avertimentos*, in particular, Valignano promoted (for the first time systematically) an approach to missionary activity that assumed adaptation as its core method. The work instructed the missionaries on the common conduct of the laymen and, most importantly, of the most influent religious people in Japan – a conduct which they were to imitate, at least on a surface level, in treating with the native population. Valignano was in fact persuaded, both by previous reports from Japan and by his own in-depth investigation of the mission, that the only way to gain the respect of the Japanese (and above all of the civilized *daimyō*) and, consequently, to achieve true success in evangelization, was to conform to local customs and courtesies in approaching them.²⁸²

promoted by Valignano, aimed at presenting Europe (with the due omissions) to the Japanese.

²⁸¹ Valignano found himself at odds, in particular, with the current superior of the mission in Japan, Francisco Cabral, who strongly opposed the idea of bestowing the ministry to native Fathers, mainly on the grounds of a distrust of the Japanese character. This distrust partially emerged also in Cabral's attitude towards the *daimyō*, that had in many cases elicited their hostility, in spite of their general support towards the mission. Cabral was finally pressed to resign from his position two years after Valignano's arrival, in favour of the more yielding Gaspar Coelho. See See Hubert Cieslik, "Alessandro Valignano: Pioneer in adaptation", available online at the following url: <http://pweb.cc.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier/cieslik/ciejmj05.pdf> (last access: January 9, 2012). The native staff would come to play a crucial role in the mission, particularly for the translation of doctrinal material. See in this regard, Higashibaba Ikuo, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*, Leiden : Brill Academic, 2001, pp. 20-28.

²⁸² Valignano's radical position was bound to generate some controversy among the order, as demonstrated by the contemporary correspondence between the Visitor and the current general Claudio Acquaviva, who generally approved Valignano's approach, but expressed strong doubts regarding the need to assume Buddhist monks as models. Samples of the correspondence, as well as a complete, commented edition

In a way, the compilation of the *Sumario de las cosas de Japon* in 1583 came as a direct consequence to such stance. The work, similar in spirit to the *Avertimentos*, consisted of a lengthy account of Valignano's experience in Japan and covered, even though not always coherently, a vast variety of matters. A significant section of the work (in particular, chapters 1-5) was focused on the description of Japan (based on what Valignano had been able to gather about the archipelago during his first visit): it offered an overview of Japanese costumes and their basic differences with European ones, presented a list of alleged Japanese virtues and vices, and introduced Japanese religion (mainly Buddhism) and the political situation in Japan, with particular regard to the provinces where the missionaries were stationed. The rest of the work was focused on matters more specifically related to the mission: it stressed the successes of the Fathers, and the importance of the enterprise in Japan in the overall picture of the Jesuit missionary activity in Asia; it also pointed to the difficulties and necessities the missionaries were encountering – ranging from the need to form a native clergy, to financial problems, to the urgent matter of preventing the arrival in Japan of different Christian (and particularly Protestant) orders – so as to continue to present to the Japanese a unified picture of Christianity; it also included, much as the *Avertimentos*, instructions for the missionaries on how to approach the Japanese population, as

of Valignano's work (in Italian translation, by the hands of the Fathers Pirri and Da Fonseca) is included in Alessandro Valignano and Giuseppe Schütte (ed.), *II cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone: Avertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão*, Rome: Edizioni di "Storia e Letteratura," 1946. A proof of the controversial nature of the text lies also in the fact that it was not forwarded to Rome, as was usual, through normal correspondence, so as to avoid the risk of it being casually read by members of the Society unfamiliar with the situation in Japan, which could have given way to scandals. Nevertheless, the work was established as mandatory reading for the missionaries in Japan, at least up to 1592, when a new rule was created.

well as more general directions on the conduction of the mission as a whole.²⁸³

Inherent to the structure of the work was a multiple aim: the report was meant as a source of information about the mission, to be relayed to superiors and, possibly, to be circulated, among the Jesuit colleges in Europe as an instrument of edification, celebrating the victories of the Catholic church overseas; it was intended as a guide for future missionaries, giving preliminary instruction about the missionary approach they would be expected to adopt if they decided to travel to Japan; and, most importantly, it was meant as an instrument to promote the importance of the mission in the eyes of the Jesuit authorities (and more generally of the members of the Jesuit colleges in Europe), so as to gain support, both in terms of money (in light of the above mentioned pressing need for funds) and manpower.

Very close in spirit were also the (usually less lengthy) reports sent regularly by the missionaries, Valignano included, from Japan to Europe – which usually treated very similar matters and were, as we'll see, even more widely circulated (as, unlike the *Sumario*, they were given to print). Not by chance, Valignano's influence marked an evolution also in the forms and contents of such reports – which developed from narrations more strictly focused on mission-related matters, to more all-encompassing descriptions, reflecting the Fathers' strive to gain a thorough understanding of the linguistic, cultural and religious background of the people they aimed at converting.

²⁸³ For a commented edition of the *Sumario*, see Alessandro Valignano and José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz (ed.), *Sumario de las cosas de Japon. (1583); Adiciones del sumario de Japon (1592). Tomo 1*, Tokyo : Sophia University, 1954. Excerpts in the English language are also included in William Theodore De Bary and Yoshiko Kurata Dykstra, *Sources Of Japanese Tradition: 1600 To 2000*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 155-162 and in the anthology by Michael Cooper (ed.), *They came to Japan : an anthology of european reports on Japan, 1543-1640*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1965.

It might be noted that the desire for publicity was, at least in part, also the motivation behind the promotion of the *tenshō shisetsu*, as made quite explicit by both the careful instructions given by Valignano to Father Nuno Rodrigues,²⁸⁴ who travelled with the young Japanese boys as their escort and tutor, and by the contemporary published literature on the embassy. One of the most complete contemporary works relating about it, the *Relationi della venuta degli ambasciatori giapponesi a Roma*, stated for example, in the chapter “Le cagioni della venuta di questi Ambasciatori a Roma” (Reasons for the coming of these Ambassadors to Rome),:

Father Alessandro approved [...] so that His Holiness and the others in Europe could have an assay of those lands, and could experience with their own eyes what they had read in letters about the value and good nature of the Japanese, and similarly learn that every struggle and effort to cultivate that Lord’s vineyard was very well employed.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ The instructions are included in an unpublished document titled “Regimento e Instrução do q hadi fazir o Padre Nuno Rois q vay por Procurador à Roma”, dated 1583 and now conserved in the Archivio storico della Compagnia di Gesù in Rome (Japonica Sinica 22, fl. 52). Extracts of the document (in the original Portuguese and in French translation) are included in J. A. Abranches Pinto and Henri Bernard, “Les Instructions du Pere Valignano pour l’ambassade japonaise en Europe. (Goa, 12 decembre 1583)”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 6 No. 1/2, 1943, pp. 391-403 (see in particular points 13, 14 and 15, pp. 395-397).

²⁸⁵ “Approvò il P. Alessandro [...] accio che sua Santità, & gli altri in Europa, havessero come un saggio di quei paesi, e per esperienza vedessero quel, che più volte havevano inteso per lettere, del valore e buona natura de Giaponesi, con che parimente conoscessero infatti, che ogni stento e travaglio in coltivar tal vigna del Signore era molto ben impegnato”. Guido Gualtieri, *Relationi della venuta de gli ambasciatori giapponesi à Roma, fino alla partita di Lisbona. Con vna descrizione del lor paese, e costumi, e con le accoglienze fatte loro da tutti i Prencipi Christiani, per doue sono passati*, Venice: Gioliti, 1586, p. 22. The text then proceeded to illustrate the other fundamental aim of the embassy – which was to impress the greatness of Europe in the minds of the young ambassadors, and have them report about it to Japan. The embassy would also have to work, in this sense, as a means of persuasions towards those *daimyō* who seemed to doubt the true intentions of the Fathers, and presume that they were travelling to Japan in search of a fortune and an esteem that they somehow lacked in their native countries.

In other words, Valignano intended to

parade living examples of Jesuit success in the Christianization of Japan through Catholic Europe. He knew that a demonstration of influence attained among the Japanese ruling classes was an important if not indispensable part of the presentation of that image of success, and he fully intended to have his specimens subjected to inspection in the highest of European circles.²⁸⁶

This need to assure (the right kind of) visibility to the mission, and the more general approach of Valignano's missionary strategy are aspects to be taken into close consideration, in order to understand the impact in Europe of the Jesuit encounter with Japan.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ J. S. A. Elisonas, "Journey to the West", cit., p. 32.

²⁸⁷ The *Tenshō shisetsu* wasn't the only (pseudo-)diplomatic approach from Japan towards Europe. Between 1613 and 1620, a second embassy travelled to Europe, organized by the Sendai *daimyō*, Date Masamune 伊達 政宗. The embassy had been promoted by the shogun, after the return from New Spain of the Franciscan missionary Luis Sotelo, who had been sent there in 1610 as an emissary and brought back with him the Spanish diplomat Sebastian Vizcaino. The embassy, accompanied by one of Date Masamune's retainers, Hasekura Rokuemon Tsunenaga 支倉六右衛門 常長, travelled across the Pacific to New Spain, and proceeded from there towards Europe, where it was received by Philip III, King of Spain and Pope Paul V, travelling through Spain, France and Italy. It didn't, however, apparently exert as strong an impression on the European public as the first one, nor it elicited the production of the same amount of literature, a sign of changed times, as well as of the far less organized approach to publicity of the Franciscans in comparison with the Jesuits.

3.1.4. Rivalling Christian orders and the persecutions against Christianity

The embassy was, at least in theory, a success for Valignano in all respects. The four Japanese emissaries were received with all honours in the cities they travelled to, and, heavily monitored by their tutors (as per Valignano's instructions), they were shielded from any kind of information about Europe that, if relayed to Japan, could turn out to be harmful for the mission.²⁸⁸ The greatest accomplishment of the embassy was, surely, eliciting from Pope Gregory XIII, even before his encounter with the Japanese boys, the promulgation of the Brief *Ex pastorali officio* (January 28, 1585), which designated Japan as exclusive Jesuit mission territory – temporarily dispelling Valignano's fears about the competition of different Christian orders.

Valignano, however, wasn't able to reap the fruits of the embassy in Japan as he had hoped to. In 1590, after meeting with the boys in Macao, he accompanied them back to the archipelago, travelling both in his usual position as visitor, and as ambassador for the Portuguese Viceroy of India. He was received by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who, after Oda Nobunaga's death in 1582, had risen to power and obtained, in 1585, the title of *kanpaku* 関白), but encountered with only superficial

²⁸⁸ The tutors of the boys were supposed to make them “see all the noble and remarkable things of Rome and of the other principal cities of Italy. It should be made sure that they are always guarded, so that they'll learn and see only what is good, and won't learn anything that is bad [...] For this reason, in no way they will have to treat with people who could scandalize them, or be told about the disorders in the court and among our prelates, or of other similar things.” (“ver todas as cousas nobres e grandes de Roma e de algunas otras ciudades pncipaes de Ytalia advertendose advertendose [sic] sempre q seam guiados e man ra q saibaõ e vejaõ somõte o q he bem e não saiba nada do mal [...] por ysso en hua [sic] maneira hã de tratar con pessoas q lhe possam dar escandalo, ne conten los desordines q van na corte e nos perlados e outras semelhantes cousas”). J. A. Abranches Pinto and Henri Bernard, “Les Instructions du Pere Valignano”, cit., p. 401.

cordiality from him, and managed to obtain little to no practical advantage for the mission in Japan.²⁸⁹

The political climate had, in fact, radically changed in the years intervening between his two visits to Japan. The shift in power from Nobunaga to Hideyoshi hadn't immediately affected the mission. In 1586, Coelho had actually been granted an audience in Osaka by the *kanpaku*, with a group of other Fathers (including Frois, who had acted as an interpreter), and had been received in a fairly benevolent way, obtaining permission to preach the Gospel in Japan.²⁹⁰ After the campaign for the conquest of Kyūshū,²⁹¹ however, Hideyoshi's attitude towards the missionaries had taken an abrupt hostile turn. In 1587, in the brief succession of two days (July 23 and 24) the *kanpaku* had

²⁸⁹ J. S. A. Elisonas, "Journey to the West", cit., p. 47. The audience is accounted for in detail in the annual letter from Japan of 1591-1592. (in Italian edition, "Copia dell'Annua del Giappone, del 1591. E del 1592. Scritta dal P. Luigi Frois, al P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu", in *Lettera del Giappone degli anni 1591. Et 1592. Scritta al R.P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu. Et dalla spagnuola nella italiana lingua tradotta dal p. Vbaldino Bartolini della Compagnia medesima.* Rome: Zannetti, 1595.)

²⁹⁰ Coelho, on the other hand, acted rather imprudently during the audience – promising to Hideyoshi to obtain for him military support from the part of the Christian *daimyō* of Kyūshū (which may have well be part of the motivation for Hideyoshi's subsequent opposition to Christianity, as it surely alerted the *kanpaku* as to how the Fathers might possess the potential influence to elicit a rebellion). An account of the audience is given by Frois in his letter to Valignano of October 7, 1586. In Italian edition, "Lettera del p. Luigi Froes scritta per commissione del p. Gasparo Coeglio Viceprouinciale del Giappone, al p. Alessandro Valignano Prouinciale dell'India della Compagnia di Giesu a' 7. d'Ottobre 1586", in *Avvisi della Cina et Giappone del fine dell'anno 1586. con l'arrivo delli signori giapponesi nell'India. Cauati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesu. riceute il mese d'ottobre 1588*, Rome: Zannetti, 1588.

²⁹¹ The Kyūshū campaign was elicited by a request of assistance from the part of Ōtomo Yoshishige, in his ongoing struggle against Shimazu Yoshishisa. It was wrapped up quickly, between the twelfth month of 1586 and the fifth month of 1587, the opposing forces being overwhelmed by sheer numbers. Hideyoshi's victory, however, didn't lead to a massive rearrangement of the power forces of the area. Conscious of the need of continuity in leadership in a insular land where, in spite of the warring state of Japan, the ruling elite was a long-lived one, Hideyoshi only partially redistributed the lands, and resorted instead, preferably, to the local enfeoffment of the *daimyō*. The Kyūshū Fathers could, consequently, continue for the great part to rely on their previous protectors (including Ōtomo himself). See Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 1989, pp. 87-93.

issued two edicts, inflicting an hard blow against Christianity. The first one, directed to Japanese converts, reflected his worry over the rebelling potential of the Christians, ordering the *daimyō* to avoid taking up Christianity and to prevent mass conversions of their subjects (and only allowing individual conversions of members of the lower classes). The second one, more directly addressed to the Fathers, declared Japan to be “the land of the Gods” and Christianity to be a “pernicious doctrine”, whose diffusion in the country was to be considered undesirable. It concluded that the *bateren* could not be allowed to remain on Japanese soil (taking care of specifying, however, how such restriction should not involve the *kurofune* 黒船 – i.e., the Portuguese *náo* – and, more generally, the foreign merchants operating in Japan).²⁹²

Hideyoshi never actually pressed for the enforcement of the second edict, and the Jesuits were allowed to continue to live on the archipelago, even if a more demure fashion.²⁹³ By the opening of the 1590s, however, the fortunes of the mission where definitely changing. The situation for the Christians hit a critical point as a consequence of the developing diplomatic relationships between Japan and the Spanish settlement in Manila, which, as mentioned in chapter 3, paved the way, in spite of the dispositions by Gregory XIII, for the arrival of

²⁹² The Fathers’ only warning before the issuing of the edicts had been a brief letter exchange between Hideyoshi and Coelho, which Coelho had handled rather clumsily (as reported in the annual letter from Japan of 1588: In Italian edition, *Lettera annale del Giappone scritta al padre della Compagnia di Giesu alli XX. di Febraio M.D.LXXXVIII*, Rome: Zannetti, 1590). For an in-depth analysis of the edicts and the motivations behind them, see Adriana Boscaro, “Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the 1587 Edicts Against Christianity”, *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. 20 No. 2, 1973, pp. 219-242, and ID., *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone*, cit.

²⁹³ Several measures were, on the other hand, taken against the Christians – ranging from the destruction of Jesuit buildings (including the *Nanbanji* and the Jesuit House – and attached church – in Nagasaki), and the destitution of the Christian *daimyō* Takayama Ukon 高山右近 (see Johannes Laures, “Takayama Ukon. A Critical Essay”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 1942, pp. 86-112).

competing Christian orders in Japan.²⁹⁴ After the San Felipe incident and the consequent martyrdom,²⁹⁵ Hideyoshi replied to the protests of the governor of the Philippines by denying the right of the Spaniards to introduce their religion into Japan, and by accusing the Franciscans of working as an advance guard for the conquest of the archipelago – as they had been for the Philippines.

Hideyoshi, engaged in his second attempt at the invasion of Korea (after the failure of the first one in 1592-1593), and struck by the illness that would lead him to death by 1598, did not promulgate further bans against the Christians in his lifetime. Ieyasu, engaged in the military campaign that would, by 1615, subdue his opposition, and interested in keeping commercial ties with the Spanish and the Portuguese, similarly maintained, in the early years of his rule, a moderated stance towards the Christians (and even used Franciscan intermediaries in his intercourse with the Spanish authorities in Manila). Persecutions did continue with severity at a local level, and thousands of Japanese Christians were stripped of their property and banished. On the other hand, the number of executions was still somehow contained, and no more Europeans were martyred up to 1612.²⁹⁶ This gave the missionaries some respite, even allowing them to rebuild some of the residencies that had been destroyed. The tension between different Christian orders, on the other hand, continued to build, and elevating the Japanese authorities' caution towards the missionaries.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ See Henri Bernard and S. J. Tientsin, “Les Débuts des Relations Diplomatiques Entre le Japon et les Espagnols”, cit., p. 112 and ff.

²⁹⁵ See chapter 3, paragraph 3.1.1.

²⁹⁶ See George Bailey Samson, *The Western World and Japan*, cit., p. 132, for a list of the recorded martyrdoms after the crucifixion of Nagasaki and up to 1612.

²⁹⁷ The incident of the *Madre de Deus*, mentioned in chapter 2, paragraph 2.1.3 was symptomatic of the growing tension.

By 1612, the stance of the Tokugawa towards Christianity took a new hostile turn. The edict for the expulsion of the Fathers was reissued, giving way, the following year, to the registration, capture and torture of the missionaries and of the main Christian leaders. On January 27, 1614, a second, final edict was issued, resulting in major deportations, and finally forcing Christianity to go underground.

No further respite was given to the Christians, even after Ieyasu's death. On the contrary, under the rule of the second Tokugawa shogun, Hidetada,²⁹⁸ the persecutions took an even harsher turn. Hidetada repeated the ban on Christianity, and severely punished all infractions. Four missionaries were executed in 1617, followed by other 120 missionaries and converts in 1622 – in a growing list of martyrs.

As a consequence to the five edicts of *Sakoku* issued between 1633 and 1639 and to the events at Shimabara, by 1639 European Christianity had effectively been eradicated from Japan.

²⁹⁸ The third son of Ieyasu. Hidetada had actually formally assumed the title of shogun in 1605, when Ieyasu abdicated in his favour, so as to personally establish his legacy (and not risk an interruption of the dynastic line, as had been the case with Hideyoshi). However, Ieyasu had continued to practically handle the government of Japan up to his death in 1616.

3.2. THE MISSIONARY SOURCES ON JAPAN

The quantity of direct sources on Japan produced by the missionaries in the time-span of the so-called “Christian century” amounts to more than a hundred of documents, including letters and reports, and a number of longer histories, circulated, in turn, in hundreds of translations and editions, singularly and in collections, or incorporated (often in edited – and not always referenced – form), into historical, cosmographical or political works, as well as into travel collections.

Including a complete bibliography of the published titles would probably require a work on its own. A wide number of bibliographies and studies, however, already exists, providing listings (and sometimes information) on the materials. Some of the works are focused on sources more generally related to the Jesuit missions in Asia. In particular:

- Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliotheca Mariana de la compagnie de Jesus*, Paris: [s.n.], 1885;²⁹⁹
- John Correia-Afonso, *Jesuit letters and Indian history: a study of the nature and development of the Jesuit letters from India (1542-1773) and of their value for Indian historiography*, Bombay: Indian Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, 1955.
- Auguste Carayon, *Bibliographie historique de la Compagnie de Jésus, ou catalogue des ouvrages relatifs a l'histoire des Jésuites*

²⁹⁹ The work is available for consultation online at the following url: <http://archive.org/stream/bibliothecamari00sommgoog#page/n3/mode/2up> (last access: January 15, 2013).

depuis leur origine jusqu'à nos jours, Paris: Auguste Durand, 1894.³⁰⁰

- Robert Streit, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, Rom, Freiburg, Wien: Herder, 1916-1955;
- Henri Ternaux-Compans, *Bibliothèque Asiatique et Africaine ou catalogue des ouvrages relatifs à l'Asie et à l'Afrique qui ont paru depuis la découverte de l'imprimerie jusqu'en 1700*, Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1841.³⁰¹

A number of bibliographies is instead devoted to listing all the known documents related to Japan published in a determined time period:

- Henri Cordier, *Bibliotheca japonica: Dictionnaire bibliographique des ouvrages relatifs à l'Empire japonais rangés par ordre chronologique jusqu'à 1870, suivi d'un appendice renfermant la liste alphabétique des principaux ouvrages parus de 1870 à 1912*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1912;
- João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, "Japan and the Japanese in printed works in Europe", *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies*, No. 014, June 2007, pp. 43-107.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ The work is available for consultation online at the following url: http://www.archive.org/stream/cihm_44366#page/n7/mode/2up (last access: January 15, 2013).

³⁰¹ The work is available for consultation online at the following url: <http://archive.org/stream/bibliothqueasia00comgoog#page/n12/mode/2up> (last access: January 15, 2013).

³⁰² João Paulo Oliveira e Costa's work is, actually, only limited to sixteenth-century sources, but is nevertheless an extremely useful reference, as, being the most recent work of the kind, it combines information not only from most of the previous bibliographies, but also from anthologies (such as the one in three volumes by Peter Kapitza, *Japan in Europa: Texte und Bilddokumente zur europäischen Japankenntnis von Marco Polo bis Wilhelm von Humboldt*, Munich: Iudicium, 1990) and more general catalogues listing works published in different European countries in the sixteenth century (for a complete list of references, see João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, "Japan and the Japanese in printed works in Europe", cit., pp. 49-50), cross-checking it, and reporting cases in which a document is only mentioned on one source (even though not going as far as verifying the existence/collocation of actual copies).

- Japan Institut, *Bibliographischer Alt-Japan-Katalog, 1542-1853*, Kyoto: Deutsches Forschungsinstitut, 1940;
- Matsuda Kiichi, *Ni ō kōshōshi bunken mokuroku = Catalogue of the documents and studies on the historical relations between Japan and Europe*. Tokyo: Isseidō shoten, 1965.
- Friedrich von Wenckstern and Léon Pages, *A bibliography of the Japanese empire: being a classified list of all books, essays and maps in European languages relating to Dai Nihon, Great Japan, published in Europe, America and in the East*. Leiden : Brill, 1895.³⁰³

Finally, a number of reference works focus exclusively on sources on Japan/related to Japan in some ways connected with the Christian missions:

- Adriana Boscaro, *Sixteenth Century European Printed Works on the First Japanese Mission to Europe: A Descriptive Bibliography*. Leiden: Brill, 1973.³⁰⁴
- Johannes Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko: A Manual of Books and Documents on the Early Christian Missions in Japan. With special reference to the principal libraries in Japan and more particularly to the Collection at Sophia University, Tokyo*, Tokyo: Sophia University, 1940 – and its subsequent, enlarged editions and supplements. The contents of the work have been made available in electronic form in a fully revised and updated version

³⁰³ The work is available for consultation online at the following url: <http://archive.org/stream/abibliographyja00palmgoog#page/n7/mode/2up> (last access: January 15, 2013).

³⁰⁴ The work, including a complete listing of the works connected with the *Tenshō shisetsu*, has the merit of not simply including information about the documents, cross-checked from several sources, but also to report of the verified existing copies of the works with their collocations (underlining in turn which ones of them are included in bibliographies but couldn't personally be accessed by the author).

in the *Laures Rare Book Database*

(<http://laures.cc.sophia.ac.jp/laures/start/sel=9-1/>).³⁰⁵

A compared study of the documents listed in such works brings to immediate light how the overwhelming majority of the sources on Japan produced and circulated in the sixteenth and in the first half of the seventeenth century are to be ascribed to the Society of Jesus.³⁰⁶

This does not surprise, considering how, as evidenced in paragraph 3.1., the Jesuits exerted an exclusive influence in Japan for the greatest part of the sixteenth century – while competing Christian orders only reached the archipelago at a time when the mission had

³⁰⁵ The work is, as stated in its very foreword, a bibliography of *Kirishitan* literature, in the broad sense of “documents [...] relating to the Christian missions from their beginnings to the first years after the reopening of Japan to foreign intercourse”. It is divided in three sections, the first devoted to “The ancient Japanese mission press” (i.e., *kirishitanban*) the second to “European works on the early missions in Japan”, and the third to “The mission press of the period of the restoration of the Catholic missions”. The second part is, clearly, the most relevant to the scope of the present works and very useful if one aims at narrowing the scope of research to Christian materials. For a bibliography focused on sources in Japanese and Chinese on Christianity in Japan, see instead Ebisawa Arimichi, *Christianity in Japan. A Bibliography of Japanese and Chinese Sources, Part I (1543-1858)*, Tokyo: Committee on Asian Cultural Studies International Christian University, 1960.

³⁰⁶ Noteworthy non-Jesuit sources on Japan include, actually, only a handful of titles. The earliest one is the general history compiled by the Franciscan Friar Marcelo de Ribadeneira, and published in Barcelona in 1601, the *Historia de las islas del archipiélago*. (Marcelo de Ribadeneira, *Historia de las islas del archipiélago y reynos de la gran China, Tartaria, Cuchinchina, Malaca, Sian, Camboxa, y Iappo6n, y de lo sucedido en el- los a los religiosos descalzos de la orden del seraphico padre San Francisco de la prouincia de San Gregorio de las Philippinas*, Barcelona: Gabriel Graells y Giraldo Dotil, 1601.) The work, a precious eye-witness account on the activities of the Spaniards in the Philippines and in the neighbouring countries, included an in-depth narration of the Franciscan activities in Japan, as well as of the martyrdoms. It didn't, however, actually add much to the already existing corpus of knowledge developed by the Jesuits on Japan. Worth mentioning is also the *Historia del regno di Voxv del Giapone, dell'antichita, nobilta, e valore del suo re Idate Masamvne, delli fauori, c'ha fatti alla christianita e desiderio che tiene d'essere christiano, e dell'aumento di nostra Santa Fede in quelle parti. E dell'ambasciata che ha inuiata alla S.tà di Ns. Papa Paolo V. e delli suoi successi, con altre varie cose di edificazione, e gusto spirituale dei Lettori*, by Scipione Amati (Rome: Giacomo Mascardi, 1615), the only existing contemporary account of the 1613-1620 embassy.

begun its decline. Part of the reason for such an overwhelming production of sources, moreover, lied in the inner workings of the Society of Jesus: by the mid-sixteenth century, the order had developed an institutionalized system for correspondence, with which no form of organized communication or intelligence system set in place by the Franciscans, the Dominicans or the Augustinians could aspire to compare.

3.2.1. Jesuit letter-writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the institutionalized Jesuit system for correspondence

The great majority of the Jesuit sources on Japan that actually circulated in print in Europe during the “Christian century” consists, as a matter of fact, of report letters sent by the missionaries stationed in Japan, published singularly or in collections of letter-books.

The system for correspondence devised by the Jesuits involved the dispatch, from the part of the Portuguese, Spanish and Italian members of the Society engaged in evangelization overseas, of regular official reports, addressed to the Jesuit European quarter-generals of Rome and Coimbra. The letters were supposed to include detailed accounts about the status of the missions, often mingled with general information about contemporary political events in the countries where the missionaries were stationed.

The system had been first put in place by Ignatius of Loyola himself, as an instrument for keeping active contacts among the various divisions of the mission in Europe. In the later years of the 1540s, it had been perfected by Juan de Polanco (appointed permanent secretary since 1547), and its scope had been extended also to the overseas

missions. The official letters from the East Indies – addressed to the Father General of the Company in Rome, to the Jesuit College of Coimbra, in Portugal, and sometimes to the Society of Jesus in general – were sorted in the administrative and religious centre of the Asian mission, in Goa, and forwarded from there to their destinations, often in combination with other, more private forms of correspondence between the singular members of the Society (sent in separate sheets known as *hijuela*). They were normally composed and dispatched on an annual frequency basis – as, as mentioned above, the Jesuits were dependant on the *Estado da India* for transport, and the fleets for Europe ordinarily left only once a year.³⁰⁷

The reason why such a regular system of communication was arranged by the Jesuits in the first place, and not mirrored (at least not to a similar extent) by different Christian orders, can likely be ascribed to the fact that no other order of the time accorded as much importance to the practice of letter-writing as the one founded by Loyola.

One of the most peculiar elements of the Jesuit missionary approach lied in the way it combined Christian beliefs with humanist moral values. The mastery of *eloquentia* (that is, proficiency in the language arts and, more specifically, in the rethorical practice – one of the central components of which was the composition of letters) was highly valued by Jesuit thinkers, as a means, in itself, to moral perfection, and also as a fundamental strategic tool – meant to accomplish various aims: fight heresy and propagate the Roman Christian message, edify the audiences, but also, more prosaically, win the patronage of the

³⁰⁷ For an in-depth description of the structure of the Jesuit system for correspondence, see Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., pp. 314-331.

ruling classes by “showing-off” the accomplishments of the missionaries.

Letter-writing was, in other words, instrumental to that pursue of publicity that, as seen in describing Valignano’s approach, was vital to the very survival of missionary activity. To quote Boswell,

The cultivation of rhetorical prowess was also strategic in enlisting the patronage of the elite. The overall success of the society depended significantly on the benefices of the ruling classes, as Jesuits did not accept fees for preaching or for celebrating Mass, and because they were not a mendicant order. They therefore had to depend on the liberality of others to establish and sustain their colleges. Although some among the mendicant orders likewise distinguished themselves by rhetorical skill to obtain important offices or to win patronage, the Jesuit strategy [... was] to win favor by demonstrating results to the ruling classes in the rhetorical practices of preaching and teaching. The Jesuits demonstrated that they could effectively propagate the Catholic faith by taking an active role in society among the ignorant, the lapsed, and the heretical. The Jesuits' success in preaching and teaching was crucial to the effectiveness of this religious activism. As a result of their accomplishments, the society was able to secure the benefices of the wealthy and powerful to establish yet more colleges and to further their cause. Thus the Jesuit pursuit of eloquence was instrumental to their growth and renown.³⁰⁸

The constant flow of information from the overseas missions was, on the other hand, very welcome to the central authorities of the Catholic

³⁰⁸ Grant Boswell, “Letter writing among the Jesuits: Antonio Possevino's advice in the “*Bibliotheca Selecta*” (1593)”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, 2003, pp 247-262.

Church as well. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Roman Church was facing, in full, the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, marked the beginning of the Catholic response to the Protestant threat, setting in place that set of measures – both passive (i.e., the enactment of a strict censorship) and active (the movement known as “Catholic Revival”) – that fell under the policies of the “Counter-Reformation”. In the climate of the religious controversy, the news of the conversions of faraway populations, and more generally of the successes of the Catholic faith overseas, could work as a powerful ideological instrument, to be spread throughout Europe, and set against the losses locally suffered by the Catholics.

This is why the circulation of the Jesuit letters didn’t stop at their original recipients. The reports were widely distributed in Europe, both inside and outside the circles of the clergy: manuscript copies were forwarded from Rome and Coimbra to the various Jesuit Colleges of Europe, meant to function, as seen in the case of Valignano’s *Sumario*, as sources of information about the missions, as a guide and inspiration for future missionaries, and as means of edification for the members of the Society; at the same time, a selected number of the letters was set out to be published and commercially distributed throughout Europe.

Printed reports were usually published first (in edited and censored versions) in the original Spanish or Portuguese languages of the manuscripts, and, in translation, in Italian collections of printed letter-books. From the Italian editions (which, as can be evinced by the above mentioned bibliographies, enjoyed the greatest fortune in Europe) came the majority of the subsequent translations in Latin and in other European vernacular languages. Most of the letter-books were printed in more than one edition. Many of them, as mentioned above, also

became sources for contemporary histories of the religious orders, for general histories of the missions, as well as for other comprehensive historical and cosmographical works.

In this sense, it was through the Jesuit missionaries' reports that, for the first time, factual, first-hand knowledge about Eastern Asia was *systematically* brought to the European readership, with an accessibility, thanks to the diffusion of print, previously unthinkable of. Among the Jesuit letters from East Asia, published singularly and in collections, reports from Japan retained a definite prominence throughout the second half of the sixteenth century (so much that, as pointed out by Donald Lach, many later writers tend to address the Jesuit letters from this period with the generic title of "Japan letters").³⁰⁹ The Jesuit writings came therefore to offer a steady and rich source of information about the Japanese archipelago, actively contributing, for the first time, to the construction of a coherent European imaginary of Japan.

3.2.2. Unpublished histories and general accounts: an overview

Aside from the report letters, a number longer works on Japan were produced by missionaries who had experienced life in the archipelago.

I have already mentioned the *Sumario de las cosas de Japon*, the longest among the writings by Valignano entirely focused on Japan.

³⁰⁹ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 321. Such prominence was mainly due to the centrality held by the Japanese mission in this phase of the Jesuit enterprise in Asia. Given their exclusive influence on the archipelago, and given the promising results obtained in the earlier decades of the evangelization effort, the Jesuits invested high expectations in the success of the mission in Japan – which only the escalating persecutions by the beginning of the seventeenth century would be able to shake.

The *Sumario* was also largely used as a basis for the section on Japan of the *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, Valignano's summa on the missions in the East Indies. Three sections of the work were compiled during Valignano's lifetime: the first and second volumes, which covered the history of the mission under Xavier (with an heavy focus on the matter of his sanctification) and in the subsequent years, up to 1564, were sent to Europe, respectively, in 1584 (probably along with the emissaries of the *Tenshō shisetsu*) and 1588; the third one, meant to cover the history of the mission from 1564 up to Valignano's time, was actually never completed. The work focused mainly on Jesuit activities, but reserved attention also to the description of the costumes and "qualities" of the inhabitants of the regions in which the missionaries were stationed. It wasn't actually as informative as the other works by Valignano focused on singular countries (such as the already mentioned *Sumario*) but its interest laid in the fact that it was one of the earliest European works to provide "a sophisticated framework for the comparison of different peoples under the concept of rational behavior, enshrining an idea of civility (not yet "civilization") which was nevertheless combined with racial and religious forms of classification."³¹⁰ This was actually, as we'll see, one of the key elements in the Jesuit cosmographical approach. Much as the *Sumario*, however, the work was never published in the sixteenth century.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 6.

³¹¹ On the other hand, Giovanni Pietro Maffei relied heavily on the work in compiling his (published) general history of the missions in Asia, the *Historiarum indicarum libri XVI.: Selectarum item ex India epistolarum eodem interprete libri IV. Accessit Ignatii Loiolae vita postremo recognita*, Florence: Philippvm Ivinctam, 1588. A modern edition of Valignano's work has also been edited by Josef Wicki: Alessandro Valignano and Josef Wicki (ed.), *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias orientales (1542-64)*, Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1944.

Similarly unpublished was another work by Valignano specifically focused on Japan, the *Del principio y progreso de la Religion Christiana en Japon*. The work, intended as a general history of the mission in Japan, was abandoned, incomplete, in 1601.³¹² The project had actually been devised by Valignano after his own veto on the publication of Frois' history of Japan, the *História de Japam* – of which 215 chapters (describing the history of the mission in Japan up to 1593) had been completed in Frois' lifetime.

The history had been commissioned specifically to Frois, at the time the central chronicler of the Jesuit enterprise in Japan, sometimes between 1583 and 1585, upon suggestion by Maffei, who was at the time working on his own general history of the missions (and in search for reference works). The scope of the work would be to reunite the somewhat scattered information that had been included in the Jesuit reports up to that moment in a coherent collection, more immediately available to the European readership. Frois embarked in his monumental work in the hope that it would be circulated in unaltered form in Europe, but Valignano ended up speaking against its publication, on the grounds that its scope was too big (“opus immensum”) and that, while it could be very useful for the missionaries in Japan, a more concise, possibly one-volume work would be needed for the sake of European readers.³¹³ Similarly never

³¹² A manuscript of the work can be found in the collection *Jesuitas na Asia*, at the Ajuda Library in Lisbon (Codex 49-IV-53). For the titles and collocations of the other manuscripts in the collection, see J. M. Braga, “The Panegyric of Alexander Valignano, S. J.,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 5 No. 2, 1942, pp. 523-535.

³¹³ See J. F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits : Alessandro Valignano in sixteenth-century Japan*, London: Routledge, 1993, chapter four (“Full and complete information”). A manuscript of Frois' history similarly can be found at the Ajuda Library (lacking the first thirteen introductory chapters on Japanese life, which have been lost). For a Portuguese edition, see Luis Frois and Jose Wicki (ed.), *Historia de Japam, edicao anotada 1[-5]*, Lisbon: Presidencia do Conselho de Ministros, Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, Direccao-Geral do Patrimonio Cultural, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1976-1984. A Japanese edition also exists: Luis Frois, Matsuda

published was another work of Frois', prepared apparently in conjunction with the history, in 1585: the *Tratado em que se contem muito susinta e abreviatamente algumas contradicções e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão* (Treatise in which some contradictions and differences of customs between the people of Europe and of this territory of Japan are comprised very briefly and succinctly). The treatise, as suggested by the title, was structured as a lists of comparisons and contrasts between costumes and matters everyday life – moral, customs, behaviours, techniques – in Europe and Japan, given in a simple juxtaposition of short sentences (without any effort to give an actual historical explanation of the differences). It may actually have been compiled for his personal use only (of for him to use for the instruction of the new missionaries arriving in the country), seeing as no contemporary source reports about it.³¹⁴

The project of the history wasn't, on the other hand, abandoned, even after the decision not to publish Frois' work, nor after Valignano's death. The pressures of the competing Christian orders that had reached the archipelago made it, actually, an even more urgent matter, so as to gain further support from Roman authorities and not lose

Kiichi and Kawasaki Momota (translators and eds.), *Nihonshi 1[-12]* (History of Japan), Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1977-1980.

³¹⁴ As suggested by Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 687. A first edition of the work was published in 1955. Luís Fróis and Josef Franz Schütte (ed.), *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan (1585): tratado em que se contem muito susinta e abreviadamente algumas contradicoes e diferencias de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japao. Erstmalige kritische Ausgabe des eigenhandigen portugiesischen Frois-Textes in der Biblioteca de la Academia de la historia in Madrid mit deutscher Ubersetzung, Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Josef Franz Schütte*, Tokyo: Sophia University, 1955. A more recent edition, with a preface by José Manuel Garcia, has been issued in the French Laguage: Luís Fróis, Xavier de Castro and Robert Schimpf (translators), *Traité de Luís Fróis, S.J. (1585) : sur les contradictions de mœurs entre Européens & Japonais*, Paris: Chandeigne, 1993.

ground on the archipelago.³¹⁵ After Valignano's failed attempt to complete a work of his own, the Portuguese missionary Mateus de Couros was similarly entrusted with the task, and similarly obtained no positive result. In the end, the history was commissioned, in 1620, to João Rodrigues (1561 or 1562-1634), one of the central Jesuit figures in the later phases of the mission. Rodrigues had spent more than thirty years in Japan, between his arrival in 1577 and his (forced) departure for China in 1610, reaching a deep level of knowledge of the country, and a true mastery of the Japanese language.³¹⁶ The initial project for the work, titled *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, included a prologue, ten introductory books on Japan and ten books on the mission, from its beginnings to 1634 (plus four further books on the missions in China, Korea, Cambodia and Siam, which would be the main focus of the Jesuit evangelization effort, after the forced departure of the mission from Japan). The project, however, was never completed, nor it was given to print – also due to the forced closure imposed to the mission.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ The reasons that pressed the compilation and publication of the history are best explained in João Rodrigues and Michael Cooper (ed.), *João Rodrigues' account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, London: The Hakluyt Society (Series III, volume 7), 2001, an annotated and commented edition of João Rodrigues' history – the first in a European language to completely include all the chapters that have come to light. A Japanese edition also exists, by Doi Tadao: João Rodrigues and Doi Tadao (ed.), *Nihon Kyōkaishi 1[-3]* (History of the Church of Japan), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967-1970. An incomplete manuscript copy of the history is preserved in the Ajuda Library, in the "Jesuítas na Asia" series.

³¹⁶ He was commonly known as *Tçuzzu*, from the Momoyama-period Japanese word for "interpreter". For an overview on Rodrigues, his works and his activities in Japan, set in the context of the general workings of the Jesuit mission (with little reference, however, to the Japanese historical setting), see Michael Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China*, New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1974.

³¹⁷ How many of the books were actually completed by Rodrigues' death is not sure. So far, the first four books on the mission and the first two introductory books on Japan – treating a variety of matters ranging from etiquette, the tea ceremony, flower arrangements, painting, calligraphy, social habits – have come to light.

What was circulated among the more general European readership consisted, therefore, mostly in the scattered, but regular, reports sent periodically by the missionaries stationed in Japan. In the next section of the chapter, I will therefore proceed to highlight which imaginary of Japan the European readership was made able to derive from them.

3.2.3. Francis Xavier's reports: laying the foundations of the mission

The earliest Jesuit reports on Japan to be dispatched to Europe were the ones written by the founder of the Japanese mission, Francis Xavier: a total of ten letters composed before, during and right after his trip to Japan from 1549 to 1551.³¹⁸

A selection of the letters was circulated in published form in Europe very shortly after its reception. It included

- a letter from Cochin, written by Xavier on January 14, 1549, before his departure from Japan, and accompanied by a letter by Father Nicolao Lancillotto, reporting the information relayed by Yajirō on Japan; it was included in a 1562 collection by the Venetian publishing house Tramezzino;³¹⁹ the report was also later reprinted in the second edition of the first volume of

³¹⁸ One letter in Cochin before his departure, five in Kagoshima upon his arrival and four in Cochin, after his return. See Adriana Boscaro, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone*, cit.

³¹⁹ "Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan, et alcuni capitoli della lettera di Nicolao Lancillotto del Cocin. Estratto di certe lettere dell'India, et d'una di Maestro Francesco Xauier di Cocin à dodici di Gennaro 1549. Alcuni capitoli di una lettera di Nicolao Lancillotto di Cocin à uentisei di Dicembre 1548", in *Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portogallo*, cit., folio 13-26.

Ramusio's collection of travel literature, *Navigazioni et viaggi* (1554).³²⁰

- a report from Kagoshima, addressed to the Jesuit college of Coimbra in Portugal and dated November 5, 1549; it was first included in a collection printed in Rome by the publishers Dorico and Bressani in 1552,³²¹ and subsequently reprinted both in the 1554 edition of Ramusio's *Navigazioni*, although wrongly dated October 5, 1549,³²² and in a 1558 collection by Tramezzino;³²³
- one report written by Xavier, again from Cochin, upon his return from the archipelago, and addressed to the Society of Jesus; it was included in the same 1558 Tramezzino collection.³²⁴

The first report from Cochin illustrates the events that prompted Xavier to travel to the Japanese archipelago. The Father relates about his encounter, in Manila, with Paolo (Yajirō) and two other Japanese natives, and about the promising attitudes all of them showed towards learning in general, and the Christian doctrine in particular:

³²⁰ Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Primo volume, & seconda edizione delle nauigationi et viaggi in molti luoghi corretta, et ampliata, nella quale si contengono la Descrittione dell'Africa, & del paese del Prete Ianni [...] Aggiuntoui di nuouo la Relatione dell'isola Giapan*, Venice: Giunti, 1554.

³²¹ "Copia de una lettera del Padre Maestro Francesco Xauier dal Giapan indrizata al Colleggio della scolari de detta Compagnia in Coymbra di Portugallo" in *Avvisi particolari delle Indie di Portugallo, ricevuti in questi doi anni del 1551 et 1552 da li padri de la copagnia de Jesu, dove fra molte cose mirabili si vede delle Paesi delle genti et costumi loro et la grande coverione di molti populiche cominciano a ricevere la Religione Christiana*, Rome: Dorico and Bressani, 1552, pp. 280-309. The letter is preceded by a brief introduction relating about the discovery of Japan, grouped with the letter under the title: "Copia de alcune littere del Padre Maestro Francesco Xauier & altri padri della Compagnia de Iesu del Iapon nuovamente scoperto & de Maluco tradotte in Italiano riceuute l'anno 1552".

³²² *Ibidem*.

³²³ *Diversi avisi particolari dall'Indie di Portugallo ricevuti, dall'anno 1551 fino al 1558*, cit. folio 102.

³²⁴ "Copia d'vna lettera del P.M. Francesco Xauier, preposito provinciale della Compagnia di Iesu nell'Indie, per tutti quelli di essa Compagnia in Europa, riceuuta nel mese di Marzo. 1553", cit.

[Giapan] is an island close to China, where everyone is gentile, and not Moor, nor Jew; and they are very curious people, and eager to learn new things about God. [...] Three young men from that island of Giapan are in the College of Holy Faith in Goa, and they are people of good costumes, and of great intellect, especially Paolo. [...] Paolo, in eight months, has learned to read, write and speak Portuguese [...] I have great hope in God Our Lord that we will manage to make many Christians in Giapan, and I am resolved to go.³²⁵

Xavier proceeds to illustrate his plans for the voyage, accounting, in particular, for how he intends to travel first to Japan's "King" and then to their Colleges, where they preach, allegedly, a doctrine imported from China. He adds that he will send, together with the manuscript of the letter, a sample of Japanese writing by the hands of Paolo (which is not, however, reproduced in any form in the published work).

The letter is followed by Nicolao Lancillotto's account of Yajirō's report on Japan, which represents the earliest full-fledged description of the archipelago to have been circulated, in print, in Europe. The account opens with a rough description of the political system of the country – presented as an island governed by a single "King", who

³²⁵ "[Il Giapan] è una isola presso alla Cina dove sono tutti gentili, non Mori, né Giudei, & gente molto curiosa, & desiderosa di sapere cose nuove di Dio [...] Sono tre gioveni nel Collegio di Santa Fede di Goa di quell'isola di Giapan [...] & narrano gran cose di quelle parti del Giapan, & sono persone di buoni costumi, & grande ingegno, spetialmente Paolo. [...] Paolo in otto mesi imparò a leggere, scrivere, e parlar Portuguese [...]. Ho grande speranza e questa tutta in Dio Signor Nostro che s'habbiano da fare molti Christiani nel Giapan, & sono risoluto di andare." "Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan", cit., folio 15.

commands fourteen “Lords similar to Dukes, and Counts”³²⁶ (who in turn exert control on dominions passed on in hereditary fashion, from first-born to first-born). The King, called *Voo* (in all probability a rendition of the term ̄ 王)³²⁷ possesses, much like the Pope in Europe, spiritual authority over Japan, but leaves all practical matters of government, such as war and the administration of justice, in the hands of the man called *Gozo*. In spite of being in all respects the effective ruler of the island, the *Gozo* remains, nonetheless, subject to the *Voo* and can be stripped of his power by him at any moment.

The report proceeds to give some examples of the workings of the Japanese justice system, as applied to both life in the court and the common population.³²⁸ The rest of the account is devoted to a (pretty miscellaneous) description of Japanese religion – in the sketchy and for the most grossly inaccurate terms in which it had been relayed by

³²⁶ “Signori simili a Duchi, & Conti”. *Ibidem*, folio 18.

³²⁷ In this case, the term seems to be referred to the Emperor, while the title *Gozo*, which, as suggested by Lach, could be a rendition of *gosho* 御所 (the term indicating the imperial palace, which had come to be applied to the ruler himself) is probably referred to the shogun (Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., p. 661). Actually, the problem of the double sovereignty in Japan, touched upon in several passages of the Jesuit reports, is not treated with much terminological coherence. Cosme de Torres would write of the dichotomy between the *Zazzo* (the spiritual authority, i.e., presumably the emperor) and the *Voo* (the shogun), who in turn delegated his power to the *Gunge*, *Enge* and *Doxo* (“Copia di una del Giappone del padre Cosimo di Torres, per il padre Antonio di Quadros Prouinciale dell’India à 8. di Ottobre 1561”, in *Nuovi Avisi dell’Indie di Portogallo, venuti nuouamente dalli R. Padri della Compagnia di Giesu, & tradotti dalla lingua spagnuola nella italiana. Quarta parte*, Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1565). In the “Lettera Annale del Giappone delli 24. Di Febraio. 1589” the emperor would be referred to as the *Dairi*, whose sovereignty in Japan had been stolen “500 years ago” (in *Lettere Del Giappone, Et Della Cina De Gl’Anni M.D.LXXXIX & M.D.XC: Scritte al R. P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu*, Rome: Zannetti, 1591). On the representation of dual sovereignty in Japan in European literature, see Thomas Baty, “The Literary Introduction of Japan to Europe”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 7 No. 1/2, 1951, pp. 24-39. In later English sources, the term “king” would be often used in reference to the *daimyō*, and “Emperour” in reference to the shogun, as we’ll see in the next chapter.

³²⁸ The letter relates, for example, about the legitimacy of murder from the part of the husband in case of adultery. See “Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan”, cit., folio 19-20.

Yajirō. Three kind of religious groups (composed of both men and women) are said to exist in Japan,³²⁹ and to conduct a monastic kind of life,³³⁰ both inside and outside the cities. They are celibate, shave their heads and beards, eat in communities and refrain from eating meat, so as to avoid temptation (and sometimes completely abstain from food, much as the Fathers). They preach frequently, in a way much similar to the Europeans. Their prayers, apparently unintelligible to the ones who are not educated among their ranks (such as Yajirō), are described as, nonetheless, able to move their hearers to deep emotion. They “preach only one God, creator of all things, and they preach Purgatory, Paradise and Hell [...] and that [God] they call Doniche”.³³¹ Such teachings have been delivered to them by “Xaqua” (Shaka), the founder of Buddhism, and carried from China to Japan, together with five main moral precepts (“the first, not to kill, the second, not to steal, the thirs, not to fornicate, the fourth, not to be disturbed by things without remedy, the fifth, to forgive insults”).³³²

³²⁹ Only a superficial description is given of the three religious groups, who are distinguished on the base of the colour of their clothes (black and grey) and of the enumeration of their alleged virtues and vices (such as the addiction to sodomy, or the tendency of the priest and nuns to entertain sexual intercourse). The text doesn't leave, in this sense, much way for the identification of the Buddhist sects it may be referring to. It might be noted, as underlined by Robert Richmond Ellis, that the accusation of sodomy was one that was often addressed by the Spaniards, and by Spanish literature on the New World, to native Americans, so as to justify their territorial conquests on a moral ground. It made sense, therefore, that the Jesuits would employ the same accusation so as to disqualify their religious opponents. The same allegation would be repeated, as we'll see, by Xavier himself, as well as by many later Jesuit writers. See Robert Richmond Ellis, “The Best Thus Far Discovered”, cit.

³³⁰ “They have monasteries, like friars” (“Hanno monasterji à modo di frati”), “Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan”, cit., folio 20.

³³¹ “Predicano un solo Dio creator di tutte le cose, predicano il Purgatorio, Paradiso, & Inferno [...] il quale [Iddio] chiamano Doniche”. *Ibidem*, folio 20-21.

³³² “Il primo che non ammazzassino, il secondo che non rubassino, il terzo che non fornicassino, il quarto che non si pigliassero passione delle cose che non hanno remedio, il quinto che perdonassino l'ingiuria.” *Ibidem*, folio 22.

The report proceeds to the description of a number of Buddhist practices (such as the performing of prayers and penances) as well as of other Japanese costumes supposedly bearing strong resemblances with European ones – which leads the writer to conclude that “in their costumes, and vivacity of mind, they [the Japanese] are really similar to us.”³³³ The resemblance is both intellectual and physical: the Japanese are described as “white”, as the Europeans, and sharing similar costumes and the same way of conducting government, as well as a love for virtue and literary arts. The author even ventures to express the idea that the Gospel might have been preached in the country in the past, by some of the “Armenian missionaries” that had spread primitive Christianity in China during the Middle Ages. The report closes, consequently, by evaluating the chances of diffusion of Buddhism in Japan with great optimism.

The report from Kagoshima relates of the events leading to the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Japan. It opens by narrating the tortuous navigation of the small group of missionaries from Malacca to the Japanese archipelago,³³⁴ and proceeds to relate about Xavier’s arrival in Kagoshima, and about the warm reception he and the other members of his group were granted in the city. Xavier illustrates his resolution to learn the Japanese language and his intention to travel to Meaco (Miyako, i.e. Kyoto), the main city of Japan – where the “King”

³³³ “Ne’ costumi, & vivacità de ingegno sono molto conformi à noi”. *Ibidem*, folio 24.

³³⁴ According to Xavier’s report, the Chinese captain of the ship procrastinated the navigation to Japan with a number of unarranged detours, so that the missionaries ran the risk of having to spend the winter in China. See “Copia de una lettera del Padre Maestro Francesco Xauier dal Giapan indrizata al Colleggio della scolari de detta Compagnia in Coymbra di Portugallo”, cit., pp.282-287.

and the most important Lords reside, and where the Buddhist “universities” can be found.³³⁵

The letter includes also Xavier’s earliest first-hand assessment of the Japanese population. Much in accord with the tone of his previous letter, his description sounds remarkably optimistic and admiring. He describes the Japanese people as “the best that have yet been discovered”:³³⁶ good in conversation, righteous and not malicious, and respecting honour more than anything else – even more than richness, as the Japanese are generally poor, but neither the noblemen nor the members of the lower classes are shamed for that. The noblemen are, apparently, held in great esteem and only marry among themselves. They always carry swords and daggers, and so does every member of the population, ever since the age of fourteen. They are moderate in eating and drinking, and very healthy, so that they usually live up to old age. The majority of the population is literate and can read and write. They only take one wife, and rarely steal, as their justice system is really strict.

Xavier expresses optimism in regard to the possibility of evangelization, as the Japanese seem open and curious towards the Christian doctrine, and better disposed toward it than any other infidel population he has met. They “take pleasure in hearing things congruent with their reason, and while they are not exempt from vices and sins, when they are shown reason and it is demonstrated to them

³³⁵ Xavier writes about a main university inside the city, hosting the five main Buddhist colleges and more than two hundred Buddhist houses, and of five more, located in the outskirts of the city. See *Ibidem*, pp. 303-304.

³³⁶ “The people we have conversed with is the best that has yet been discovered, and it appears to me that among the infidels we won’t be able to find a better one”. (“La gente che habbiamo conversato, è la migliore che in sin’adesso si sia scoperta & fra gli infideli me pare non se troveria altra migliore”). “. *Ibidem*, p. 288.

that they are acting wrong, they accept it”.³³⁷ Xavier only has reproaches to make when it comes to the country’s religious groups, that are held in great esteem by the common population, but are prone to vices such as sodomy and promiscuity, and unapologetic about it.³³⁸

Very similar in tone and content is the later account from Cochin – if only slightly more moderated in its enthusiasm, and reflecting, conversely, a deepened knowledge of the archipelago.

Xavier reports once again of the warm welcome he received in Kagoshima, and proceeds to a narration of what followed that first encounter with the Japanese population, and with a detailed narration of the earlier phases of the Jesuit mission in Japan. He reports about the departure from Kagoshima (where Paolo was left behind to preach), the visit to Miyako, the establishment of footholds in Hirado and Yamaguchi and the encounter with the “Duke of Bungo”. He intersects the narration with accounts of the contemporary political events in Japan he assisted to, such as the shift in power in Yamaguchi, which led to the establishment of the brother of Ōtomo Yoshishige as *daimyō*. He dispels the belief expressed in Lancillotto’s account that the Japanese might have been converted to Christianity before, declaring that no one there seems to possess any kind of previous knowledge about Christ.

³³⁷ “Si dilettao de sentire cose conforme a la loro ragione, & benché siano vitii e peccati fra loro, quando lo danno ragione, mostrando essere mal fatto quello che fanno, l’acceptano.” *Ibidem*, p. 290.

³³⁸ “[When reproached] they laugh about it, not ashamed to be reproached about such ugly sins”. (“[Quando vengono ripresi] ridono di quello, non si vergognando di essere ripresi di tanti brutti peccati”), *ibidem*, p. 290. There are, on the other hands, exceptions. Xavier relates, for example, of his friendship with the Buddhist priest Ninxit (Ninshitsu 忍室, abbot of the Fukushōji. On his relationship with Xavier, see Johannes Laures, “Notes on the Death of Ninshitsu, Xavier’s Bonze Friend”, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 8 No. ½. 1952, pp. 407-411.

The report includes also a new general description of the country, “discovered eight or nine years before by the Portuguese”. Xavier depicts it as a large archipelago, united by a common language, which (in spite of his own difficulties) he deems as “not hard to learn”.³³⁹ He describes the Japanese as honourable, exceedingly skilled in war (and with weapons in general), and very civil towards each other, if not always towards strangers. He reports that they have but one king,³⁴⁰ who, however, has not been obeyed for 150 years, so that the country is affected by a state of continuous internecine war.

The major section of the report is, once again, focused on religion. Xavier describes the Buddhist monks and nuns as divided into two main groups (respectively dressed in black and grey, and generally hostile towards each other). A total of nine sects exists, among which the population is allowed to choose freely, so that sometimes members of a same family belong to different sects. The doctrine professed by the monks and nuns is said to have been imported from China, where it was preached by men, who “were great penitents, more than 1000, 2000 and 3000 years [ago] and whose names are Xaca and Amedia”.³⁴¹ Every sect has different moral precepts, but all of them preach a number of common rules of behaviour, which are not to kill, not to eat anything that is dead, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to lie, not to drink wine.

Xavier reports of several doctrinal confrontations with the monks, as well as of the main doubts and objections addressed to him by the

³³⁹ “In tutta questa terra non c’è più d’una lingua: e questa non è molto difficile da apparare.” “Copia d’vna lettera del P.M. Francesco Xauier, preposito provinciale della Compagnia di Iesu nell’Indie, per tutti quelli di essa Compagnia in Europa”, cit., folio 120.

³⁴⁰ Probably referring, in this instance, to the shogun, more than to the emperor.

³⁴¹ “Huomini, che fecero gran penitentie, piu di 1000, 2000, & 3000 anni li cui nomi sono Xaca & Amedia” (Shaka and Amida). “Copia d’vna lettera del P.M. Francesco Xauier, preposito provinciale della Compagnia di Iesu nell’Indie, per tutti quelli di essa Compagnia in Europa”, cit., folio 121.

common population.³⁴² The overall judgement of the religious groups is not better than it was in the first letter. They are said to be prone to vice, and also to enrich themselves at the expenses of the common population, falsely promising to liberate them from their sins, and save their souls from hell, in exchange for money donations – so that those who are poor are not put in the condition of being able to save themselves.³⁴³

On the other hand, his general good impression on the Japanese population is not shaken. He insists, once again, on the diffused literacy, remarking how the majority of the population, men and women, can read and write, especially the aristocrats and the merchants. And he describes them as “more obedient to reason, than any other Infidels I have met, and so curious and ready to ask, so eager to know, that they never cease to question”.³⁴⁴ Such assessment leaves him, upon his departure for China, optimistic about the chances of success of the Christian religion in Japan.

Xavier’s letters are a fundamental instrument to understand the basic premises on which missionary activity was being settled in Japan.

While offering a punctual narration of the early developments of the mission, it is quite evident that they can’t be relied upon as an in-depth source of information on Japan per se. Xavier’s sketchy depiction of the Japanese population, traced in the form of a list inherently attributed qualities, doesn’t really do justice to the complexity of Japanese culture and society in the Sengoku era. In spite of the reports’ insistent focus

³⁴² In particular, the question of the incompatibility of the idea of an all-mighty Lord and the existence of evil in the world (and, consequently, of a Hell without return). *Ibidem*, folio 122.

³⁴³ *Ibidem*, folio 122. Xavier was referring to the practice of almsgiving.

³⁴⁴ “Più obbedienti alla ragione, che gente infidele, che già abbia mai visto, e tanto curiosi e importuni in dimandare, tanto desiderosi del sapere, che mai finiscono di interrogare.” *Ibidem*, folio 126.

on religion, moreover, what emerges from the letters is merely a superficial knowledge of the Japanese religious background: while Xavier attacks the Buddhist bonzes on a moral level, he never truly challenges them on a theological level. Moreover, he doesn't seem to take notice of Shinto, either as a separated cult, or as an element of Buddhism.³⁴⁵

Xavier's letters are, however, highly informative in another respect. They point to how the Jesuits – and through them European readers – came to conceive Japan, and provide the first sketch of an imaginary that would influence the European literary production on the Japanese archipelago well into the seventeenth century. They, conversely, reveal “as much about mid-sixteenth-century Europe, in the throes of religious reformation and imperialist expansion, as about Japan itself.”³⁴⁶ They highlight, in other words, how the Jesuits perceived both Japan and themselves, in relation to the archipelago and their mission.

3.2.4. The published Jesuit letter-books: shaping an imaginary of Japan

The idea of the Japanese as a people in possess of “reason”, one that recurs in Xavier's writings, carried a philosophical weight deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, and, in particular, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

“Reason” had been identified by Aquinas as the defining characteristic of “humanity” – the absolute element that distinguished

³⁴⁵ Possibly, because the idea of religious syncretism was alien to a man whose background lied in Reformation Europe. Robert Richmond Ellis, ““The Best Thus Far Discovered””, cit., p. 160.

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

human beings from animals. According to Thomist thought, all people in possess of the “right reason” shared a common intellectual and moral framework (which he identified as “natural law”) – from which the Christian religious system was assumed to directly derive. The logical consequence to this assumption was that all beings deemed as rational were considered naturally prone, if shown the way by means of rational instruction, to convert. On the contrary, people conceived as not “rational” should, in order to be saved, be forced into the adoption of civil customs, and into conversion.³⁴⁷

This theoretical framework functioned as a fundamental background for the elaboration of the Jesuit cosmography in the second half of the sixteenth century. As illustrated by Massarella,³⁴⁸ such influence clearly emerges in the writings of one of the most important Jesuit theorists – the missionologist José de Acosta.

In his 1588 work, *De procuranda indorum salute*, Acosta classified the “barbarian” inhabitants of the world outside Europe according to

³⁴⁷ The notion of “right reason”, as expressed by Thomas Aquinas, had come to play a central role in the debate that had aroused, in the aftermath of Da Gama’s and Christopher Columbus’ voyages, among the various Christian orders engaged in evangelization overseas. The confrontation had first sparked in the New World – precisely, in the American island of Hispaniola, in 1511 – between the Dominican Order, and the Franciscan Order, that detained religious monopoly under the Spanish settlers. The Dominicans had accused the Spaniards, and the Franciscans that supported them, of maintaining an inexcusably tyrannical attitude towards the natives. They had remarked that the natives were loaded with such amounts of work, that they didn’t even have them the time to receive a proper Christian instruction. Fray Montesinos, spokesman of the Dominicans, had backed his accusation by appealing to the basic humanity of the natives, arguing that their possess of “right reason” put them on the same grounds as the Spanish conquerors. The Spanish settlers and Franciscans, from their part, had refuted the stance of the Dominicans, precisely by diminishing the humanity of their subjects: they deemed them as natural slaves, who could not be guided to conversion by instruction, but only by coercion. They even openly compared them to animals, saying they would only repeat prayers mechanically, “like parrots”. By the 1550s, the confrontation had been taken to Europe, were it had also come to revolve around the newly encountered Asian populations. See in this regard Derek Massarella, “Revisiting Japan’s “Christian Century””, *Casahistoria*, January 2008. Available at <http://www.casahistoria.net/japanchristaincentury.pdf> (last access: October 10, 2012).

³⁴⁸ Derek Massarella, “Some reflections on Identity Formation in East Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, cit.

three different categories: those who lived in stable and settled societies, and used letters; the unlettered, who nevertheless lived in organized societies; and, lastly, nomadic tribes, lacking both orderly cities and literacy, and living in an unsettled and ungoverned fashion – in other words, in an almost bestial state. In the first category, he included most of the populations residing in the East Indies, including the Japanese. He described such populations as not departing much “from right reason and the common usage of humanity”, and having

a stable form of government [respublica], public laws, fortified cities respected magistrates, secure and prosperous commerce, and that which is most important, use and knowledge of letters, for wherever there are books and written monuments, the people are more humane and politic. To this class belong in the first rank the Chinese. [...] Following them are the Japanese and many other provinces of East India.³⁴⁹

As well as to Thomist thought, Acosta’s categorization referred to notions of “otherness” well established in European intellectual discourse: the basic opposition between civilized and uncivilized (or barbarian), a concept which could be traced back as far as Aristotle. As underlined by Michael T. Ryan, by the sixteenth century, the idea of paganism – the concept of “gentiles” – had become central to such opposition:

³⁴⁹ Acosta is cited as quoted in *ibidem*, p. 144. In the last category, Acosta numbered instead most of the populations of the New World, and some of the Moluccas. In the second, the Aztecs and the Incas, and some lesser kingdoms and principalities.

The appeal of paganism also lay in the fact that there was an enormous body of literature on the subject going back to Patristic antiquity. This literature, which grew to epidemic proportions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was rich and broad enough to embrace the new peoples in Asia and the Americas. It provided a vocabulary for understanding and describing not simply pagan religion but paganism as an entire organization of life: Since the eighth century, the term *gentiles* had been used synonymously with *barbari* by a Christian Europe still quite vulnerable to barbarian invasion. There was no problem in seeing exotics through this lens since paganism, like Christianity, was a transhistorical category. It was thus more than a merely self-validating category like "barbarian" or "wild man" or "savage." Finally, the fact that exotics were pagans served to guarantee their humanity in a crucial way: They could and, according to Biblical prophecies, would be converted to Christianity.³⁵⁰

While paganism functioned as an inclusive category of otherness, however, it didn't work as the only distinctive element in Acosta's rank of civilizations. In a way that called back to the humanist moral values that were at the core of the Jesuit approach to religion (and that, in many ways, singled them out among the Christian orders) he also pointed to political and social structures, as well as to literacy, as signs of civilization.

Corollary to this hierarchical vision of world civilizations was also the idea that different strategies had to be applied for the conversion of different populations. Acosta underlined that the only way to bring

³⁵⁰ Michael T. Ryan, "Assimilating New Worlds in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, 1981, pp. 519-538, p. 525.

societies of the lowest level to adhere to natural law was to force them to adopt civilized manners and then coerce them into the “true” religion. Illiterate communities with more complex social organizations, while being submitted to a strict regime, in order to be brought to the Christian truth, should instead not be forced into conversion: compromises could be made with their customs, as long as they did not depart from “natural law”. Societies belonging to the highest level of civilization, on the other hand, had already, in Acosta’s eyes, basically everything in common with Europe in terms of adherence to natural law. The only step to be taken with them would be to guide them to the Christian Revelation by means of reason.

That did not mean that missionaries were supposed to overlook the existence of differences. Quite the contrary, it meant that they had to acknowledge them: accept that natural law identified with a universal ideal of humanity that could not be strictly equated to European costumes, and which, on the contrary, could find expression into different societal forms. The missionaries operating in the East Indies were supposed to learn about the specific forms they were dealing with, coming to understand the languages and customs of the people they aimed at converting, in order for their efforts to bear success.

This was also, to the core, the moving principle behind the strategy of adaptation adopted by Valignano (as described above): the fact that Japanese society responded in all ways to natural law meant that the Japanese were *already* as apt as Europeans to receive the Christian Revelation; that they shared with the Europeans a common intellectual framework, where arguments favourable to Christianity could be presented, discussed, and understood as true. The Japanese people, therefore, did not need to be induced to adopt European manners, in order to be converted. On the contrary, it was up to the

Jesuits to accommodate and compromise with local customs. Missionaries were to acquire knowledge and understanding of the Japanese language and manners, in order to grasp the best ways to rationally demonstrate to the Japanese people the Christian doctrine.

While, in concrete, not all the Jesuit missionaries stationed in the East Indian colleges smoothly adhered to this line of thought,³⁵¹ this stance became the basic premise for the management of the Japanese mission in the sixteenth century. Much of Acosta's evaluation of Japan, actually, relied on what others missionaries, who had experienced life in the archipelago and direct contact with the Japanese, had written before him – including Xavier and Valignano themselves.

Xavier was no theorist of the mission like Acosta, but his descriptions of the Japanese deeply resonated with the assessment of the archipelago included in the *Procuranda*: the stress on the Japanese political and justice system, the focus on the complexity of social structures and usages, the insistence on the literacy of the Japanese and on their rational and inquisitive nature – all elements that, in the eyes of Xavier, put Japan on the high ranks of an hypothetical hierarchy of civilization, and that led him to deem the Japanese as the “best people that have yet been discovered.”

In Xavier's (and his contemporaries') reports, Japan is not (or not mainly) described for itself: the stress in the writing is put on confronting Japanese practices, manners and customs with European ones. And, in the framework above presented, it should not surprise that similarities are highlighted as much as, if not more than differences. This attitude is best exemplified in a quote from the report by Nicolao Lancillotto on Yajirō's description of Japan:

³⁵¹ As demonstrated, for example, by Valignano's debate with Francisco Cabral.

These people, being in the same climate as we are, are white like us, and of the same stature; they are discreet, noble people, and they love virtue and the literary arts, and hold scholars in great consideration. Their costumes, and their way of conducting government both in peace and war are similar to ours.³⁵²

Later missionaries' writings (while reflecting a progressively deepening knowledge of Japanese culture and society) seem to operate in a very similar mind-set. In a 1554 letter, for example, Pietro d'Alcacena, once again narrating of the religious debates in which the Jesuit Fathers usually engaged with the Japanese Christians, concluded that the Japanese were "such Christians that [...] I couldn't tell the difference between them and our brothers".³⁵³ In a 1561 letter, father Cosme de Torres, compared the Japanese inclination towards honour to that of the Ancient Romans, commenting on how such attitude was what made them respect parents and friends, in spite of their lack of fear in God.³⁵⁴ Alessandro Valignano, in his unpublished work, the *Historia*

³⁵² "Questi popoli trovandosi sotto il medesimo clima che noi, sono ancora bianchi, & della medesima statura, è gente discreta, nobile, & che ama la virtù, & lettere, e tenendo in gran venerazione i letterati. I costumi, & modo di reggere la repubblica in pace, & in guerra sono conformi à nostri." "Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan", cit., folio 25.

³⁵³ "Christiani tali, che [...] non potrei far differenza da loro à nostri fratelli". "Lettera di Pietro d'Alcacena della compagnia di Iesu, uenuta dal Giapon alli scolari del collegio di detta compagnia in Coimbra, fatta in Goa. 1554", in *Diversi avvisi particolari dall'Indie di Portogallo ricevuti, dall'anno 1551 fino al 1558*, cit. folio 177.

³⁵⁴ The comparison – a subtle way to underline the basic similarity between Japanese and Europeans, where the fundamental element of distinction, as it had been in the case of Ancient Romans, was the lack of access to the "true" faith – held even more weight considering how the Jesuits looked up to the Ancient Romans as models of eloquence. See "Copia di una del Giappone del padre Cosimo di Torres, per il padre Antonio di Quadros Prouinciale dell'India à 8. di Ottobre 1561", cit. ("La gente è molto bellicosa, simile agli antichi romani per le questioni d'onore. Proprio l'onore è il loro principale idolo, e ne derivano guerre e uccisioni, tanto che arrivano anche a uccidere se stessi quando ritengono di averlo perso. Per lo stesso motivo evitano di fare cose come rubare e portare via la donna d'altri, e dunque, nonostante non

del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64), stated that the Japanese excelled “not only all other Oriental people, but surpass the European as well.”³⁵⁵ This quote would be a much cited one in contemporary published literature on Japan. Giovanni Pietro Maffei, for example, would include it in his *Historiarum Indicarum Libri*, first published in 1588 (which, as seen, largely drew on Valignano’s manuscript). Very similarly, in his work focused on the *Tenshō shisetsu*, Guido Gualtieri would define the Japanese as people of “good reason” (“buona ragione”), and declare that “it can’t be denied that those people are all of good and courteous nature, and have such good disposition that they are superior not only to the Indians [i.e., the inhabitants of the East Indies] but to Europeans as well”.³⁵⁶ Gualtieri also pointed to the “natural” Japanese rapidity in learning and to the general civility that, among them, characterized even the members of the lower classes – an observation that frequently recurred in the Jesuit writings.³⁵⁷

That didn’t necessarily mean that the Japanese were absolutely singled out among East Asian populations. As a result of the centrality of the Japanese mission for the Society of Jesus in the sixteenth century, Japan indeed became central to the Jesuit writings (both in

temano Dio, poiché non credono esserci altra vita la di là della presente, nondimeno per via dell’onore hanno rispetto per parenti e amici.”)

³⁵⁵ The quote is reported as cited in Rotem Kowner, “Skin as a Metaphor: Early European Racial Views on Japan, 1548–1853”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 51 No. 4, 2004, pp. 751-778, p. 755.

³⁵⁶ “Non si può negare, che quella gente non sia tutta generalmente di natura nobile e cortese, e abbia sì buon naturale, che quanto a questa parte faccia vantaggio non solo agli Indiani, ma anco a nostri Europei”. Guido Gualtieri, *Relationi della venuta de gli ambasciatori giapponesi*, cit.

³⁵⁷ Such as Xavier himself, Valignano, Frois, Torres (see for example the “Lettera scritta di Bungo nel Giappone alli padri, et fratelli che stanno in S. Paolo in Goa, nell’India à 8. di Ottobre 1561,” in *Nuovi Avisi dell’Indie di Portogallo, [...] Quarta parte*, cit., folio 9).

quantitative and qualitative terms).³⁵⁸ On the other hand, however, by the final decade of the century a growing number of authors – Jesuits and non-Jesuit alike – had come to write of the archipelago in association to its neighbouring countries. Much as Acosta had grouped Japan with the “provinces of East India”, several writers pointed to the resemblance between the Japanese and the neighbouring populations, above all in terms of physical appearance.³⁵⁹ This was the case, for example, of Juan González de Mendoza, the Augustinian author of one of the earliest full-fledged published European works on China.³⁶⁰ In the one chapter of his work focused on Japan, Mendoza, while drawing largely on the published Jesuit sources for everything else, added a personal speculation on the origin of the Japanese, that linked them directly to the Chinese population, precisely on the ground of physical similarity.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ As well as in practical matters such as the formation of a native clergy, a “privilege” reserved in the beginning only to the Japanese (and only later extended to the Chinese and Koreans). See Rotem Kowner, “Skin as a Metaphor”, cit., p. 756.

³⁵⁹ For a collection of quotes, see *ibidem*, pp. 754-756.

³⁶⁰ Juan González de Mendoza, *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China*, Roma: Bartholome Grassi, 1585 (available online at the following url: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75292n> Last access: December 29, 2012).

³⁶¹ The Japanese were said to have originated from a group of Chinese, exiled to the archipelago from the continent after a failed attempt at rebellion: “These islands are many (as aforesaid), yet are they populated with much people, who in their bodies and faces differ very little from the Chinos, although not so politike: [by the which it seemed to be true, that which is found written in the histories of the kingdom of China, saying that these Japonese in old time were Chinas, and that they came from that mightie kingdome unto these ilands. Whereas they do now dwell, for this occasion following. A kinsman of a king of China, a man of great countenance and valour, having conceived within his brest for to kill the king, and thereby to make himself lorde of the countrie, the better to put this in execution, he gave to understand of his evill intent unto others of his friends, requesting their favour to execute the same, promising that he would do his best. This being done, [...] they did promise him [...]. Their treason came to be discovered unto the king. [...] He comanded they should not die, but be banished for ever out of the kingdome, with precise band, that they, their wives and children, and all that should come of them, should for ever live on those ilands that are now called Iapon, which were at that time desert and without people.” The quotation is taken from the 1588 English translation of the work, as included in Robert Park and Sir George Thomas Staunton

It is worth noting that the Japanese, as well as the neighbouring populations to whom they were physically compared, were equated to the Europeans also in terms of skin colour. The description of the Japanese as “white” (that traced back to Garcia Escalante De Alvarado’s account, as well as, as shown by the above quote, to the earlier Jesuits) remained a recurring element in the representation of the Japanese population throughout the “Christian century”, not only in missionaries’ writings, but also in the works of early Dutch and English writers.³⁶²

Not by chance, Nicolao Lancillotto explicitly associated the whiteness of the Japanese people to climate. The argument recalled a intellectual debate which was in full heat in Europe by the time of the arrival of the Jesuits on the archipelago: the one between supporters of a “polygenist” theory of humankind and supporters of the idea of “human unity”. The debate was part of the European intellectuals’ way to cope with the new “reality” of the populations of the African, Asian and American continents. Theorists of the first group argued that the “new” populations encountered, displaying such a different range of physical characteristics from the Europeans, had to be part of a different ancestry altogether: they had to be, in other words, not “sons of Adams”, and therefore not truly part of the human race. Opponents of the theory insisted instead on the unity of humankind, attributing differences in physical appearances to the effects of climate and environment. It made sense for Jesuits theorists to fall in the second group, considering the view of the world and humanity expressed in Acosta’s writings. And, indeed, the “polygenist” theory had officially

(ed.), *The history of the great and mighty kingdom of China and the situation thereof*, London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1854, vol. 2, chapter XIX, pp. 294-302.

³⁶² See the quotes included in Rotem Kowner, “Skin as a Metaphor”, cit., p. 754.

been rejected by the Roman Church with a Bull issued by Pope Paul III in 1537, asserting the humanity of the populations of the New World.³⁶³

On the other hand, environmental motivations were often coupled, by the same Christian writers, with less “neutral” explanations connected to biblical tradition – the “Ham” curse and the idea of divine punishment were used, for example, as an explanation for the skin colour of black Africans.³⁶⁴ In the same way, the idea of “whiteness”, associated with the Japanese, did seem to be imply an inherent (positive) value judgement for the Jesuit writers. At least, enough for Valignano to write

Withal there is this difference between the Indian and the Japanese Christians [...] each one of the former was converted from some individual ulterior motive, and *since they are blacks, and of small sense*, they are subsequently very difficult to improve and turn into good Christians; whereas the Japanese usually become converted, not on some whimsical individual ulterior motive (since it is their suzerains who expect to benefit thereby and not them themselves) but only in obedience to their lord’s command; and *since they are white and of good understanding* and behaviour, and greatly driven to outward show, they readily frequent the churches and sermons, and when they are instructed they become very good Christians, albeit the lords

³⁶³ For an overview of the debate and in general on sixteenth-century European views on race, see Gary P. Leupp, *Interracial Intimacy in Japan: Western Men and Japanese Women, 1543-1900*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003, pp. 14-16.

³⁶⁴ For an in-depth analysis of environmental theories and the use of Bible references to explain diversity, see Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011 (c. 1964), pp. 207-294.

who have an eye on the main chance and are so preoccupied
with warfare are usually the worst.³⁶⁵

Of course, in the embryonic ethnical constructions built by late sixteenth/early seventeenth century Jesuit writers, physical characteristics were a factor still too largely overshadowed by cultural and religious considerations to constitute a “racial” discourse, in the modern sense of the term.³⁶⁶

Surely, though, the writings were a rudimentary expression of the mechanisms of representation highlighted by Edward Said in his well-known critical essay on the European orientalist literary tradition: they typified a “way of coming to terms with the Orient [...] based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience”.³⁶⁷ The “Japan” pictured by the Jesuits was very different from the mythical

³⁶⁵ Emphasis added. The excerpt, from the *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, is cited as quoted in Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, cit., p. 94. (originally from Georg Schurhammer, *Shin-tō : der Weg der Götter in Japan*, Bonn , Leipzig : Kurt Schroeder, 1923).

³⁶⁶ I.e. in the sense attributed to “race” by the discourses of Social Darwinism, where “race refers to alleged biological and physical characteristics, the most obvious of which is skin pigmentation. These attributes, frequently linked to “intelligence” and “capabilities” are used to rank “racialized” groups in a hierarchy of social and material superiority and subordination.” Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, London: Sage, 2011, p. 253. See *ibidem*, pp. 253-288 for a full-fledged overview on the notions of race and ethnicity and the ongoing scholarly debate about them.

³⁶⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage books, 1979, p.1. Of course, the dynamics between the Jesuit writers and the Japanese population were very different from those between the “Orient” and the “West” described by Said. The Jesuits operated in a context where they held no material power, and from an intellectual standpoint that advocated “reciprocity not hegemony”, very different from “the assumptions behind the hierarchies of peoples that emerge in the nineteenth century.” (Derek Massarella, “Some reflections on Identity Formation in East Asia”, cit.). In a way, the Jesuit literary corpus on Japan anticipated the seventeenth and eighteenth century tradition of European Sinophilism, which, as underlined by Ho-fung Hung contradicts much of Said’s assumptions about the centrality of the idea of Western superiority in European Orientalist tradition as a whole. See in this regard. Ho-Fung Hung, “Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conceptions of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 21 No. 3, 2003, pp. 254-280.

land of Marco Polo – it was now a representation born of factual, direct observation. But it was still, in a different way, also an intellectual product, that took part in a fundamental process of self-definition from the part of the Jesuit missionaries, and through them, of their European readers. The letters did not respond (nor aimed to respond), in the first place, to objectivity in the modern sense of the term. As already mentioned, they were not conceived simply as a way to transmit information, but as rethorical devices – meant to attract the interest and support of the European lay and ecclesiastic authorities toward the mission. Moreover, they interpreted and assimilated Japan through categories that, as illustrated above, were still deeply rooted in the Christian religion (and largely stemmed from a Eurocentric kind of vision).

With all the reservations of the sort, on the other hand, the Jesuit reports do provide some of the most rich and informative accounts to have survived to our date (in any language) on both the history of Christian mission, and the history of the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Tokugawa periods.

Each of the annual letters includes detailed accounts of the number of conversions, of the names of new, eminent Christians, of the deaths and acquisitions of new members in the mission, of the construction of houses, colleges, churches and seminaries, and of the intercourse between the missionaries and Japanese authorities – which came to include, at a later date, also the narration of the persecutions.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ Actually, from around 1610 basically only information about the persecutions was relayed to Europe. From 1610 to 1615 little to no report was produced, and the letters from 1615 are heavily focused on the arrests, the martyrdoms, the occasional apostasies, without adding much to the already formed corpus of information about Japan made available to Europe. An overview of the contents of the later reports is included in Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*,

At the same time, the letters provide also a rich source of collateral information about Japan per se. The longer and more thoroughly the strategy of adaptation was applied, the more the missionaries came to know about Japanese culture and society – a knowledge which was mirrored in the way the reports sent to Europe were composed. Letters from the 1550s, 1560s and 1570s already appear to be of a more informative nature than Xavier's reports. The range of the matters treated by the accounts was, then, further expanded under the influence of Valignano, and particularly through the writings of one of the major interpreters of his vision – the main chronicler of the mission, Luis Frois. Ever since 1579, the length of the annual letters significantly increased and the reports came to include detailed accounts focusing singularly on all the different regions in which the Jesuit seminaries and residences were located.

Offering a complete overview of the information about Japan contained in the reports is not easy – scattered as it is among narrations of more strictly mission-related matters. A most useful instrument to grasp the quality and amount of such knowledge is provided however by Michael Cooper, with his anthology *They came to Japan*,³⁶⁹ a collection of excerpts extracted from the missionaries reports,³⁷⁰ aimed at providing “a picture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japanese life as seen through the eyes of foreign merchants and missionaries”.³⁷¹ The selected passages, indeed, open a big window on life in Japan in the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Togukawa periods, as depicted through the words of the missionaries. The work, moreover,

Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 4: East Asia, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 1842-1843.

³⁶⁹ Michael Cooper, *They came to Japan - An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640*, cit.

³⁷⁰ As well as a, more limited, number of excerpts of merchants' reports. The work doesn't limit itself to published works, but includes also excerpts of unpublished histories, such as Frois' one.

³⁷¹ Michael Cooper, *They came to Japan*, cit., p. X.

provides a useful working model to catalogue the information included in the reports.

Basing loosely on such model, the contents of the reports may be grouped into six main categories:

1. General assessment of the Japanese population and of Japan (information about the geography, climate, resources and political structure of the archipelago). Most notably, the annual letter of 1579, which somehow sets up the tone and structure for the reports in the “post-Valignano” era, includes a long description of Japan’s political outline, introducing the reader to the warring state of Japan, and to the internal power divisions in the three main islands of the archipelago.³⁷²
2. Descriptions of Japanese religion – in considerably more complete terms than in the earlier reports by Xavier. Already by 1561, Father Cosme De Torres could provide a much more in-depth picture of Buddhism, and an introduction to the beliefs of Shinto.³⁷³ Several letters reported also of religious customs, such as funeral rites.³⁷⁴
3. Descriptions of Japanese cities, ceremonies and art forms. One significant example, is the annual letter by Father Gaspar Vilela of 1561, which includes an extensive description of the city of Kyoto,

³⁷² “Lettera Annuale Del P. Francesco Carrion Al P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu dal Giappone l’anno 1579”, in *Alcune Lettere delle cose del Giappone. Dell’anno 1579. Insino al 1581*, Rome: Zannetti, 1584.

³⁷³ See “Copia di una del Giappon del padre Cosimo di Torres, per il padre Antonio di Quadros Prouinciale dell’India à 8. di Ottobre 1561”, cit. For an overview on the encounter between early modern Christians and Shinto and Buddhism, see Notto R. Thelle, “The Christian encounter with Japanese Buddhism”, in Mark R. Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 227-247 and John Breen, “Shinto and Christianity. A History of Conflict and Compromise”, in *ibidem*, pp. 249-276.

³⁷⁴ See for example the “Lettera scritta di Bungo nel Giappon alli padri, et fratelli che stanno in S. Paolo in Goa, nell’India à 8. di Ottobre 1561”, cit.

and of the celebrations for the Gion *matsuri* and the Obon *matsuri*.³⁷⁵

4. Information on Japanese society: descriptions of political structures, family relationships and the justice system (as seen above), as well as information about the different social classes, with their customs (eating habits, clothes, housing, etiquette) and mutual relationships. The reports are not particularly informative in regards to the marginalized classes of Japan, even though they do mention them.³⁷⁶ Much more weight is given to the warring aristocracy, with whom the missionaries maintained a regular intercourse (in accord to their strategy of approaching the authorities first, so as to get through to the common population).³⁷⁷
5. Narrations of Japanese history before the arrival of the Fathers on the archipelago. In reality, though, the reports show little interest in

³⁷⁵ “Lettera del padre Gaspar Villela, scritta dal Meaco città de Giappon alli 17. de Agosto 1561. alli padri et fratelli della compagnia di Giasu”, in *Nuovi avisi dell’Indie di Portogallo*, cit. Another even more rich description of Kyoto is included in a later report by Luis Frois, the “Copia di una del P. Luigi Froes à 14. d’aprile del 1581. Scritta in Meaco ad altri della compagnia nell’istesso Giappone quali conosceuano le genti, & intendeuano la lengua”, in *Alcune Lettere delle cose del Giappone. Dell’anno 1579. Insino al 1581*, cit.

³⁷⁶ Frois writes, for example, of the Eta as the “lowest social class of Japan”, whose job is to “skin dead animals and to act as executioners”. (cited as quoted in Michael Cooper, *They came to Japan*, cit., p. 54)

³⁷⁷ Understandably, much space is assigned to unifiers of Japan. The annual letter of 1580, for example, includes a description of the castle of Azuchi (“Lettera annale del Padre Lorenzo Mexia al Padre Generale della Compagnia di Giesu dal Giappone l’anno 1580”, in *Alcune Lettere delle cose del Giappone. Dell’anno 1579. Insino al 1581*, cit.). The narration of Nobunaga’s death, in the 1583 annual letter, is coupled with a lengthy description of Nobunaga’s character, of his history of conquest, and of his relationship with his vassals – with a description of the embryonic form of the *Sankinkōtai* practice (*Avisi del Giappone de gli anni MDLXXXII, LXXXIII et LXXXIV. Con alcuni altri della Cina dell’LXXXIII e LXXXIV. Cauati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesu*, Rome: Zannetti, 1586.) The annual letter of 1586, by Father Luis Frois, narrates instead, as already mentioned, of the audience granted by Hideyoshi to Coelho, including an in-depth description of Hideyoshi’s character, as well as of his palace in Osaka (the history of whose construction is also briefly narrated) (“Lettera del p. Luigi Froes scritta per commissione del p. Gasparo Coeglio Viceprouinciale del Giappone, al p. Alessandro Valignano Prouinciale dell’India della Compagnia di Giesu a’ 7. d’Ottobre 1586”, cit.)

giving an historicized account of Japan. Even if brief historical excursions are included in some of the reports, most of them are completely devoid of references to the history of the archipelago before the sixteenth century.³⁷⁸

6. Information about the Japanese language. This, too, wasn't one of the main objects for the works meant to be circulated in Europe. Passing remarks about the Japanese language are included in the reports by Balthasar Gago (as already mentioned), Alessandro Valignano, Gaspar Vilela, and João Rodrigues, but most of the full-fledged studies on the Japanese language were meant for use *in* Japan, or more generally among the missionaries, rather than for diffusion in Europe. This was actually the case with *kirishitanban* literature, which offered what are surely the most meaningful sources on the Japanese language produced by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but was not generally circulated in Europe at the time.³⁷⁹ Rodrigues, renowned, as seen

³⁷⁸ Among the exceptions is, for example, the annual letter of 1589, which hints to the Genpei war and to the rise to power of the military aristocracy at the expense of the emperor: "The Dairi (called also with other many names) for more than two thousands and two hundred years, according to their histories, has been the supreme Lord, from them revered; until, five hundred years ago, a most cruel war erupted among them, and the two Quubi, called Guenei and Fryim (of whom most of their histories report about) upset the whole country, stripping the Dairi of his dominion; and the Lords now called Iacati gradually occupied these kingdoms." ("Il Dairi (chiamassi ancora questo con altri diversi nomi) ha più di duemila e duecento anni, che si trova nelle loro storie, che egli fu sempre Signore sommamente riverito, e venerato tra loro; finche già sono cinquecento anni che nascendo tra essi crudelissime guerre, i due Quubi, detti Guenei, & Fryim (de quali anco trattano la maggior parte di queste historie) misero sosopra tutto il Giappone spogliando il Dairi del suo dominio, & andarono di poi di mano in mano occupando questi regni [...] i Signori che hora chiamano Iacati.") "Lettera Annale del Giapone delli 24. Di Febraio. 1589", cit.

³⁷⁹ A handful of non-Jesuit sources on the Japanese language also exists. The Dominican Diego Collado, who lived in Japan between 1619 and 1622 was the author of a grammar of the Japanese language, the *Ars grammaticae Iaponicae linguae*, printed in Rome in 1632 by the Typis & impensis Sacr. Congr. De Prop. Fide, together with two companion works: the *Niffon no cōtobani yō confesion* (also known with its Latin title *Modus confitendi et examinandi poenitentem iaponensem*), a collection of formulas for the sacrament of Confession, written in rōmaji, with parallel text in Latin and with added grammar annotations; and the *Dictionarium sive*

above, for his command of the Japanese language, was, in particular, author of the two earliest comprehensive grammars of Japanese, the monumental *Arte da Lingoa de Iapan*, printed in Nagasaki between 1604 and 1608, and the more concise *Arte Breve da Lingoa Japoa*, printed in Macao in 1620 (both with the Jesuit mission press). The works, however, were never printed in Europe.³⁸⁰

A major aspect of the reports (consciously disregarded in Cooper's anthology) is, moreover, their focus on contemporary Japanese history. The accounts include numerous extensive narrations – sometimes in the order of a hundred of pages or more – of contemporary political events, both at a local and at a central level.

Casual mentions of local shifts in power – such as the one that the involved the extension of the power of the Ōtomo family in Yamaguchi – were included in the reports ever since the early years of the Jesuit

thesavri Lingvae Iaponicae compendium, a Latin-rōmaji dictionary, created at the scope of providing a basic vocabulary for the missionaries in Japan. The works were, however, mostly intended for circulation inside the orders, as demonstrated by the very limited number of copies that have survived to our day. An annotated English translation of the grammar is available on the Gutenberg project site at the following url: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21197/21197-h/21197-h.htm> (last access: January 20, 2013).

³⁸⁰ A commented Japanese edition of the *Arte da Lingoa* was edited in the twentieth century by Doi Tadao: João Rodrigues and Doi Tadao (ed.), *Nihon daibunten* (Great grammar of Japan), Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1955. Studies and editions of particular sections of the grammar (or both grammars) are also available. See for example: Michael Cooper, "The muse described: Joao Rodrigues' Account of Japanese Poetry", *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 26 No. 1/2, 1971, pp. 55-75; Joseph Moran, "The Well of Japanese Undefined. Joao Rodrigues' Advice on How to Study Japanese", *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 30 No. 3, 1975, pp. 277-289; particularly interesting to gain an understanding of the workings of the missionary strategy of adaptation is moreover João Rodrigues and Jeroen Pieter Lamers (ed.), *Treatise on epistolary style: João Rodriguez on the noble art of writing Japanese letters*, Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001, which translates and comments, specifically, the section of the grammar focused on the Japanese epistolary style (*Sorōbun*) and on how its forms, particularly those applied by the Buddhist clergy, could be adapted for use by the missionaries in Japan.

presence in Japan. It is, however, since the end of the 1570s that detailed accounts of the local wars that involved the Christian *daimyō* became a constant in basically every annual letter. In particular, starting with the 1579 annual letter, the ongoing conflict in Kyūshū, which would later culminate in Hideyoshi's campaign on the island, is narrated in all of its phases.³⁸¹

The history of the rise to power of the three great Japan's unifiers is also included in the reports. The 1577 letter sent from Kyoto by Francesco Stefanoni mentions Nobunaga, mainly reporting about his policies towards the Christians in the city.³⁸² The annual 1579 letter, on the other hand, report quite extensively of Nobunaga's war campaign against the *daimyō* Araki Murashige 荒木村重 ("Araque", in the account), lord of the Itami 伊丹 castle – accused of having allied with the Mōri *daimyō* of Yamaguchi, enemy of Nobunaga. The report focuses in particular on the involvement of the Christian *daimyō* Takayama Ukon ("Giusto Ucondono"), a vassal of Araki, loyal to Nobunaga, who was forced to send his wife and son as hostages to Itami to assure his subservience (and who saw them released when the castle finally fell, in 1579).³⁸³ The narration is picked up in the 1580 letter, which still reports of the ongoing war between Nobunaga and the Yamaguchi *daimyō*.³⁸⁴ The 1583-1584 reports relate, finally, of

³⁸¹ "Lettera Annuale Del P. Francesco Carrion Al P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu dal Giappone l'anno 1579", cit.

³⁸² "Del Padre Giovan Francesco Stefanone, scritta dal Meaco al Padre visitatore", in *Lettere dell'India Orientale, scritte da' Reuerendi Padri della Compagnia di Giesu'. Nelle quali si scopre la grande arte usata de gli istessi, per liberar l'anime degli infideli indiani dalla potestà del nimico infernale, et ridurle alla nostra Santa Fede*, Venice: Antonio Ferrari, 1580.

³⁸³ "Lettera Annuale Del P. Francesco Carrion Al P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesu dal Giappone l'anno 1579", cit.

³⁸⁴ "Lettera annale del Padre Lorenzo Mexia al Padre Generale della Compagnia di Giesu dal Giappone l'anno 1580", cit.

Nobunaga's death in the Honnō-ji (本能寺),³⁸⁵ and of the competition among Nobunaga's sons for the succession.³⁸⁶ Similarly, the already mentioned annual letter of 1586 covers in length the rise of Hideyoshi,³⁸⁷ while the 1597 report by Francesco Pasio narrates of his demise.³⁸⁸ The subsequent political turmoils and the rise to power of Tokugawa Ieyasu are instead chronicled in the annual letters of the years 1599-1600, 1601 and 1603-1604-1605.³⁸⁹

In many of the later reports, the narration of historical events is preponderant in the economy of the account. There are even examples of letters devoid of any information directly related to the mission, like the one written by Father Luis Frois in 1595, devoted to relating the death of the newly nominated *kanpaku-dono* by the hands of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.³⁹⁰

Given the amount of information they collected, and given the regularity with which they were composed, surely the reports potentially opened a wide window on Japan for the European public of the sixteenth century. What was, however, their effective impact on the

³⁸⁵ Several possible versions of the events are presented. Frois, the narrator in the letter, suggests that Nobunaga might have killed himself after having being mortally wounded, or have been burnt alive in the subsequent fire in the temple.

³⁸⁶ *Avisi del Giappone de gli anni MDLXXXII, LXXXIII et LXXXIV.*, cit.

³⁸⁷ "Lettera del p. Luigi Froes scritta per commissione del p. Gasparo Coeglio Viceprouinciale del Giappone, al p. Alessandro Valignano Prouinciale dell'India della Compagnia di Giesù a' 7. d'Ottobre 1586", cit.

³⁸⁸ *Copia d'vna breve relatione della Christianità di Giappone, Del mese di Marzo del M.D.XCVII. infino ad Ottobr. del medesimo Anno, Et della morte di Taicosama Signore di detto Regno. Scritta del P.Francesco Pasio, al M.R.P. Claudio Acquaviva Generale della Compagnia di Giesu*, Venice: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1601.

³⁸⁹ *Lettera dei p. Alessandro Valignano, visitatore della Compagnia di Giesù nel Giappone, e nella Cina, del 1599* [e supplemento di p. Valentino Carvalho], Venice: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1603; *Lettera annua di Giappone scritta nel 1601 e mandata dal P. Francesco Pasio V. Provinciale, al M.R.P. Claudio Acquaviva Generale della Compagnia di Gesù*, Roma: Zannetti, 1603; *Tre lettere annue del Giappone de gli anni 1603. 1604. 1605. e parte del 1606*, Rome: Zannetti, 1608.

³⁹⁰ *Ragguaglio della morte di Quabacondono, scritta dal P. Luigi Frois della Compagnia di Giesù, dal Giappone nel mese d'Ottobre del 1595*, Zannetti, 1598.

European readership? Did they mostly pass unnoticed, or can it be presumed that they contributed to putting Japan on the map for a significant section of the public? And if so, for which part, and to what extent?

A firm starting point in answering to such questions is considering the fact that, for the first time in the sixteenth century, the written materials on Asia had the potential to reach a significant level of circulation, thanks to the increasing diffusion of print. A more precise evaluation of their level of popularity in Europe, moreover, is made possible *precisely* by the published nature of the materials. Approaching the printed Jesuit reports from a bibliographical point of view offers access to a kind of information that can hardly be derived from observing their contents alone. As for all published books, text is in fact but an aspect of them: the works can be analyzed also as objects, viewed in the light of the cultural and economical processes that lead to their production and circulation.

In the next paragraph, I will adopt such perspective to try and evaluate the effective popularity of the Jesuit letter-books on Japan in Europe, by taking the Italian editions (i.e., as seen above, the most popular ones) published in the second half of the sixteenth-century as a case study.

3.2.5. The impact of the reports in Europe: Italian editions in the sixteenth century

I have been able to trace, in Italy only, 81 editions of letter-books, published throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. These include both first editions, and reprinted editions of earlier works. Some books consist in but one letter, but most of them are collections.

In the whole of the letter-books, a total of about 100 letters is translated:

EDITIONS ISSUED UP TO 1580:

Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo...

Rome: Valerio Dorico, et Luigi fratelli bressani, 1552

Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo, nuovamente havuti...

Rome: Antonium Bladum, 1556.

Lettere del Giappone...

Rome: Zannetti, 1578 (the work is included in some of the bibliographies, but I have not found actual consistencies)

Rome: Zannetti, 1579

Brescia: Giacomo e Policreto Turlini, 1580

Naples: eredi di Matteo Cancer, 1580

Diversi avisi particolari dall'Indie...

Venice: Tramezzino, 1558

Venice: Tramezzino, 1565;

Venice: Tramezzino, 1568

Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portogallo...

Venice: Tramezzino, 1559

Venice: Tramezzino, 1569

Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portogallo... Terza parte.

Venice: Tramezzino, 1562

Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portogallo... Quarta parte.

Venice: Tramezzino, 1580

Lettere dell'India Orientale...

Venice: Antonio Ferrari, 1580

EDITIONS ISSUED FROM 1581 TO 1600

Alcune lettere delle cose del Giappone. Dell'anno 1579. Insino al 1581.

Rome: Zanetti, 1584

Rome: Zanetti, 1584

Naples: Orazio Salviani e Cesare Cesari, 1584

Brescia: Vincenzo Sabbio, 1584

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1584

Venice: Giolito, 1585

Lettera annale scritta di novo dal Giapone delle cose ivi successe l'anno M D LXXXII.

Venice: Giolito, 1585

Venice: Giolito, 1585

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1585

Rome: Zanetti, 1585

Avisi del Giapone de gli anni MDLXXXII, LXXXIII et LXXXIV...

Rome: Zannetti, 1586

Rome: Zannetti, 1586

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1586

Venice: Giolito, 1586

Venice: Giolito, 1586 (an alternative edition, with the title *Nuovi auuisi del Giapone con alcuni altri della Cina del 83, et 84.*)

Viaggio nell'India Orientale...

Venice: Andrea Muschio, 1587 (this edition is included in some of the bibliographies, but I have not found actual consistencies)

Avvisi della Cina et Giapone del fine dell'anno 1586...

Rome: Zannetti, 1588

Rome: Zannetti, 1588

Rome: Zannetti, 1588

Verona: Discepolo, 1588

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1588

Naples: Horatio Salviani, 1588

Venice: Giolito, 1588

Anversa: Christoforo Plantino, 1588 (in Italian)

Brescia: Vincenzo Sabbio, 1588 (this edition is included in some of the bibliographies, but I have not found actual consistencies)

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1589

Ragguaglio d'un notabilissimo naufragio...

Rome: Zannetti, 1588

Venice: Giolito, 1588

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1588

Raccolta di molti auuisi del Giappone dell'anno 1582 fin all'87.

Rome: Zannetti, 1590.

Lettera annale del Giappone scritta al padre della Compagnia di Giesu alli XX. di Febraio M.D.LXXXVIII.

Rome: Zannetti, 1590

Rome: Zannetti, 1590

Brescia: Vincenzo Sabbio, 1590

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1590

Lettere del Giappone, et della Cina de gl'anni M. D. LXXXIX & M. D. XC.

Rome: Zannetti, 1591.

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1592

Venice: Gio .Battista Ciotti, 1592

Brescia: Vincenzo Sabbio, 1592

Ragguaglio d'alcune missioni delle Indie Orientali, & Occidentali. Cavato da alcun auuisi scritti gli anni 1590. et 1591.

Rome: Zannetti, 1592

Rome: Zannetti, 1593

Rome, Turin: Zannetti, 1593

Bologna: Benacci, 1593

Copia di due lettere annue scritte dal Giappone. Del 1589. Et 1590.

Rome: Zannetti, 1593.

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1593

Brescia: Policreto Turlino, 1593

Brescia: Policreto Turlino, 1598

Lettera del Giappone degli anni 1591. Et 1592.

Rome: Zannetti, 1595

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1595

Venice: Gio. Battista Ciotti, 1595

Lettera annua del Giappone del marzo del 1593, sino al marzo del 94.

Rome: Zannetti, 1597

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1597

Copia di due lettere scritte dal P. Organtino Bresciano della compagnia di Giesu dal Meaco del Giappone.

Rome: Zannetti, 1597

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1597

Ragguaglio della morte di Quabacondono...

Rome: Zannetti, 1598

Copia di una lettera annua scritta dal Giappone nel M.D.XCV...

Rome: Zannetti, 1598

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1598

Relatione mandata da Don Francesco Teglio...

Rome: Niccolo Muzi, 1599

Venice: Marcello Iseppo, 1598

Relatione della gloriosa morte di 26. posti in croce...

Rome: Zannetti, 1599

Bologna : her. di Gio. Rossi, ad istanza di Gasparo Bindoni, 1599

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1599

Trattato d'alcuni prodigii occorsi l'anno 1596. nel Giappone. Mandato dal p. Luigi Frois, della Compagnia di Giesu.

Rome: Zannetti, 1599

Lettera annua del Giappone dell'anno M.D.XCVI....

Rome: Zannetti, 1599

Milan: Pacifico Ponte, 1599

Venice (Padua): Francesco Bolzetta, 1599

Relatione del martirio, che sei padri scalzi di San Francesco et venti Giaponesi christiani patirono nel Giappone l'anno 1597

Roma: Nicolo Mutij, 1599

Copia d'una breve relatione della Christianità di Giappone...

Venice. Gio. Battista Ciotti, 1600

(Venice: Gio. Battista Ciotti, 1601 – in duodecimo, and not in octavo)

(Rome: Zannetti, 1601)

As evinced by this sketchy overview of the editions, the overwhelming majority of the books saw the light in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Up to 1580, only 8 works were published, in a total of 14 editions, as opposed to the 67 editions issued in the brief span of the following 20 years. Moreover, works published up to the 1570s were mostly just inserts in works not specifically devoted to Japan, but, more generally to “India” (the territories assigned to the Portuguese by the Treaty of Tordesillas). The first letter-book wholly centered on Japan was the collection by the Zanetti publishing house published in Rome in 1578. After that moment, publications focused on Japan, or more rarely on Japan and China, usually became the rule.

The rapid increment in the pace of the publications was surely, at least in part, tied with an active engagement in promotion from the part of the Society of Jesus, in the light of the policies of the Catholic Revival. As mentioned above, the news of the conversions of far away populations had to be inserted in a wide circuit of distribution so as to inspire public interest and, in the face of the defeats suffered by Catholicism in Europe, foster the notion of the greatness of the Catholic Church and of its world-wide predominance.

On the other hand, given their commercial nature, the growth in number of the publications had somehow to be connected also to an increasing demand for the Japanese letter-books from the part of the

readers. As amply underlined by Grendler,³⁹¹ the Counter Reformation surely influenced the book market, both by means of coercion – through censorship and the Index of banned books – and 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, although some of the most influential publishing houses, such as the *Giolito* house in Venice, were able to drive production to a measure, all in all, in the absence of modern strategies of publicity, demand was still what mostly determined editorial policies.³⁹²

The *Tenshō shisetsu* was probably a crucial factor in stimulating interest for the reports.

According to the records of the time, reporting of the enthusiastic crowds greeting the envoys in the various cities they visited, the embassy appears to have attracted considerable attention from the part of the European public. Several scholars have actually questioned the meaning of such reception in terms of the effective impact of the mission. Judith Brown, summing up the debate and analyzing the documents on the arrival of the emissaries included in the Florentine archives, suggests that the enthusiasm shown by the population towards the ambassadors might be better understood “as a conjuncture

³⁹¹ Paul F. Grendler, *L'inquisizione romana e l'editoria a Venezia: 1540-1605*. Roma: Il veltro, 1983. The weight of the Church, and particularly of the Jesuit order was, of course, particularly strong in Rome, but footholds of the Society of Jesus were scattered throughout Italy; the influence of the Fathers over the publishing industry didn't happen simply in a direct fashion, but also, more generally, through the strong involvement of the Jesuits in the cultural activities of the cities. See in this regard Paul V. Murphy, “Jesuit Rome and Italy”, in T. Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the Jesuits*, cit., pp. 71-87.

³⁹² On the relationship between Church influence, client demand and editorial policies in the sixteenth century, see Frédéric Barbier, *Storia del libro: Dall'antichità al XX secolo*, Bari : Edizioni Dedalo, 2004, pp. 227-272 (originally in French : *Histoire du livre*. Paris: A. Colin, 2000).

of favorable forces within European politics than as a demonstration of interest in a different and alien culture”.³⁹³

The embassy, on the other hand, didn't simply elicit a fleeting interest in the crowd that encountered the emissaries. It, itself, spurred the publication of a huge number of published works: at least 80 titles were given to in the brief span of two years – as evidenced by Adriana Boscaro in her bibliographical essay on the mission.³⁹⁴ The works mostly included booklets – pamphlets and gazettes, reporting of the voyage of the ambassadors, of their meetings with various exponents of the European aristocracy, of the public hearing granted them by the Pope, and sometimes providing short descriptions of Japan (mostly based on the published first-hand accounts of the Jesuits), but also at least one more organic work, the already mentioned *Relationi della venuta degli Ambasciatori Giaponesi a Roma* by Guido Gualtieri (which collected and reorganized all the somewhat repetitive information scattered in previous publications). In light of such an editorial boom, the growing interest towards the Jesuit writings on Japan can be put in context.

The success of the letter-books can also be understood, more generally, in relation to the dominating trends in the contemporary publishing market. The sixteenth century can rightly be called the first age of information in Europe. “Avvisi”, “Relationi”, “Fogli di notizia” and other newspaper-like publications circulated throughout the century in all of the major printing centers of the time, relating both national and international events, with a regularity that has induced

³⁹³ Judith C. Brown, “Courtiers and Christians: The First Japanese Emissaries to Europe”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47, 1994, pp. 872-906, p. 873.

³⁹⁴ Adriana Boscaro, *Sixteenth Century European Printed Works on the First Japanese Mission to Europe*, cit.

some researchers, such as Giuseppina Monaco,³⁹⁵ to trace back the birth of modern periodical publications to them. Moreover, travel literature had enjoyed great fortune throughout the century.³⁹⁶

An analysis of the production of the publishing houses that materially prompted the circulation of the Japanese reports reinforces the idea that Japanese materials were published in response to a precise demand, and in integration with ampler editorial policies.

We can take as an example the Giolito publishing house, that was one of the giants of the Venetian publishing industry, and, ever since 1585, was responsible for the publication of the majority of the Japanese reports issued in Venice. As shown by the annals of the house, compiled at the end of the nineteenth century by Salvatore Bongi,³⁹⁷ the production of the publishing house before 1560 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, religious and historical works, that is, works close in nature to the Japanese letter-books, became the main objects of their publishing activities; the Giolito adapted their production in order to survive the crisis, exploiting the changes in civil society brought both by the Catholic Revival and the new relationship between Europe and remote regions of the world. The Jesuit letter-books were part of such response.

If a steady demand existed for the letter-books, then, amongst what section of the European readership were they popular?

³⁹⁵ Giuseppina Monaco, "La stampa periodica nel Cinquecento", in Marco Santoro (ed.), *La stampa in Italia nel Cinquecento: atti del convegno, Roma, 17-21 Ottobre 1989*, Roma: Bulzoni, 1992, pp. 641-649.

³⁹⁶ On the role of Histories in the sixteenth-century publishing market, see Augustus Pallotta, "The New World and Italian Readers of the Spanish Historie in the Sixteenth Century", *Italica*, 69, 1992, pp. 345-358.

³⁹⁷ Salvatore Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari da Trino di Monferrato stampatore in Venezia*, 1 [-2], Rome: presso i principali librai, 1890-1893.

The diffusion of print and the growth of the publishing industry in Europe in the sixteenth century was connected with an expansion of the reading population, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. This was partially due to the necessities of printing industry itself: editions needed high circulation figures, in order to amortize the fixed costs associated with the printing process. It is known for example, from a letter by the publisher Michele Tramezzino,³⁹⁸ that an average edition in Venice consisted in 1000 copies – as the printing privilege wasn't conceded for less than 400 copies, and with less than 1000 copies production costs would not be covered. Moreover, as already underlined, books were increasingly exploited as means of propaganda in the political and religious controversies that divided Europe, and it was therefore necessary for them to reach readers belonging to many social categories. The expanding use of vernacular languages in print, as opposed to Latin, was also a factor in the widening of the public. By the end of the sixteenth century, more than half of the books printed in Italy were written in the vernacular, while Latin was increasingly relegated to works strictly addressed to the learned population – university professors and students, aristocracy, clergy, doctors or jurists – and was progressively losing his international character. The use of the vernacular in the letter-books is therefore in itself an indication that they were not addressed, or at least not exclusively, to the more traditional categories of learned, professional readers.

Publishing houses, too, can be an indicator of the kind of public to which the letter-books were addressed. This is not true of the smaller ones, as they often worked on commission, and published materials of a more disparate nature. The bigger ones, however, tended to follow a definite editorial line and to address their production to a specific

³⁹⁸ Quoted in Paul F. Grendler, *L'inquisizione romana e l'editoria a Venezia*, cit.

section of the public. We know for example that the Giolito publishing house in Venice was specialized in vernacular books, and that its production was mostly intended for an upper, educated middle class.³⁹⁹

The conclusion that this was the kind of public for which the letter-books from Japan were intended is reinforced by their physical appearance. The published volumes are almost exclusively in the small “octavo” format, which was first adopted for books intended for non-professionals, upper middle class readers at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the publisher Aldo Manuzio.⁴⁰⁰ Small formats were actually typical of popular books, too, but, as underlined by Grendler,⁴⁰¹ books designed for lower classes shared also a recurring set of physical characteristics – such as the use of Gothic characters – that are not common to letter-books. Nor were popular books as often conserved in libraries. Nor did they usually circulate in places too far from the one in which they were produced, as only educated readers with enough financial supplies would be able to afford the shipping expenses: the fact that letter-books published in Rome, Naples or Brescia are today available in libraries throughout Europe can in itself be an indicator of the kind of public that used to read them.

Such reflections do not exclude, of course, an interest towards the books also from the part of the learned European readership. On the contrary, the fact that the producers of culture had common access to

³⁹⁹ On the editorial policies of the Giolito publishing house, see Amedeo Quondam, “«Mercanzia d'onore» / «Mercanzia d'utile». Produzione libraria e lavoro intellettuale a Venezia nel Cinquecento”, in Armando Petrucci (ed.), *Libri, editori e pubblico nell'Europa moderna: guida storica e critica*, Roma, Bari : Laterza, 1977, pp. 52-104.

⁴⁰⁰ Giorgio Montecchi, “L'imposizione nei libri in ottavo di Aldo Manuzio”, in Marco Santoro (ed.), *La stampa in Italia nel Cinquecento*, cit.

⁴⁰¹ Paul F. Grendler, “Il libro popolare nel Cinquecento”, in Marco Santoro (ed.), *La stampa in Italia nel Cinquecento*, cit.

the letter-books is largely proved by the influence of the Jesuit sources on a number contemporary literary genres.

The most immediate influence of the Jesuit reports was, of course, that on religious histories. Most notably, those produced by the official historians of the Society of Jesus Giovanni Pietro Maffei and Luis de Guzman.⁴⁰²

Other genres similarly used the reports as sources. I have already mentioned Ramusio, who, as seen above, included part of Xavier's accounts in his work – possibly catching on the potential popularity of the Japanese letters. I will also discuss, in the following chapter, some examples of collections of travel literature that included excerpts, or sometimes whole (edited or unedited) editions of the Jesuit reports (namely, those by Linschoten, Hakluyt and De Bry). Aside from the travel collections, Jesuit reports were also widely exploited as sources in many lay histories and cosmographies, produced since the last decades of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² The *Rerum a Societate Iesu in Oriente gestarum volumen, continens historiam iucundam lectu omnibus Christianis, praesertim ijs, quibus vera Religio est cordi. In qua videre possunt, quomodo nunquam Deus Ecclesiam suam deserat, & in locum deficientium a vera fide, innumeros alios in abditissimis etiam regionibus substituat*, dated 1571, and the *Historiarum Indicarum Libri XVI. Selectarum item ex India Epistolarum eodem interprete Libri IV*, dated 1588, by Maffei offered, respectively, the earliest attempt at an official history of the mission in Asia (and particularly Japan), and what is probably the most complete and reliable sixteenth-century historical compendium on the Japanese Jesuit mission, up to 1573. Luis de Guzman, author of the *Historia de las Misiones que han hecho los religiosos de la Compañía de Jesús para predicar el Sancto Evangelio en la India Oriental, y en los reynos de la China y Japón*, published in 1601, picked up from where Maffei had stopped, providing a systematic account of the mission in the later decades of the sixteenth century.

⁴⁰³ These included, for example, the works of the two Italian popular historians Mambrino Roseo and Cesare Campana, who included extensive accounts of the progress of the Christian mission in Japan into their world histories (both titled *Delle Historie del Mondo*, and dated, respectively, 1573 and 1598). The geographer Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania also included, in his cosmographical work, *L'Universale fabrica del mondo* (1573), lengthy chapters on Japan and China that heavily relied upon the Jesuit sources. Donald Lach has provided a monumental overview on the influences of the direct sources on Asia, including Japan, produced in the sixteenth century on contemporary Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French and Germanic literary

On a more indirect level, the reports, in a way that much anticipated later writings on China and the current of seventeenth-century sinophilism, came to feed universalistic theories that were already surfacing in European political thought. Donald Lach has underlined, for examples, how the Jesuit writing on both Japan and China added to an interest towards cultural alternatives that found expression in the writings of such thinkers as Giovanni Botero.⁴⁰⁴

Of course, the Jesuit writers never put in doubt the privileged status of Christendom, and the perspective of their representations of Japan was extremely partial. Europe remained the ultimate reference point from which they evaluated Japan. However, by presenting Christianity as an integration, and never as an alternative to Japanese culture, they did set a comparison between cultures, that contributed to opening the space to a sense of cultural relativism previously unknown to Europe.

production. See Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe, volume II: a century of wonder. Book 2: The literary arts*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

⁴⁰⁴ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery*, cit., pp. 235-252.

4. NORTHERN EUROPEAN COMPETITORS TO THE IBERIAN TRADE WITH JAPAN: CIRCULATION OF ENGLISH AND DUTCH SOURCES IN EUROPE UP TO THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE *SAKOKU* POLICY

Given the lucrative nature of the silver and silk trade, it didn't take long before European competitors to the Iberian traders – notably English and Dutch – tried to make their way into commerce with Japan.

The presence of the outpost in Macao and the agreements made with the Chinese local authorities carried, undoubtedly, a big advantage for the Portuguese merchants – so that, up to the 1640s (when all relationships between Europe and Japan were limited to the Dutch presence in Nagasaki), the Portuguese did manage to retain control over the most valuable section of the European commerce with Japan. Even though the only active attempt of the Dutch to conquer Macao (in 1622) failed, however, already by the second half of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese monopoly had begun to crumble.

4.1. DUTCH AND ENGLISH COMMERCIAL INTERCOURSE WITH JAPAN

4.1.1. The Dutch factory

Thanks to their extensive experience in whaling and herring, the Dutch had emerged, in the course of the sixteenth century, as the leading shipbuilders in Europe.⁴⁰⁵ Such technical primacy had made them dominant in one of the most profitable trades in Europe – the one between the Baltic and the Mediterranean sea. Grain, manufactures and naval supplies (such as timber, tar and pitch) were carried from Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia to Southern Europe, and Mediterranean products, such as olives and wine were purchased in exchange, to be sold back in the North. Their role in the trade was so crucial that, even in the years of the Calvinist riots against Spain in the Spanish Netherlands (from 1556 onwards), the Castellans – regardless of their opposite religious stance – still relied heavily on Dutch merchants for supplies.

In the last two decades of the century, a number of other factors further contributed to the growing Dutch commercial power. The most important one was, in 1585, the capture of the city of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma and Piacenza. Antwerp was at the time the greatest commercial entrepot in Europe, and one largely dominated by Calvinist

⁴⁰⁵ The tonnage being equal, Dutch ships were normally able to carry larger cargoes, which minimized the transport costs, and allowed Dutch sellers to impose cheap prices on the goods, emerging as some of the most competitive merchants in Europe. By the end of the century, moreover, the creation of a cheaper and more efficient cargo-ship (the *fluit*) was coupled with the development of an advanced system of marine insurance, that involved compulsory insuring for any Dutch ship sailing into dangerous waters. See Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p.59 and Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire: 1600-1800*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1977, p. 20.

merchants. When the Catholic Duke extended his control over the city, the Calvinists were left with the possibility to stay in the city and renounce to their religion, or to settle their affairs, over a maximum time-span of two years, and then move their enterprises and capitals away. Many chose to leave, the most rich and enterprising ones travelling to Holland and Zeeland and bringing their wealth of financial and human capital with them – thus offering great stimulus to trade in the Dutch towns. Amsterdam, in particular, greatly benefited from the exodus, turning, before the end of the sixteenth century, into an international commercial emporium.

In the following years, a series of bad harvests in southern Europe heightened the demand for Baltic grain, further contributing to the Dutch presence in the Mediterranean. The Dutch role in the Baltic-Mediterranean trade had previously mostly stopped by the Straits of Gibraltar, and only on seldom occasions Dutch ships had reached the Mediterranean and Levant ports. Throughout the last decade of the sixteenth century, their presence in the area came instead to rival that in the Baltic.⁴⁰⁶

The shipbuilding innovations developed in the Baltic scenery, together with the revenues accumulated with the commerce in the Mediterranean, settled the basic ground for the Dutch to embark, by the end of the sixteenth century, on the Oceanic routes leading to the East Indies.

The impulse that motivated their advance in the Indian Ocean is still a matter of discussion among historians. Some scholars have pointed to the fact that the unification of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns under Philippe II of Spain had involved Lisbon in the Spanish

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-20.

war, effectively leading to the closure of the city, the end point of the Asian spice trade, to Dutch merchants, by 1594.⁴⁰⁷ The capture of Antwerp, imposing a further limit to the Dutch access to the Asian goods brought to Europe by the Portuguese, would have therefore prompted them to seek their own position in the Asian trade network. Other historiographers suggest instead that, more than by the inability to access Asian products, the Dutch were motivated by the will to find a way around the erratic supply and the high prices of the spices imported by the Portuguese.⁴⁰⁸

With little doubt, moreover, a major inspiration to pursue direct trade with Asia came from the writings circulated in Europe about Asia, including those produced by the Dutch sailors travelling in the East Indies at the service of the Spanish and Portuguese seafarers.⁴⁰⁹ Most notable, among these accounts, was the *Itinerario* by Jan Huygen Van Linschoten, largely based on the author's experience as a clerk of the archbishop in Goa, between 1583 and 1588.⁴¹⁰ The work significantly added to the nautical, economical and geographical knowledge about Asia available to the European public (outside of the published Portuguese sources). More than anything, it provided, for the first time, direct testimony to the fundamental dispersion of the

⁴⁰⁷ See for example Grant Kohn Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch, 1600-1853*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁸ See for example Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p.59. For more on the debate, see Michael S. Laver, *Japan's Economy by Proxy in the Seventeenth Century: China, the Netherlands, and the Bakufu*, New York: Cambria Press, 2008, chapter 1 "A world in flux: Japan and the Netherlands in the 15th and 16th Centuries" (ebook version).

⁴⁰⁹ The link between the circulation of literature on Asia and the Dutch and English commercial expansion has been discussed at length by Szommer Gábor, "The East India Company Encounters Japan: Its knowledge of Japan", available on *Academia*, at the following url: http://www.academia.edu/2094796/The_East_India_Company_Encounters_Japan_Its_Knowledge_on_Japan (last access: December 3, 2012).

⁴¹⁰ *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naar Oost ofte Portugaels Indien* (Travel account of the voyage of the sailor Jan Huyghen van Linschoten to the Portuguese East India), published in Amsterdam in between 1595 and 1596. On the *Itinerario*, more will be said in the following part of the chapter.

Portuguese Empire, and to its growing inability to maintain control over the commercial monopolies. It made clear, in the eyes of Dutch businessmen and politicians, that, above all in the “Spice Islands”, ample room was left by the *Estado da India* for European competitors, and was therefore, in the intellectual climate that preceded and surrounded the early Dutch voyages to Asia, held as a writing of national importance by the Dutch intelligentsia behind the travels.

The first Dutch attempts to initiate direct trade with the Indies came right after the publication of Linschoten’s work, on the initiative of a number of small trade companies (*voorcompagnie*) based in Amsterdam and in the other major Dutch trade centres (and, more often than not, set up specifically to gather investors for single trips to Asia). The first of such initiatives took place in 1595, when the merchant Cornelis de Houtman was sent on a two-year voyage to the Spice Islands, along the navigational route that circumnavigated Africa (a course probably chosen in accordance to Linschoten’s writings themselves). He reached Java, and returned in Amsterdam, in 1597, with a pepper cargo more than sufficient to cover the travel costs he had afforded. His voyage was not as successful as it could have been, but its relatively profitable outcome and, more than anything, the fact that it had materially proved that the Portuguese monopoly *could* be broken, prompted many others to embark, around the turn of the century, on similar ventures. Many of the enterprises, that similarly largely relied on Linschoten’s *Itinerario* for their travel plans, never managed to return to Holland. However, the lure of the spices was such that, by 1601, fourteen fleets (for a total of sixty-five ships) had already set off towards the Indies.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, cit., p. 23.

Soon, need emerged to regulate the trade. The Dutch presence in the Asian trade network could be imposed more effectively (and truly come to challenge the Portuguese and Spanish empires) through coordinate effort and planning, rather than by scattered efforts. Moreover, had competition among the trade companies not been smothered, it would have been impossible to keep control over the prices of the imported goods, which would have fallen in a lowering spiral. These necessities finally led, by 1602, to the foundation of the Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or VOC, as it is commonly known), which resulted from the fusion of the pre-existent competing companies and which was accorded the monopoly over the Dutch trade between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan.⁴¹²

In the following decade, the members of the Dutch United East India Company extended their interests in Asia, with a strategy that closely mirrored the one already put in place by Portugal: by playing in the local rivalries – such as the ongoing conflict between the Sultan of Tidore and the Sultan of Ternate, whose alliance, as well as the monopoly over the cloves trade, they obtained in 1607 – and by establishing local outposts, from which to manage both trade and military activity. The central headquarters of the Company were

⁴¹² The Company was led by a committee of seventeen Gentlemen (*Herren Zeventien*), representing the six main Dutch trade centers (Amsterdam, Middleburg, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen) – in a way proportional to their contributions, in terms of funds, to the company itself. Each of the Gentlemen directly controlled an allotted number of merchants, who came to constitute the board of directors (seventy-six by the time of the founding of the Company, soon reduced to sixty). Each director served his role for life (or until retirement), and every time one of them had to be replaced, the substitute was directly chosen by the government of the city he was a representative of. This way, *de facto*, the company was made into a semi-governmental institution, maintaining close relationships with the Dutch state institutions. This governmental connection was a big part of what made the Company worrisome for its Portuguese and Spanish competitors: it granted the members of the institution the necessary diplomatic authority to act as a sovereign power in their interactions with Asian local rulers. Michael S. Laver, *Japan's Economy by Proxy in the Seventeenth Century*, cit.

settled first in Banda, in 1609, and then, by 1611, in Batavia, which became the VOC's central commercial, administrative, military and strategic base, as well as its main storage point in Asia.

Relationships with Japan, on an unofficial level, had already been opened by the beginning of the century. In 1600, one of the vessels sent to the Indies by the private trade companies that had pioneered commerce with Asia – the *Liefde*, captained by Jacob Quaeckerneck – was cast in Bungo, Kyūshū, by a tempest. In spite of the protests of the local Jesuits (who had already barely tolerated the arrival of the Franciscans in the 1590s, and inevitably resented even more the presence of the Protestants, whom they construed as heretics) and Portuguese merchants,⁴¹³ the ship was allowed to remain in Japan, giving occasion to its crew to witness how Portuguese activities were conducted on the archipelago, and to realize how trade with Japan could provide a steady source of precious metals.

By 1605, Quaeckerneck was permitted to leave the archipelago, bearing a license (the *shuinjō* 朱印状, or vermilion seal document)⁴¹⁴ granted by the shogun, that enabled the Dutch state to initiate trade with Japan. Two years later, captain Pieter Willems Verhoefen left with his fleet for the Indies, in charge with the task of establishing a permanent Dutch factory in Japan. Two of his ships, the *Roode Leeuw*

⁴¹³ At least, those involved in the Nagasaki-Macao trade, who had reason to be afraid of the competition. As noted by Massarella, the ones who were trading privately were probably not as hostile. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 76.

⁴¹⁴ The official trade permit, granted by the Tokugawa to selected ships (known as *shuinsen* 朱印船) – and required for anyone who aimed at trading abroad. The system was introduced, in its perfected seventeenth-century form, in 1604 (even though similar passes had been issued before by Hideyoshi). The majority of the seals, of which 355 in total were issued until the enforcement of the *sakoku* policy in 1640, went to Japanese merchants (or to members of the authorities willing to send merchants abroad), but a number of foreigners were also granted the rights. For an in-depth study of the vermilion seal system, see Seiichi Iwao, *Shuinsen bōekishi no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985.

Met Pijlen and the *Griffoen*, reached Hirado in 1609, and were allowed to open a permanent trading post in the port.

Unlike the Spaniards (and, as we'll see, the English), the Dutch *did* come to pose a concrete threat to the Portuguese predominance in the Japanese trade. While Spain relied mostly on sources outside Asia for the provisions of goods to trade with Japanese and Chinese merchants, the Dutch were able to establish, through their factories, a self-sufficient structure – in many ways similar to a state, and in some way close to the *Estado da Asia*.⁴¹⁵ Dutch merchants purchased goods from Japan by using Asian products, such as raw silk from Bengal and cotton fabrics and ray skins from Coromandel, as a tool of exchange. In turn, they employed the purchased goods to carry new exchanges. The profit of millions annually earned through such Asian exchanges was then invested – directly, through cash, or indirectly, through Indian textiles – in the purchase of goods for the European market, mostly pepper and fine spice.⁴¹⁶

Japan played a most important role in this chain of exchanges: it provided the VOC members with a type of good – precious metals such as silver bullions, gold coins and copper – that were essential to the Dutch, but that would have otherwise been accessible to them only through the Spaniards.⁴¹⁷ The volume of the trade was such that the

⁴¹⁵ And, according to Laver, even more efficient, as, rather than playing a limited role in already existing trade patterns, they were able to superimpose to them to a point, and in some cases to take over native shipping altogether. See Michael S. Laver, *Japan's Economy by Proxy in the Seventeenth Century*, cit.

⁴¹⁶ Els Maria Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company During the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006, p. 145.

⁴¹⁷ Throughout the first half of the sixteenth century the Dutch mostly dealt with silver. The VOC came however to be growingly involved in the flourishing intra-Asian trade of Japanese copper – so that by the end of the century, the metal had become the chief among the Japanese products exported by the Dutch from the archipelago, by a percentage of over 80% of the total exports. On the Dutch trade of Japanese silver and copper, see in particular Suzuki Yasuko, *Kinsei Nichi-Ran bōeki-shi no*

Japanese authorities even came to prohibit the exports between 1637 and 1646, so as to allow the domestic production of copper coins.⁴¹⁸ This freed them from the necessity to depend, for their main source of financial sustenance in Asia, on the outcomes of the ongoing conflicts in Europe and turned the Japanese factory into the most crucial and profitable outpost for the Dutch in Asia.⁴¹⁹ Both the Spanish and the Portuguese settled in Japan did try to use their influence on the Tokugawa authorities to undermine the Dutch position in Japan, but their stance was weakened by their ties with the Christian missionaries operating in the archipelago.

The Dutch, who weren't involved in such connections, weren't, on the other hand, totally exempt from restrictions. In 1633, a fixed price, the same established for the Portuguese in Nagasaki, was imposed to them for the selling of raw silk, and the exchanges involving other imported products were temporarily suspended. Their freedom of movement and agency in Hirado was, moreover, progressively reduced, until, by 1637, they, too, were forced not to travel in Japan (mainly so as to avoid the entrance in the country of Portuguese merchants

kenkyū, Kyoto: Shibunkakushuppan, 2004 and Shimada Ryūto, *The Intra-Asian Trade in Japanese Copper by the Dutch East India Company During the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden: BRILL, 2006.

⁴¹⁸ Ryūto Shimada, *The Intra-Asian Trade in Japanese Copper*, cit. p. 12.

⁴¹⁹ One initial limitation to the Dutch role in the Japanese commerce came from their lack of access to the purchase of Chinese goods (which, as shown in the previous paragraphs, the Portuguese were instead able to acquire through Macao, and the Spanish through the exchanges in the Philippines). Their strategically convenient position in Hirado allowed them, on the other hand, to seek an alternative access to the goods by preying on their competitors' vessels, in alliance with the English. Both the Portuguese ships carrying the Nagasaki-Macao trade and the Spanish ones travelling along the China seas were built for size rather than for speed or defense, which made them an easy prey. The frequency of the attacks even became a matter of concern even for the *bakufu*, so that any act of overt piracy in Japanese waters was finally prohibited by the Tokugawa authorities. By 1624, on the other hand, the Company was able to secure an outpost in Taiwan, which paved the way for them to obtain Chinese silk (still one of the most required foreign products in Japan) and allowed the commerce with the archipelago to truly take off. Michael S. Laver, *Japan's Economy by Proxy in the Seventeenth Century*, cit.

carrying Dutch passports).⁴²⁰ They escaped, however, the fate of expulsion, and, confined on the Island of Deshima, remained the only European power allowed to trade with the archipelago in the following two centuries.

4.1.2. The English factory

The Dutch encounter with Japan was also a central factor in accelerating the opening of the English trade with the Japanese archipelago.

Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, while in Europe a growing tension was building between England, entangled in the Dutch revolts, and Spain (a tension that would lead, by 1585, to open war), private English ships had growingly attempted to penetrate into the Spanish and Portuguese maritime empires. Such enterprises showed to the English privateers, much as Linschoten had showed to the Dutch, that the Portuguese monopoly on commerce within the Indies was not an impenetrable one. Particularly effective in this regard was the expedition led by Francis Drake, who, between 1577 and 1580, accomplished a new voyage of circumnavigation of the world (the second, after Magellano's enterprise of the 1520s), reaching the Moluccas via the Straits of Magellan. Drake got to be invited by the Sultan of Ternate to participate in the profitable clove trade that generated from the Sultanate (even though he didn't received any offer of monopoly over it).⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ For an in-depth treatment of the restrictions applied to both the Portuguese and the Dutch in Japan from the 1620s onward, see Kohn Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch*, cit., pp. 11-17.

⁴²¹ The offer confirmed to the English that good commercial opportunities were available for them in the Indies, and prompted, in 1582, the dispatch of an expedition

The attempt to penetrate the trade network in the East Indies was, on the other hand, delayed by other factors – such as the fact that, in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, a thriving commerce had been opened by the English with the Levant, through the English Levant company (founded in 1581).⁴²² By the end of the century, however, the Dutch progresses in Asia not only provided further proof of the profitability of commerce in the East Indies, but also created new alarm about the future of the trade with the Levant – where prices would inevitably fall due to the Dutch competition and which could, in the long run, die altogether. This prompted the foundation, by the end of 1599, of the English East India Company – a private entity, whose status in English foreign policy remained, throughout the first half of the century, somewhat ambiguous.⁴²³ In 1601, the first voyage of the Company left Europe for Asia, to which, throughout the first decade of the century, several others followed, aimed at establishing English factories that would function as bases to penetrate the regions' country trade.

The first Englishman to have reportedly set foot in Japan was the pilot Will Adams, who had travelled on board of the ship *Liefde*, in the

specifically aimed at establishing trade with the Moluccas (led by commander Edward Fenton via the Cape of Good Hope), which wasn't, however, able to reach its destination. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p.54.

⁴²² While in the first years of the sixteenth century the news of the Portuguese expansion had temporarily put in question the survival of the old indirect routes to Asia (via the Persian gulf and the Red Sea) – generating, as seen in the previous chapter, a crisis among the Italian merchants – the routes had actually continued to thrive throughout the century, so that, by the 1580s, many of the European imports from Asia were still channelled through that region. As it had been for the Venetians, the involvement in the trade was sufficient for many English merchants who, while prone, to a point, to perpetrate the English Crown's agenda of expansion, were still privateers, keen on avoiding the risks that the establishment and maintenance of a direct trade with the East Indies would have implied. *Ibidem*, p.56.

⁴²³ The company was not directly dependant from the English Crown, but it overall strived, not without difficulty, to keep on good terms with it, and despite its unofficial status it was often employed as a tool in foreign policy. See in this regard *ibidem*, p.62.

first Dutch voyage to Japan. Adams was chosen to report to the shogun about the mission of the Dutch ship and was subjected to a long interrogation – which gave way to the Japanese authorities to learn about the political and religious divisions of Europe (marking the end of the Catholic monopoly on information on Europe in Japan). Adams thereafter remained at the service of the shogun, as a shipbuilder, an advisor and an interpreter (and was even granted the unheard of honour of a land and title). In this capacity, he also came to act a mediator for the establishment of an English factory in Japan.⁴²⁴

In 1611 the directors of the English East India Company had in fact, explicitly recommending the use of Adams' experience and position,⁴²⁵ commissioned to John Saris, captain of the Company's eight voyage, the creation of an outpost in Japan, where they hoped to find a good market for broadcloth (which was, at the time, England's staple product). Saris reached Hirado, where he knew the Dutch had established their factory, on board of his ship, *Cloves*, in June 1613, and was well received by the local *daimyō*, Matsuura Shigenobu 松浦鎮信, who was glad to expand the trade in the area under his dominion (already open to the Dutch and the Portuguese) to another group of foreigners. Adams at the time was in Sunpu (Shizuoka) where Ieyasu had retired, and he was fetched back to Hirado in order to escort the English newcomers. They were presented both to Ieyasu in Sunpu and to the nominal shogun in Edo, and granted the *shuinjō*. Even though both Ieyasu and Adams had recommended Edo as the location for the factory, the outpost was finally established in Hirado, where Richard Cocks was appointed Chief Merchant.

⁴²⁴ On Adams, his position at the service of Tokugawa Ieyasu, and his role in the establishment of the English factory, see Ilza Veith, "Englishman or Samurai: The Story of Will Adams", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 1945, pp. 5-27.

⁴²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

The English enterprise in Japan, however, turned out, in the long run, to be not as profitable as it had been expected. While Cocks was initially able to expand the activities of the factory, creating branches in Edo and Osaka and sub-agencies in Kyoto and Sakai, the fortunes of the English East India company in East and South Asia always largely depended on the Dutch military and commercial support. When the relationships between the two countries began to deteriorate, by the second decade of the seventeenth century, the English influence on the area was considerably reduced. After the death of Ieyasu, moreover, the trade privileges of the factory were reduced, and so was the number of the ships allowed to commerce, so that the Edo and Osaka branches had to be closed. Debts were growingly accumulated, and at the end of 1623 the factory was finally closed, and its staff moved to Batavia. In spite of their lack of connections with the Catholics the subsequent attempts from the English to re-establish commercial contacts with Japan were a failure.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ The only ship to effectively reach Japan, in 1673, was repelled, due to the marital connections between Charles II and the Portuguese Crown. Janet Hunter and Sugiyama S., "Anglo-Japanese Economic Relations in Historical Perspective, 1600–2000: Trade and Industry, Finance, Technology and the Industrial Challenge", in Janet Hunter and S. Sugiyama (eds.), *The history of Anglo-Japanese relations, 1600–2000, volume 4 : economic and business relations*, London: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 1-43.

4.2. DUTCH AND ENGLISH SOURCES

4.2.1. The *Itinerario* by Linschoten

The *Itinerario* by Linschoten was, as mentioned above, one of the most instrumental written sources for the Dutch expansion in Asia. The author had been trained both as a merchant and as a humanist. His work was emblematic of the close connection between world geography as developed in the sixteenth century, presenting the world “most directly for exploration and occupation”, and colonization, representing “a leap of knowledge for the Dutch, inaugurating a new struggle for the Indian Ocean and a new phase of globalization.”⁴²⁷

Linschoten relied for his writings not only on personal knowledge, but on a vast connection of collaborators and external sources (mostly first-hand Portuguese and Spanish sources).⁴²⁸ The image of Asia conveyed by his collection was therefore a complex one, that didn't specifically focus on mercantilism, navigation or natural history, but encompassed all such matters, providing a general description of all the known continents, and exploring both the economical significance

⁴²⁷ Arun Saldanha, “The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario* and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594–1602”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 101 No. 1, 2011, pp. 149-177, p. 150. See the article also for a more general overview of Linschoten's work, in light of its importance for the establishment of the Dutch overseas empire.

⁴²⁸ Starting from his half-brother, who was a member of the Court of Spain that transferred to Portugal in 1580. On Linschoten's sources and collaborators, see *Ibidem*, pp. 155-160. As far as Japan is concerned, Linschoten's most important connection seems to have been his acquaintance with the Dutch sailor Dirck Gerritszoon, who had travelled to Japan on Portuguese ships, and who gave him extensive account of his experiences.

of the Spanish conquests and the Portuguese navigational accomplishment.⁴²⁹

The *Itinerario* was also the earliest Dutch writing to include extensive information on Japan. It was through the collection that at least part of the navigational knowledge accumulated by Portuguese merchants about the archipelago – information that at the time wasn't "available anywhere in Europe outside the Iberian peninsula"⁴³⁰ – was made accessible (not by chance, right at the time when the Portuguese monopoly in the China Seas area was starting to waver) to the European public.

In the section of the work titled *Reys-gheschrift*, Linschoten put on print, for the first time, the navigational routes traced by the Portuguese, that had been, up to that moment, largely restrained from circulation.⁴³¹ A considerable number of the 67 chapters of the section are devoted to the routes from China to Japan, and to the Japanese coasts themselves (limited, however, to Shikoku and Kyūshū):

⁴²⁹ The work originally comprised three sections: the *Reys-gheschrift*, a section specifically focused on the Portuguese navigation in Asia; the *Itinerario* proper (*Itinerario: Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien*), describing Portuguese Asia in terms of geographical position, resources and commodities, customs, religion; and the *Beschryvinghe van de gantsche custe van Guinea, Manicongo, Angola ende tegen over de Cabo de S. Augustijn in Brasilien, de eyghenschappen des gheheelen Oceanische Zees*, a survey of the coasts of Africa and America. The first English translation of the work, published in London by John Wolfe in 1598 under the title *John Huighen van Linschoten, His discours of voyages into ye Easte and West Indies: deuided into foure bookes*, included, in a fourth, separated book, Linschoten's translation of the revenues of the Spanish crown (presumably obtained by his half-brother).

⁴³⁰ Cornelis Koeman, *Jan Huygen Van Linschoten*, Coimbra: UC Biblioteca Geral 1, 1984, p. 27.

⁴³¹ This made the section a most innovative work – as further proved by the fact that the book, the first one of the four composing the Dutch edition, was actually rushed to publication a year earlier than the rest of the work, so that it could be taken on-board of the first of the Dutch voyages to Asia (the privilege for print – *octrooi* – having been granted to the work only in 1594). Arun Saldanha, "The Itineraries of Geography", cit., p. 161. The chapter was positioned as third in the subsequent English edition, after the chapters devoted to the description of Asia and America, and before the one devoted to the Iberian kingdom.

- chapter 31: “The description of a voiage made by a Portingale Pilote from Liampo to Iapan in a Chinchea Soma, that is a Chinchén Ship, with the description of the coast of Bungo, Miaco, Cacay and the Island Toca, all countries of Iapan”
- chapter 32: “The Navigation from Lampaton (which lyeth by Macau in the Coast of China) to the Island of Iapon and from thence to the Island of Firando, with the description thereof by another Pilote”
- chapter 33: “A voiage made by a Portingale Pilot (with a Suma, that is a Chimpo shippe) from Macau, or out of China, to the Island of Iapon and the countrey of Bungo, with the scituations of the places along the course.”
- Chapter 34: “Another description of the course from the Haven of Macau along by the Island of China to the Island of Fyrando, and the Islands lying about it, to the Haven of Umbra in the coast of Iapon; with the description of other Havens lying thereabout, where they ordinarily use to traffic.”
- Chapter 35: “A short description of the course from Macau in China to Iapon and the Island Caboxuma to the Haven of Langasaque or Nangasache, which at this day is most frequented of the Portingales: with all the courses and situations, by an expert Pilote, with a declaration of the winds called Tuffon.”
- Chapter 36: “A voyage from Macau in China to the Haven of Langasaque or Nangasache in the Island of Iapon in the Shippe called the S. Cruz, the captaine being a Portingall called Francisco Pais, and the Gunner Dericke Geritson of Enchuisen

in the yeare of our Lord 1585 written by the Pilote of the same shippe.”

- Chapter 37: “The right markes of the Island Meaxuma, as well by the depthes as by the opening of the land, with an advertisement how you shall put into the Haven, and in the Rode of Langasaque or Nangasache in the land of Iapan.”
- Chapter 38: “The right course to saile from the Island Meaxuma to the Haven of Cochinocy and to Facunda, with the Scituation of the places.”
- Chapter 39: “An instruction of the course out of the Haven of Langasaque or Nangasache, to the cape de Sumbor, in the coast of China, where the Portugales are resident.”
- Chapter 40: “Another voiage made from the Haven of Langasaque to Macau, which is from Iapon to China, with certaine descriptions and accidents which happened by the Island Guoto, with the description of the Hevens thereof, accomplished in the yeere of our Lord 1584 by a Portingale Pilot.”
- Chapter 41: “Another voiage made out of the Haven of Langasaque from the Island of Iapon to Macau in China in the Santacruz the Gunner being Dericke Geritson of Enchuisen in Ann. 1586.
- Chapter 42: “An instruction and large declaration of the course from the Island Firando in Iapon, to the coast of China, & the haven of Macau, with all the courses, situations, and stretchings of the same, done by a Portingale Pilote.”

- Chapter 47: “Of the signes and tokens of the tides, waters, and windes upon the coast of China and in the way to Iapon.”⁴³²

A description of mainland Japan is also included in the *Itinerario* proper,⁴³³ but its content is one that the European readership was not unfamiliar with. The chapter opens by geographically locating the country (about 80 miles east of the China coast, at a latitude of 38°), and presenting it as an archipelago – of which the full circuit has not as of yet been completely explored by the Portuguese. Mention is then included of its climate and natural resources (and particularly of its silver mines, connected to the Nagasaki-Macao trade). And then, an overview is given of Japanese customs. The overall stance on the Japanese, as had been the case with missionary writings, is positive:

They are sharp-witted and quickly learn anything they see. The common people of the land are much different from those of other nations, for that they have among them as great courtesy and good policy as if they had live continuously in the Court. [...] They are in all their actions very patient and humble, for that in their youth they learn to endure hunger, cold, and all manner of labor, to go bareheaded, with few clothes, as well as in winter as in summer.⁴³⁴

⁴³² The chapter-titles are taken from *John Huighen van Linschoten, His discours of voyages*, cit., pp. 373-404 and pp. 407-408. A copy of the work can be accessed online via Google Books at the following url: <http://books.google.it/books?id=nRN-HgO3tREC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> (last access: December 20, 2012).

⁴³³ Inserted as book 1 in the above mentioned English edition (Chapter 26, “Of the Iland of Iapan.”) Jan Huygen Van Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten, His discours of voyages*, cit., pp. 44-48.

⁴³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

The account very briefly focuses on the Japanese justice system, describing the Japanese as very skilful with their weapons but having little occasion to use them, as drawing a sword in Japan results in being put to death; it is underlined that there is no such thing as prison, as offenders will be punished right away or banned from the country. The Japanese dress-style and fashion, houses, manners of eating and drinking are also described, as well as the practice of drinking “warm water [...] made with the powder of a certain herb called *Chaa*, which is much esteemed, and is well accounted of among them”. Japanese religion is only very briefly touched upon – in a passing mention that compares the Japanese “idols and Ministers” to the Chinese ones – while more relevance is given to the Jesuit effort to convert the Japanese population to Christianity. Mention is also included of the *Tenshō shisetsu*, and in particular of the privileges obtained by the Jesuits from the Pope as a consequence to the mission – namely the exclusive right to live and operate in Japan.

The description appears far less detailed than the one reserved to Goa (and, in general, to the regions to which Linschoten had personally travelled to). Moreover, the elements over which it focuses, and sometimes the very words used, highly resonate the reports on Japan included in the published Jesuit sources, as well as in other printed works that relied on them.⁴³⁵

In this sense, the work didn’t add much, in qualitative terms, to the general knowledge of Japan divulged among the European public. On the other hand, as underlined by Lach, the description in itself was a

⁴³⁵ The part of the description focused on the Japanese legal system appears, for example, to be taken almost word for word from the pamphlet by Giacomo Gualtieri describing the coming of the embassy to Europe – the *Relationi della venuta de gli ambasciatori giapponesi à Roma*, published in 1586, as well as the words quoted above recall the assessments of the Japanese by Xavier and other missionaries.

sign that, precisely thanks to the diffusion of the Jesuit sources, some fifty years after its “discovery”, Japan had been firmly put on the map at least for the learned – and literature producing – section of the European population.⁴³⁶ The collection did, in its own merit, help further spreading such knowledge, thanks to its popularity, that made it what was “probably the most circulated source on Asia throughout the early modern period.”⁴³⁷ After the original Dutch edition of 1596, to which several amended versions followed up to 1644, a consistent number of translations were produced – including the already mentioned English one of 1598, a German translation dated 1598, two Latin ones dated the following year and several French one dated 1610, 1619 and 1638.⁴³⁸

4.2.2. Early English and Dutch indirect sources: Willes, Hakluyt, de Bry

A similar role was exerted by other travel collections, produced by a number of English and Dutch writers in the last decades of the sixteenth century. The majority of the authors of such collections, were, however, versed in the contemporary literature on Asia but not travellers themselves, nor they had access to the kind of navigational information that Linschoten had. The information they included about Japan was therefore often even more scarce, and dependant on the Jesuit sources, than that of their Dutch counterpart.

⁴³⁶ Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p.729.

⁴³⁷ Carmen Nocentelli, “Discipline and love. Linschoten and the *Estado da India*.”, in Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo and Maureen Quilligan (eds.), *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp. 205-224, p. 206.

⁴³⁸ See Arun Saldanha, “The Itineraries of Geography”, cit., for a more in-depth overview of the editorial history of the work.

The first known account of Japan in the English language was the one, titled “Of the Island Giapan, and other little Isles in the East Ocean”, included in Richard Willes’ *History of Travayle in the West and East Indies* – a travel collection published in 1577.⁴³⁹ The information included in the account consisted in nothing other than a loose translation and re-edition of formerly published letters on Japan by the hands of Jesuit Fathers – mainly those of the founder of the Japanese mission, Francis Xavier, and one letter by Luis Frois from Kyoto, dated February 19, 1565.⁴⁴⁰

Willes’ translation was in turn included by the English writer Richard Hakluyt in the expanded, three-volume edition of his monumental collection of travel accounts, the *The Principall Navigations*, published between 1598 and 1600.⁴⁴¹

Hakluyt was, even more than Linschoten, a “practical geographer”, acting as a “commercial geographical consultant to the merchant

⁴³⁹ The work even predated the first English edition of Marco Polo’s *travels*, which was to be released only two years later. Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 65.

⁴⁴⁰ A summary of Willes’ account is included in *ibidem*, pp.65-66. The letters were translated from their Latin version, extracted from Giovanni Pietro Maffei’s general history of the Jesuit missions in Asia, the *Rerum a Societate Iesu in Oriente gestarum volumen, continens historiam iucundam lectu omnibus Christianis, praesertim ijs, quibus vera Religio est cordi. In qua videre possunt, quomodo nunquam Deus Ecclesiam suam deserat, & in locum deficientium a vera fide, innumeros alios in abditissimis etiam regionibus substituat*, Dilingae: apud Sebaldum Mayer, 1571. The work can be consulted online at the following url: http://books.google.it/books?id=vh3f6NDdL5kC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Rerum+a+Societate+Iesu+in+Oriente+gestarum+1571&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1m_dUOHzLMjk4QTD4YGADA&sqi=2&ved=0CDYQ6wEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false (last access: December 28, 2012).

⁴⁴¹ Richard Hakluyt, *The principall navigations, voiajes, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation: made by sea or over-land, to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth, at any time within the compasse of these 1500. yeeres: devided into three severall volumes, according to the positions of the regions, whereunto they were directed*. London: by George Bishop, Ralph Newberie and Robert Barker, 1598-1600.

explorers that dominated England’s exploratory ventures during the sixteenth century.”⁴⁴² His work, meant to account for the English explorations overseas, was first published in 1589,⁴⁴³ and initially included but a few mentions of Japan. In the *Epistle dedicatorie*, addressed to Sir Francis Walsingham, the author mentioned the evangelization effort in the archipelago, together with an event that had seemingly stirred some curiosity in the English public: the landing in England of two Japanese travellers – collected in 1587 from a Spanish Manila galleon (the *Santa Anna*) in South California (together with three Filipinos) by Thomas Cavendish (who had attacked and sunk the galleon along his voyage of circumnavigation).⁴⁴⁴ The work contains also a more complete account of Cavendish’s voyage,⁴⁴⁵ but, even though the text related about the battle with the *Santa Anna*, it didn’t include any other mention of the two Japanese.

The 1598-1600 edition, on the other hand, includes more than one reference to Japan. A second account of Cavendish’s circumnavigation was added to the narration,⁴⁴⁶ which mentioned the two Japanese men,

⁴⁴² James P. Helfers, “The Explorer or the Pilgrim? Modern Critical Opinion and the Editorial Methods of Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas”, *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 94 No. 2, 1997, pp.160-186, p. 162

⁴⁴³ London: George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, 1589. A copy of this 1589 edition can be accessed online at the following url: http://ia700509.us.archive.org/1/items/cihm_35668/cihm_35668.pdf (last access: December 29, 2012).

⁴⁴⁴ “Is it not as strange that the borne naturalles of Japan, and the Philippinaes are here to be seene, agreeing with our climate, speaking our language, and informing us of the state of their Easterne habitations? For mine owne part,I take it as a pledge of Gods further favour both unto us and them ; to them especially, unto whose dootes I doubt not in time shall be by us carried the incomparable treasure of the trueth of Christianity, and of the Gospells while we use and exercise common trade with their marchants.” .

⁴⁴⁵ “The famous voyage of M. Thomas Candish Esquire round about the globe of the earth, in the space of two yeares and lesse then two moneths begunne in the yeere 1585”, in Richard Hakluyt, *The principall navigations*,(1589), cit., p. 809.

⁴⁴⁶ By the hands of Francis Pretty (Cavendish’s navigator). “The admirable and prosperous Voyage of the Worshipful Mr. Thomas Cavendish, of Trimley, in the county of Suffolk, Esquire, into the South Sea, and from thence round about the

referring to them with the Christian names Christopher and Cosmos, and pointing to their ability to read and write in their language.⁴⁴⁷ A passing mention of the two Japanese travellers was also included in *The historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China*, by Robert Parke, a translation of Juan González de Mendoza's 1585 work on China,⁴⁴⁸ which, as seen in the previous chapter, also included a whole chapter on Japan.⁴⁴⁹ The final edition of the *Principall Navigation* also added to Willes' material the translation of several new accounts by Frois: two letters dated 1590 and 1594 respectively, and focused on Corea, including mention of the attempted invasion of the continent by Hideyoshi ("Three several testimonies concerning the mighty kingdom of Coray"), and one letter dated 1596 and specifically focused on Japan ("A briefe note concerning the extreme Northern province of Japan called Zuegara, situated thirtie degree journey from Miaco which argueth the Isle of Japan to be of greater extension Northwards, then it is ordinarily described in maps, or supposed to be").⁴⁵⁰ The edition included moreover part of Linschoten's work, which was being

circumference of the whole earth; begun in the year of our Lord 1586, and finished 1588", in Richard Hakluyt, *The principall navigations*, (1598-1600), cit., Vol. III, p. 803. The two are the only existing accounts of the voyage.

⁴⁴⁷ "Before his departure, he took out of this great ship two yong lads borne in Japon, which could both wright and reade their own language, the eldest being about 20 yeers olde was named Christopher, the other was called Cosmos, about 17 yeeres of age both of very good capacitie". *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁸ Juan González de Mendoza, *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China*, cit. Before ending up in the final edition of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*, the work had originally appeared as a stand-alone work, in 1588: Robert Parke, *The historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China and the Situation Thereof*, London : I. Wolfe for E. White, 1588.

⁴⁴⁹ Titled "This chapter doth treat of the Islands of Japon, and of other Things in that kingdome". The chapter-title is taken from the nineteenth century edition of the work published by the Hakluyt society: Robert Park and Sir George Thomas Staunton (ed.), *The history of the great and mighty kingdom of China and the situation thereof*, cit.

⁴⁵⁰ Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 68. All the letters were translated from their Italian edition (published in Rome), as was the case for the vast majority of the Jesuit letter-books appearing in languages different from Italian, Spanish or Portuguese.

published in English translation that same 1598, under Hakluyt's suggestion.

The editor and publisher Theodor de Bry – a protestant born in Belgium who, by the 1570s, had settled in Frankfurt so as to escape the Spanish – similarly exploited both the Jesuit sources and Linschoten for the descriptions of Japan included in his travel collection series *Collectiones peregrinatorum*.⁴⁵¹ He also included one of the earliest figurative representation of the Japanese population – albeit an incorrect one: in one of the plates accompanying the text of his section on America, he represented in fact a public confession of Japanese pilgrims, in front of Japanese priests dressed in the fashion of Aztec ones (in reference to the Jesuit missionologist José de Acosta, who had compared the Aztec religious practices to the Japanese ones).⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ *Collectiones peregrinatorum in Indiam orientalem et Indiam occidentalem, XIII partibus comprehenso*. The collection began appearing in 1590 and, after the death of De Bry in 1598, the publication was taken over by his son, who continued it up to 1634. The series included two sub-collections of travel literature, the so-called *Grand voyages*, mostly focused on the Americas, and the *Petits voyages*, which comprehended the section on *India Orientalis* (the names were derived from a slight difference in the formats of the books). Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe. The Century of discovery (book 1)*, cit., p. 216.

⁴⁵² Bernadette Bucher, *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of De Bry's Great Voyages*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 19.

4.2.3. Early first-hand accounts: Noort and the factory merchants

The earliest Dutch report of some significance to include first-hand information about the Japanese archipelago was the one relayed to Europe, not long after the shipwreck of the *Liefde*, by Olivier Van Noort, captain of one of the cruises that had sailed to the Indies under the patronage of the still unassociated trade companies.⁴⁵³

Noort hadn't personally travelled to Japan, but during the last stages of his voyage, in early 1601, he had encountered a Japanese vessel directed toward Manila, off the coast of Borneo.⁴⁵⁴ The vessel was piloted by a Portuguese man named Emanuel Luis, who informed Noort of the presence of the Dutchmen in Japan, so that he could report the news to Europe.⁴⁵⁵ Noort was also briefed about a number of other Japan-related matters, including the way the Nagasaki-Macao trade was conducted, the Jesuit presence in Japan and some information about the Japanese language (a young sailor on board of

⁴⁵³ Noort's expedition had left Europe in 1598 and travelled through the Straits of Magellan – with an openly warring stance towards the Spanish possessions in the Pacific Ocean, as well as with the intent to engage in trade with the Spice islands. He returned to Rotterdam by 1601 through the Cape route, being the first Dutchmen to accomplish a circumnavigation of the world.

⁴⁵⁴ William Corr, *Adams The Pilot*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁵⁵ "The next morning they set saile, and espying a Junke of Japan, learned of them that they were bound for Manilla, and forced for succour to Borneo, had spent foure moneths waiting for their voyage. The Captaine was Emanuel Powis a Portugall, then dwelling at Languasacke in Japan, the Pilot a Chinese, the company Japanders. These told them of a great Holland Ship by tempests shaken, to have put in at Japan, the company by famine and sicknesse all but fourteene dead. They came first to Bongo in thirtie foure degrees, fortie minutes, and by the Kings direction remooved to Atonza, in 36 1/2." I haven't been able to access a copy of the first edition of the report. The quotation is taken from the (edited) version of Noort's report included in Samuel Purchas' *Hakluytus Posthumus* (see below), in the early twentieth century edition by James MacLehose: Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others, Volume 1 [-20]*, Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1905-1909, pp. 203-204. A complete summary of the report is included in Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere*, cit., p. 80.

the vessel informed him about the use of similar characters for writing in Japanese and Chinese, in spite of the fundamental difference in speaking). This information, notice of the shipwreck, and Noort's own impression of the Japanese crew – which included comments on the Japanese style of dressing (peculiarly compared to that of the Polish) and general external appearance, on their attitude (described as inclined to war), as well as on the efficiency of their weapons – were included in the captain's journal, excerpts of which were published upon his return to Europe.

After the establishment of the Dutch and English factories, the merchants, administrators and agents operating in Japan had, contrary to their Portuguese and Spanish counterparts, occasion – and motivation – enough to produce a major quantity of manuscript source materials on the archipelago. Not only they were stationed for long periods in Japan, but they lived scattered throughout different localities, and habitually engaged in business trips, as well as in standard visits to Edo. A regular correspondence was, therefore, necessary between the merchants operating locally, so as to maintain their network of relationships and to coordinate the trade. Moreover, while the Captain of the *náo* in the Macao-Nagasaki trade was entrusted with the task of conducting the trade as a reward for his services to the Crown – and wasn't therefore called to report to a superior for his trade – the factory members were part of larger organizations (the VOC and the English East India Company) to which they were supposed to forward updated information on their investments.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ Michael Cooper, "The Brits in Japan", cit., p. 265-266.

While not all of the materials produced were divulged to the general European public,⁴⁵⁷ some of the accounts did obtain a wider circulation, being included in published collections of travel literature. Most of the Dutch accounts actually appeared in print only from the 1640s onwards – after the enforcement of the *sakoku* policy had assured, at last, the extension of a complete monopoly by the Netherlands on the European commercial intercourse with Japan.⁴⁵⁸ Some of the English materials were, on the other hand, given to print already in the first decades of the seventeenth century – included the massive anthology of travel accounts collected and edited by the English historian Samuel Purchas, and published in 1625 with the title *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his pilgrimes*.

⁴⁵⁷ A massive collection of letters of various length, of manuscript diaries and of other archival materials produced by the members of Japan's British factory between 1613 and 1623 – directly transcribed from the manuscripts collected by the English East India Company – is included in Anthony Farrington, *The English Factory in Japan, 1613-1623*, London: The British Library, 1991. They provide a precious source of knowledge not only about the history of the British factory and the way businesses were handled by the Company in Japan, but also about the material life of the merchants working in the country.

⁴⁵⁸ With some exception. In 1624, the Dutch chronicler Nicolaes Van Wassenaer was able to report, in his *Historisch verhael*, of the steady flow of trade by then existing between the VOC and Japan. He also reported of an episode occurred in 1620, when a Dutch ship brought a young Siamese elephant to the governor of Hirado, allowing its keeper, Daniel Dortsman, to access his residence and meet with (and shortly describe) the wives and concubines that lived inside it (confined, unlike other Japanese women, who, he noticed, were free to roam in the street, unchaperoned). Nicolaes Van Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael alder ghedenck-weerdichste geschiedenisse[n] die hier en daer in Europa, [...] Asia, [...] Africa, [...] America van den beginne des jaers 1621 [tot Octobri des jaers 1632] voorgevallen syn*. Amsterdam: Bij Ian Evertss, 1622-1635. The earlier Dutch first-hand account of some note to be published in Europe was however the one by the VOC merchant François Caron, author of the *Beschrijvinghe van het Machtigh Coninckryck Japan und Siam* (A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam), first published in Amsterdam in 1646. For a complete overview of the work and of its editorial history, see Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 4: East Asia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 1855-1870. A very useful reference work on the Dutch sources on Japan is the bibliography compiled by Oskar Nachod, *Die beziehungen der Niederländischen ostindischen kompagnie zu Japan im siebzehnten Jahrhundert: Inaugural-Dissertation der Hohen philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Rostock zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde*, Berlin: Druck von Pass & Garleb, 1897.

4.2.4. *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his pilgrimes*⁴⁵⁹

Purchas' collection was meant as an expansion of the *Principall Navigations* by Richard Hakluyt. The author reprised the general structure of Hakluyt's work, arranging the materials by geographic area and by time. Whereas the *Navigations* had been conceived to represent the glory of England, as well as to promote the protestant Christian missions in the face of the Catholic ones, Purchas' work was, however, more of a narrative kind, imagined as a sort of "surrogate" for travel itself, and giving a lot of weight to contemporary writers.⁴⁶⁰ It included, as it had been the case with Hakluyt, a number of geographical works that had already been given to print either as stand-alone publications or in other collections (including Hakluyt's own writings and earlier works, such as Ramusio's collection) but also relied for its narrative on a great wealth of unpublished sources.

As far as Japan was concerned,⁴⁶¹ Purchas similarly included both old material (Noort's travel account, Pretty's account of Cavendish's

⁴⁵⁹ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his pilgrimes: Contayning a history of the world, in sea voyages & lande-travells, by Englishmen & others. Wherein Gods wonders in nature & providence, the actes, arts, varieties, & vanities of men, with a world of the worlds rarities, are by a world of eywitnesses-authors, related to the world. Some left written by M. Hakluyt at his death. More since added. His also perused & perfected. All examined, abreviated with discourse. Adorned with pictues and expressed in mapps. In fower parts. Each containing five bookes*, first published in London, by W. Stansby for H. Fetherstone, in 1625.

⁴⁶⁰ On Purchas in comparison with Haklyut and more generally on the travel collections published in the final decades of the sixteenth and in the first half of the seventeenth century, see James P. Helfers, "The Explorer or the Pilgrim?", cit. and Andrew Hadfield, *Amazons, Savages, and Machiavels: Travel and Colonial Writing in English, 1550-1630: An Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁴⁶¹ A twentieth century collection of all the materials related to Japan included in Purchas' work has been gathered by Cyril Wild: Samuel Purchas and Cyril Wild (ed.), *Purchas his Pilgrimes in Japan, extracted from Hakluytus Post-humous or Purchas His Pilgrimes Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, Kobe: J. L. Thompson & Co., 1939. The work adds a commentary to the material, and arranges it all systematically, dividing it in four sections, related respectively to the early explorers (starting with the second-hand account by Marco Polo), the Jesuits, the English – a section that actually occupies the

circumnavigation, as well as a number of Jesuit materials),⁴⁶² and unpublished sources – including two letters by Will Adams, the journal of Captain John Saris, some sections of the diary and a number of letters by Richard Cocks and Edmond Sayer (one of the merchants stationed at the English factory under Cocks’ command),⁴⁶³ and one letter addressed to Purchas himself by a Arthur Hatch, a merchant who had, apparently, spent some time in Japan.

The first of the letters by William Adams (titled “William Adams his Voyage by the Magellan Straights to Japon, written in two Letters by himselfe, as followeth”)⁴⁶⁴ relates of the author’s voyage across the

great majority of the work – and the Dutch. The book, which was never reprinted and is not easily found, was based, in turn on the 20 volumes complete edition of Purchas work, edited and published by James MacLehose: Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others, Volume 1 [-20]*, cit.). An unedited reproduction of an 1625 (and in turn extremely rare) edition of Purchas’ work, in its totality, has been recently published by Kessinger publishing (Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrimage or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered from the Creation Unto This Present Vol: 1 [-2]*, Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003.

⁴⁶² In some cases translating them for the first time in the English language, as with Father Nicholas Trigault’s *The summe of a Letter of Nicolas Trigautius a Jesuite, touching his Voyage to India, and of the State of Christianitie in China and Japan*, first had been first published in Dutch in 1609 and which was included in translation in the work: see Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Volume 10*, cit., pp. 74-82. Other materials connected with the Jesuits included an account of the establishment of the Japanese mission and one of the 1585 embassy: see Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Volume 12*, cit., in particular pp. 239-269.

⁴⁶³ A complete edition of Richard Cocks diary was published much later (1883) by the Hakluyt Society: Richard Cocks and Edward Maunde Thompson (ed.), *Diary of Richard Cocks, cape-merchant in the English factory in Japan, 1615-1622 : with correspondence, vol. 1 (-2)*, London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1883. (both volumes are available online at the following urls: <http://archive.org/stream/diaryofrichardco01cock#page/n5/mode/2up> and <http://archive.org/stream/diaryofrichardco02cock#page/n3/mode/2up> last access: January 4, 2012).

⁴⁶⁴ See Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Volume 2*, cit., pp. 326-346. The volume is available in digitized format at the following url: <http://ia700402.us.archive.org/20/items/cu31924065997144/cu31924065997144.pdf> (last access: December 19, 2012).

Pacific and of the first years of his experience in Japan: of how the crew of the *Liefde* agreed on seizing the opportunity of selling cloth in Japan and decided to travel there; of how he and the other members were kindly received by the *daimyō* of Bungo; of how Adams was summoned and questioned by the “Emperour” (shogun), who learned from him about the warring state of Europe, and how he was kept in temporary imprisonment; of how he was finally freed, in spite of the attempts of the local Jesuits and Portuguese merchants to turn the Japanese authorities against him; of how the crew was allowed to settle in Japan, and how he was retained as a counsellor for the shogun, even after the departure of part of his companions (who were entrusted with the task to bring back to the Netherlands the official permission to initiate trade with Japan). The narration closes with the arrival in Japan of the two ships from Holland in charge of the establishment of the Dutch factory, in 1609, and of a subsequent ship in 1611. A very brief description of Japan is also included – relating about the “length and breadth” of the archipelago, and about the “disposition of people”, described in terms that do not significantly vary from the ones used in the description by Linschoten:

The people of this Land of Japan are good of nature, curteous above measure, and valiant in warre: their Justice is severely executed without any partialitie upon transgressors of the Law. They are governed in great civilitie, I thinke, no Land better governed in the world by Civill Policie. The people are verie superstitious in their Religion, and are of divers opinions.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 339.

The letter closes by generally accounting for the presence of many Jesuits and Franciscan Friars in Japan.⁴⁶⁶

Definitely more rich in details about customs and habits in the archipelago is the narration by Captain John Saris.

In the chapter narrating “The eighth Voyage set forth by the East-Indian Societie”,⁴⁶⁷ Saris relates about his voyage to Hirado and his reception by the local *daimyō* (“King”), Matsuura Shigenobu (“byne Sama”), who visited his ship together with his grandson, Takanobu 隆信 (Tone-Saxna).⁴⁶⁸ Saris profusely describes the manners and clothes of his hosts, and his impressions of the other people he met on board, and ashore, during his own visit to the *daimyō*:

When they drew neare to the ship, the King commanded all, but the two wherein himselfe and his Nephew were, to fall a sterne, and they only entred the ship, both of them in silke

⁴⁶⁶ The second letter, addressed by Adams to his wife (“A Letter of William Adams to his Wife from Japan”), doesn’t add much to the information of the first one, which is basically repeated, with the narration truncated, “by the malice of the bearers”, after his questioning by the shogun.

⁴⁶⁷ “The eighth Voyage set forth by the East-Indian Societie, wherein were employed three Ships, the Clove, the Hector, and the Thomas, under the command of Captaine John Saris : His Course and Acts to and in the Red Sea, Java, Molucca's, and Japan (by the Inhabitants called Nessoon, where also he first began and setled an English Trade and Factorie) with other remarkable Rarities, collected out of his owne Journall”, in Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Volume 3*, cit., pp. 357-490. The volume is available in digitized format at the following url: <http://archive.org/details/hakluytusposthu91purcgoog> (last access: December 29, 2012).

⁴⁶⁸ Samuli Kaislaniemi has commented on the use of the term “king” in reference to “*daimyō*”, and “emperour” in reference to “shogun” in the English correspondence, noticing how the use of the terms shows evidence of confusion generated by the Japanese practice of nominal abdication (and, more generally, by the mismatch of the Japanese and English semantic categories). See in this regard, Samuli Kaislaniemi, “Encountering and appropriating the Other: East India Company Merchants and foreign terminology”, in Arja Nurmi, Minna Nevala and Minna Palander-Collin (eds.), *The Language of Daily Life in England (1400-1800)*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2009, pp. 219-252.

gownes, girt to them with a shirt, and a paire of breeches of flaxen cloath next their bodies, either of them had two Cattans or swords of that Countrey by his side, the one of halfe a yard long, the other about a quarter. They wore no bands, the fore-parts of their heads were shaven to the crowne, and the rest of their haire, which was very long, was gathered together and bound up on a knot behind, wearing neither Hat nor Turbant, but bare-headed. The King was aged about seventie two yeeres, his Nephew or Grand-child, that governed under him, was about two and twentie yeeres old, and either of them liad his Govemour with him, who had conunand over their slaves, as they appointed him. Their manner and curtesie in saluting was after their manner, which is this. First, in presence of him whom they are to salute, they put off their shooes (stockings they weare none) and then clapping their right hand within their left, they put them downe towards meir knees, and so wagging or moving of their hands a little to and fro, they stooping, steppe with small steps sideling from the pairtie saluted, and crie Augh, Augh.⁴⁶⁹

There came continually such a world of people aboard, both men and women, as that we were not able to go upon the decks [...] I gave leave to divers women of the better sort to come into my Cabbin, where the picture of Venus, with her Sonne Cupid, did hang somewhat wantonly set out in a large frame, they thinking it to bee our Ladie and her Sonne, fell downe and worshipped it, with shewes of great devotion, telling men in a whispering manner (that some of their owne companions which were not so, might not heare) that they

⁴⁶⁹ Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...]*, Volume 3, cit., pp. 442-443.

were Christianos: whereby we perceived them to be Christians, converted by the Portugall veneration of Jesuits. The King came aboard againe, and brought foure chiefe women with him. They were attired in gownes of silke, dapt the one skirt over the other, and so girt to them, bare-legged, only a paire of halfe buskins bound with silke riband about their instep: their haire very blacke, and very long, tyed up in a knot upon the crowne in a comely manner : their heads no where shaven as the mens were. They were well-faced, handed, and footed; cleare skind and white, but wanting colour, which they amend by arte. Of stature low, but very fat; very curteous in behaviour, not ignorant of the respect to be given unto persons according to their fashion. [...]They sung divers songs, and played upon certain Instruments (wherof one did much resemble our Lute) being bellyed like it, but longer in the necke, and fretted like ours, but had only foure gut-strings. Theit fingring with the left hand like ours, very liimb: but the right hand striketh with an Ivoiy bone, as we use to play Upon a Citterae with a quill. They delighted themselves much with their musicke, keeping time with their hands, and playing and singing by booke, prickt on line and space, resembling much ours heere.⁴⁷⁰

The one and twentieth, the old King came aboard againe, and brought with him divers women to be frolicke. These women were Actors of Comedies, which passe there from Iland to Iland to play, as our Players doe here from Towne to Towne, having severall shifts of apparrell for the better grace of the matter acted ; which women for the most part are of Warre, Love, and such like. These Women are as the slaves of one man, who putteth a price what every man shall

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 444-445.

pay that hath to doe with any of them; more then which he is not to take upon paine of death, in case the partie injured shall complaine. It is left to his owne discretion to prize her at the first, but rise he cannot afterwards, fall he may. Neither doth the partie bargaine with the Wench, but with her Master, whose command she is to obey. The greatest of their Nobilitie travelling, hold it no disgrace to send for these Panders to their Inne, & do compound with them for the Wenches, either to fill their drinke at Table (for all men of any ranke have their drinke filled to them by Women) or otherwise to have the use of them. When any of these Panders die (though in their life time they were received into Company of the best, yet now as unworthy to rest amongst the worst) they are bridled with a bridle made of straw, as you would bridle an Horse, and in the doathes they died in, are dragged through the streetes into the fields, and there cast upon a dunghill, for dogges and fowles to devoure.⁴⁷¹

The letter goes on to narrate the establishment of commercial contacts between the English and the Dutch already operating on the Japanese archipelago. The author has occasion to briefly discuss the Japanese justice system, and to report about several capital punishment sentences delivered against members of the local population during his stay in Hirado:

The first of July, two of our Company happened to quarrell the one with the other, and were very likely to have gone into the field, to the endangering of us all. For it is a custome here, That whosoever drawes a weapon in anger, although he doe no harme therewith, hee is presently cut in peeces:

⁴⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 447-448.

and doing but small hurt, not only themselves are so executed, but their whole generation.⁴⁷²

The eighth, three Japonians were executed, viz. two men and one woman : the cause this ; The woman none of the honestest (her husband being travelled from home) had appointed these two their severall houres to repaire unto her. The latter man not knowing of the former, and thinking the time too long, comming in before the houre appointed, found the first man with her already, and enraged thereat, he whipt out his Cattan, and wounded both of them very sorely, having very neere hewne the Chine of the mans backe in two. But as well as he might hee cleared himselfe of the woman, and recovering his Cattan, wounded the other. The street taking notice of the fray forthwith seased upon them, led them aside, and acquainted King Foyne therewith, and sent to know his pleasure, (for according to his will, the partie is executed) who presently gave order that they should cut off their heads. [...] The tenth, three more were executed as the former, for stealing of a woman from Firando, and selling her at Langasacque long since, two of them were brethren, and the other a sharer with them. When any are to be executed, they are led out of the Towne in diis manner : There goeth first one with a Pick-axe, next followeth an other with a shovell for to make his grave (if that bee permitted him) the third man beareth a small Table whereon is written the parties offence, which table is afterwards set up upon a Post on the grave where he is buried. The fourth is the partie to be executed, his hands bound behind him with a silken cord, having a little Banner of Paper (much resembling our wind-vanes) whereon is likewise written his offence. The

⁴⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 448.

executioner followeth next, with his Cattan by his side, holding in his hand the cord wherewith the offender is bound. On either side of the executioner goeth a soxildiour with his Pike, the head thereof resting on the shoulder of the partie appointed to suffer, to skare him from attempting to escape. In this very manner I saw one led to execution, who went so resolutely and without all appearance of feare of death, that I could not but much admire him, never having seene the like in Christendome. The offence for which he suffered was for stealing of a sacke of Rice (of the value of two shillings sixe pence,) from his neighbour, whose house was then on fire.⁴⁷³

The remaining part of the journal is devoted to narrating the visit paid by Saris to Ieyasu in Sunpu castle (Suruga) and to the shogun Hidetada in Edo – which led to the final establishment of the English factory in Japan.

The narration of the journey to Sunpu is interspersed with descriptions of Saris' encounters with the population living in the country and along the Japanese coasts:

here in Fuccate, and so through the whole Country, whithersoever we came, the boyes, children, and worser sort of idle people, would gather about and follow along after us, crying, Coré, Coré, Cocoré, Waré, that is to say. You Coéns with false hearts: wondering, hooping, hollowing, and making such a noise about us, that we could scarcely heare one an other speake, sometimes throwing stones at us (but that not in many Townes) yet the clamour and crying after us was every where alike, none reprooving them for it. The

⁴⁷³ *Ibidem*, pp. 450-451.

best advice that I can give those who hereafter shall arrive there, is that they passe on without regarding those idly rablements, and in so doing, they shall find their eares onely troubled with the noise. All alongst this Coast, and so up to Ozaca, we found women divers, that lived with their household and family in boats upon the water, as in Holland they do the like. These women would catch fish by diving, which by net and lines they missed, and that in eight fathome depth : their eyes by continuall diving doe grow as red as blood, whereby you may know a diving woman from all other women.⁴⁷⁴

A number of Japanese cities are also mentioned: Hakata (“Fuccate”), presented as “as great as London” and “very civil”, Osaka (“Osaca”), similarly “as great as London within the walls, with many faire Timber bridges of a great height, serving to passe over a river there as wide as the Thames at London”,⁴⁷⁵ and Sakai (“Sacay”). A long description is given of the castle of Osaka, residence of “the sonne of Tiquasamma” (Hideyoshi) – who, having been an infant at the death of his father, had seen his power usurped and had been confined in the castle (and married to Tokugawa Ieyasu’s daughter). Saris focuses, moreover, on the garrison of three thousand soldiers put in place by Ieyasu to guard the cities of Osaka and Kyoto (“Miaco”), enumerating the equipments of the soldiers. The garrison, given change on a three-year basis, happened to be shifted right when the English travellers passed it,

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 453-454. As underlined by Lach and Van Kley, it is actually doubtful that the local population was referring to the English travelers as “Coreans” (*chōsenjin*). The line has been interpreted by different writers in different possible ways: for an overview of the matter, see Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 4*, cit., p. 1851 (note 95).

⁴⁷⁵ Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...]*, Volume 3, cit., pp. 453-454.

allowing Saris to comment, in admiring tones, on the orderly way in which the process was conducted:

Such good order was taken for the passing and providing for, of these three thousand Souldiers, that no man either travelling or inhabiting upon the way where they lodged, was any way injured by them, but cheerefully entertayned them as other their guests, because they paid or what they tooke, as all other men did. Every Towne and Village upon the way being well fitted with Cookes and Victualling houses, where they might at an instant have what they needed, and dyet themselves from a pennie English a meale, to two shillings a meale.⁴⁷⁶

The captain devotes some remarks to the Japanese diet (underlining the centrality of rice – even for the production of alcohol – fish, and pickled vegetables and roots and the absence of dairy products in the diet, enumerating the various categories of cattle, and relating about the habit of drinking warm water, without however explicitly mentioning tea) and proceeds to the description of the scenario encountered by his group of travellers along the *Tokaidō*:

This way is the mayne Roade of all this Countrey, and is for the most part sandie and gravell; it is divided into leagues, and at every leagues end are two small hils, viz. of either side of the way one, and upon every one of them a faire Pine-tree, trimmed round in fashion of an Arbor. These markes are placed upon the way to the end, that the Hacknie men, and those which let our Horses to hire, should not make men pay more then their due, which is about three pence a league.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 457.

The Roade is exceedingly travelled, full of people, ever and anon you meet with Farmes and Countrey houses, with Villages, and often with great Townes, with Ferries over fresh Rivers, and many Futtakeasse or Fotoquis which are their Temples, scituate in Groves and most pleasantest places for delight, of the whole Countrey. The Priests that attend there-upon dwelling about the same, as our Friars in old time planted themselves here in England. When wee approached any Towne, we saw Crosses with the dead bodies Crosses and of those who had beene crucified thereupon. For crucifying is heere an ordinarie punishment for most Malefactors.⁴⁷⁷

The final encounter with Ieyasu is then narrated, and the subsequent trip to Edo, which brought the group to travel across Kamakura, and to visit the bronze *Daibutsu* that stood in the city:

We saw many Fotoquise or Temples as we passed, and amongst others one Image of especiall note, called Dabis, made of Copper, being hollow within, but of a very substantiall thicknesse. It was in height, as wee ghessed, from the ground about one and twentie or two and twentie foot in the likenesse of a man kneeling upon the ground, with his buttockes resting on his hedes, his armes of wonderfull largenesse, and the whole bodie proportionable, he is fashioned wearing of a Gowne. This Image is much revered by Travellers as they passe there.⁴⁷⁸

Edo is described as even greater than Sunpu, and glorious in appearance:

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 459.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 462.

The fourteenth, we arrived at Edo, a Citie much greater then Surunga, farre fairer building, and made a very glorious appearance unto us; the ridge-tiles and comer-tiles richly gilded, the posts of their doores gilded and varnished: Glasse-windowes they have none, but great windowes of board, opening in leaves, well set out with painting, as in Holland: there is a Cawsey which goeth thorow the chiefe streete of the Towne; underneath this Cawsey runneth a River, at every fiftie paces there is a Well-head, fitted very substantially of free-stone, with buckets for the neighbours to fetch water, and for danger of fire. This streete is as broad as any of our streets in England.

After reporting about the encounter with the shogun, Saris inserts a copy of the letter to the King of England and a translation of the privilege for trade he received from Hidetada. Mention is also included of the decrees against Christianity, and of a martyrdom of Christians held in Edo during his stay there. In the narration of his trip back to Hirado, moreover, Saris includes a brief description of Kyoto, the Buddhist temples and Jesuit college there:

Miaco is the greatest Citie of Japan, consisting most upon merchandizing. The chiefe Fotoqui or Temple of the whole Country is there, being built of free-stone, and is as long as the Western end of Saint Pauls in London, from the Quier, being as high arched and borne upon pillars as that is: where many Bonzees doe attend for their maintenance, as the Pmests among Papists. There is an Altar whereon they doe

offer Rice and small money, called Condrius (whereof twentie make one shilling English:) which is employed for the use of the Bonzees. Neare unto this Altar there is an Idoll, by the Natives called Mannada, made of Copper, much resembling that of Dabis formerly spoken of, but is much higher, for it reacheth up to the very Arch. This Fotoqui was begun to be built by Taicosania in his life-time, and since his Sonne hath proceeded to the finishing thereof, which was newly made an end of when wee were there. Within the inclosure of the walles of this Fotoqui there are buried (by the report of the inhabitants) the Eares and Noses of three thousand Coreans, which were massacred at one time: Upon their grave is a mount raised, with a Pyramis on the toppe thereof; which mount is greene, and very neatly kept. The horse that Taico-sanias last rode on, is kept neare unto this Fotoqui, having never been ridden since, his hooffes being extraordinarily growne with his age, and still standing there. The Fotoqui standeth upon the top of an high hill, and on either side, as yee mount up to it, hath fiftie pillars of free-stone, distant ten paces one from the other, and on every pillar a Lanterne, wherein every night lights are maintained of Lampe-oyle. In this Citie of Miaco, the Portugall Jesuits have a very stately Colledge, wherein likewise are divers Jesuits, Naturall Japonians, which preach, and have the new Testament printed in the Japan language. In this Colledge are many Japonian children trayned up, and instructed in the rudiments of Christian Religion, according to the Romish Church: There are not lesse then five or sixe thousand Japonians in this Citie of Miaco professing Christ.

Besides the Fotoqui before described, there are many other Fotoquis in this Citie. The Tradesmen and Artificers are distributed by themselves, every Occupation and Trade in

their severall streets, and not mingled together, as heere with us.⁴⁷⁹

The letter closes with the narration of the establishment of the English factory and of Saris' return trip to England. The final pages include some brief remarks about "Yedzo" (Ezo/Hokkaido) – titled *Intelligence concerning Yedzo, delivered in the Citie of Edoo in Japan, by a Japanner, who had beenc there twice*:

Yedzo is an Island, and lyeth on the North-west side of Japan, and distant from thence ten leagues : That the people are white, and of good condition, Dut very hairy all their bodies over like Munkeyes. Their weapons are bowes and arrowes poysoned. The people in the Southermost part thereof doe understand weight and measure: whereof within the Land thirtie dayes journey they are ignorant. They have much silver and sand-gold, whereof they make payment to the Japanners for Rice, &c. Rice and Cotton doath of Japan, is heere well recmested. Iron and Lead is brought to them from Japan. Necessaries for the belly and backe are most vendible to them. Rice transported from Japan to Yedzo, hath yeilded foure for one.

The Towne where the Japanners have their chiefe residence and Mart, is called Matchma, therein are five hundred housholds of Japanners, who likewise have a Fort there, the Governour whereof is called Matchmat donna. This Towne of Matchma, is the principall Mart Towne of all Ycdzo, whither the Natives most resort to buy and sell, especially in September, for their provision for winter. In March, they bring downe Salmon and dryed fish of sundrie

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 470-471.

sorts, and other wares, for which the Japanners barter, which the Japanners rather desire than silver.

The Japanners have no settled being or Trade, in any other Towne than Matchma. That further to the North-ward, upon the same Land, are people of very low stature like Dwarfes. That the Yedzos are people of the stature of the Japanners: and have no apparrell, but what is brought them from Japan.⁴⁸⁰

This was actually not the first notice of Ezo to reach Europe. Reports of the existence of the island had been included in Jesuit accounts before – the earliest one being the letter sent to Goa by Father Luis Frões in 1565 (and first published in the already mentioned *Rerum a Societate Jesu in Oriente Gestarum volumen* by Giovanni Pietro Maffei).⁴⁸¹ Saris' narration about the island was, still, the first to appear in the English language, and a fairly detailed one. Only a few years after his departure from Japan, in 1618, a European, the Italian Jesuit Father Girolamo de Angelis, would reportedly set foot for the first time in Ezo, leaving a more detailed description and a manuscript map of the island.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 488-489.

⁴⁸¹ The letter accounted for a “great land inhabited by savages” to the north of Japan and adjacent to it, three hundred leagues from the city of Kyoto. See George Kiss, “The Cartography of Japan during the Middle Tokugawa Era”, cit., p. 106.

⁴⁸² Both the description and the map are conserved, in manuscript form, in the archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome (under the title *Relaçao do reino de Yezo que o P.re Francisco Pacheco me. pedio por ordem dos superiores, Iap, Sin.* 34, ff. 49r-54v) The description of Yezo (without the map) was first published in 1624, under the title “*Relatione del Regno di Iezo*” in the *Relatione di alcune cose cauate dalle lettere scritte ne gli anni 1619. 1620. & 1621. dal Giappone. Al molto reu. in Christo P. Mutio Vitelleschi preposito generale della Compagnia di Giesu*, Rome: Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1624, pp. 217-232. (The volume is available on line at the following url: http://books.google.it/books?id=b51GAAAacAAJ&pg=PA2&dq=Relatione+di+alcune+cose+cauate+dalle+lettere+scritte+ne+gli+anni+1619.+1620.+1621.+dal+Giappone.&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fPbmUKLnMMqT0QXU14HADQ&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false Last access: January 2, 2012). Only by 1643, western navigators would begin to chart the eastern shores of Ezo. On the early European cartographical production

Saris only mentions Japan again in the appendix to his narration,⁴⁸³ where he includes “A note of requestable Commodities vendible in Japan, together with their prices there Current” and “A Memoriall of such Merchandize as are to be bought in Japan, and the prices as they are there worth.” The narration about the archipelago is picked up in the following chapter of Purchas’ collection, which includes part of Richard Cocks’ diary, and a number of letters written in the years of his direction of the English factory.⁴⁸⁴

The section of Cocks’ diary published in Purchas covers the events happening in Hirado throughout 1613, while Saris was engaged in his voyage to Sunpu and Edo. It relates about the intercourse of the English House with the local authorities – as well as with the governor of Nagasaki (“Bon Diu”), who visited the city during Saris’ absence – and of other occurrences, such as the typhoon that struck the area in August, heavily damaging the city (and nearly disrupting the English House) and heightening the risk of fires.⁴⁸⁵

on Ezo, see Adriana Boscaro and Lutz Walter, “Ezo and Its Surroundings through the Eyes of European Cartographers,” in Lutz Walter (ed.), *Japan – A Cartographic Vision*, Munich-New York: Prestel, 1994, pp. 84–94.

⁴⁸³ “Observations of the said Captaine John Saris, of occurrents which happened in the East-Indies during his abode at Bantam, from October 1605. tin Octob. 1609. As likewise touching the Marts and Merchandizes of those parts; observed by his owne experience, or relation of others, extracted out of his larger Booke, and heere added as an Appendix to his former greater Voyage; and may serve as a continuation of Master Scots premised Relations. To which are added certaine Observations of the said Author, touching the Townes and Merchandize of principall Trade in those parts of the World” in Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...], Volume 3*, cit., pp. 490-518.

⁴⁸⁴ “Relation of Master Richard Cockes Cape Merchant, Of what past in the Generals absence going to the Emperours Court. Whereunto are added divers Letters of his and others for the better knowledge of Japonian Affaires, and later Occurents in those parts”, in Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...], Volume 3*, cit., pp. 519-570.

⁴⁸⁵ Because of what Cocks defines “stupid superstitions”: “the barbarous unruly people did runne up and downe the streets all night with fire-brands, that the wind carried great coales quite over the tops of houses, and some houses being carryed away, the wind whirled up the fire which was in them, and carried it into the ayre in

The narration doesn't leave as much space as Saris' one to the description of Japan, but it does include some passing remarks on the customs and habits of the population. The death of a member of the English House, for example, gives Cocks occasion to discuss the attitude of the population towards death and burial:

The seven and twentieth, M. William Pauling Masters mate, having been long sicke of a consumption, died at the English house, whereof I advertised the old King by Miguel our Jurebasso, desiring a buriall place for him among the Christians, which he graunted me. So we put the dead corps into a winding sheete, and coffind it up, others of the ships company, came to the English house, to accompanie the dead corps to the grave, and then were we given to understand, that of force we must transport it by water, as farre as the Dutch house, onely because the Bose (or Priests) would not suffer us to passe through the street (with the dead corps) before their Pagod or Temple : so the Master sent for the SkifFe, and conveied the dead body by water to the place aforesaid, we going all by land, and met it, and so accompanied it to the place of buriall, the Purser going before, and all the rest following after, the coffin being covered with a Holland sheet, and upon that a Silke quilt, we being followed with many of that countrey people, both young and old. And after the corps was enterred, we returned all to the English house, and there made collation, and so our people returned aboard about ships busnesse. But I had almost forgot to note downe, that we had much adoe to get any one of these countrey people to make the

great flakes, very feareull to behold". *Ibidem*, p. 524. Fires are often mentioned in the account, including one that ended up destroying the residence of the local *daimyō* (pp. 528-529).

grave, that a Christian was to be buried in; neither would they suffer the dead corps to be conveyed by water in any of their boates.⁴⁸⁶

Cocks comments, moreover, on the way the city is managed, reporting of how the inhabitants of every house in the city are supposed to engage in keeping the streets clean:

The King commaunded that all the streetes in Firando should be made cleane, and channell rowes made on either side, to convey away the water, the streetes being gravelled, and the channels covered over with flat stones; which worke was all done in one day, every one doing it before his owne house. It was admirable to see the diligence every one used therein : our house was not the last a doing, the Captaine Chinesa (our Land-lord) setting men a worke to doe it.⁴⁸⁷

A long descriptions is also given of the *bon matsuri*, that took place in the town soon after Saris' departure, and of other occasions of social interaction:

The nineteenth at night, began the great Feast of the Pagans, they inviting their dead kindred, banquetting and making merry all night with candle-light at their graves: this Feast endured three days, and as many nights. And very strict command was given from the King, that every house should gravell the street before their doores, and hang out candle-light in the night: in doing whereof I was not slacke; and as I was informed, a poore man was put to death, and his house

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 527.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

shut up, for disobeying therein. The China Captaine furnished me with a couple of paper Lanteraes very decent. And I was informed the Kings would ride about the streets, and come to visite me : so I made readie a banquet, and expected them untill after midnight, but they came not at all. On the twentieth, one and twentieth, and two and twentieth, I sent presents to both the Kings (being informed that it was the use of the Countrey) of Wine and banquetting stuffe ; as likewise to Nobesane the yong Kings brother, and to Semidone, the old Kings Govemour, and Unagense, which were well accepted. Some Cavaleros came to visite our house, and received the best entertainment I could give.

On the three and twentieth, [...] the great Feast made an end, and three companies of Dancers went up and downe the Towne with flags or banners, their musicke being Drummes and Pans; at the sound whereof they danced at every great mans doore, as also at all their Pagods and Sepulchres.

The foure and twentieth at night, all the streets were Masking and hanged with candle-light, for that the yong King and his brother, Nabesone Semydone, and many others went with a Maskarado, or to dance at the old Kings house : the yong King and his brother were mounted on horse-back, and had Canopies caried over them ; the rest went on foote, and the musicke was Drummes and Kettles, as aforesaid ; and Nabesone winded a Phife.⁴⁸⁸

The three and twentieth, I was given to understand of a great Pagan Feast that was to be performed this day, and that both the Kings, with all the rest of the Nobilitie, accompanied with divers strangers, met together at a Summer-house, set up before the great Pagod, to see a

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp.520-521.

Horse-race : I thinke there was not so few as three thou-sand persons assembled together, as I esteemed in viewing of them. Every Nobleman went on horse-backe to the place, accompanied with a rout of Slaves, some with Pikes, some with Small-shot, and others with Bowes and Arrowes: the Pike-men were placed on the one side of the streete, and the Shot and Archers on the other ; the middest of the streete being left void to runne the race: and right before the Summer-house (where the King and Nobles sate) was a round Buckler of straw hanged against the wall, at which the Archers on horse-backe running a full Careere, discharged their arrowes, both in the streete and Summer-house, where the Nobles sate ; that neither the Present which we sent, nor we could have entrance: And so we passed along the streete, beholding all, and returned another way to the English house.⁴⁸⁹

In particular, a feast at the house of the *daimyō* is described, where Cocks and other members of the English House had occasion to assist to a “comedy” performed by their very hosts:⁴⁹⁰

The old King himselfe came and brought us Collation in sight of all the people: and after Semidone did the like in the name of both the Kings; and after divers Noblemen of the Kings followers, made us a third Collation. But the matter I noted most of all, was their Comoedie (or Play) the Actors being the Kings themselves, with the greatest Noblemen and Princes. The matter was of the valiant deeds of their Ancestors, from the beginning of their Kingdome or

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 539.

⁴⁹⁰ As suggested by Lach and Van Kley, probably a *nō* or a *kyōgen* performance. Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 4*, cit., p. 1853 (note 109).

Common-wealth, untill this present, with much mirth mixed among, to give the common people content. The Audience was great, for no house in Towne but brought a Present, nor no Village nor place under their Dominions, but did the like, and were spectators. And the Kings themselves did see, that every one, both great and small, did eate and drinke before they departed. Their acting Musique and singing (as also their Poetry) is very harsh to us, yet they keepe due time both with hands and feet. Their Musique is little Tabers, made great at both ends, and smal in the middest, like to an Houre-glasse, they beating on the end with one hand, and straine the cords which goe about it, with the other, which maketh it to sound great or small as they list, according their voices with it, one playing on a Phite or Flute ; but all harsh, and not pleasant to our hearing. Yet I never saw Play wherein I noted so much, for I see their policie is great in doing thereof, and quite contrary to our Comoedies in Christendome, ours being but dumbe shewes, and this the truth it selfe, acted by the Kings themselves, to keepe in perpetuall remembrance their affaires.⁴⁹¹

The account closes with the return of Saris back in Hirado. Several letters follow, covering events from the departure of Saris up to march 1620,⁴⁹² and focusing on matters more strictly related with the English factory (the amount and nature of the exchanges conducted on the archipelago and with the surrounding countries, the intercourse – and

⁴⁹¹ Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...], Volume 3*, cit., pp. 542-543.

⁴⁹² Two letters sent from Hirado and dated December 10, 1614: “Firando in Japan, the tenth of December 1614.” (Richard Cocks); “To the Worshipfull Thomas Wilson Esquire, at his House at the Britaine-Burse, at the Strand” (Richard Cocks). Two letters dated respectively December 5, 1615 and December 4, 1616, by Edmond Sayer. A letter by Richard Cocks from Hirado, dated February 15, 1617 (with, enclosed, part of another of his letters, from the previous year). And a letter by Richard Cocks from Nagasaki, dated March 10, 1620.

often the hostility – with European competitors, the future perspectives of trade, etc.).

Only occasionally, and very generally, the letters account also for current events in Japan. The first one, dated December 10, 1614, reports, for example, of the persecutions against the Christian missionaries, of the death of the old *daimyō* of Hirado, of the beginning of the siege in Osaka (that would eventually lead to the final defeat of the Toyotomi family by the hands of Tokugawa Ieyasu) and of a typhoon that struck the city of Edo, causing a flood in the city and forcing the inhabitants to seek safety in the mountains. The last of the letters similarly covers the persecutions against the Christians (mentioning the martyrdoms of fifty-one Christians in Kyoto and sixteen in Nagasaki and the tearing down of Churches and Jesuit Houses) and accounts also for the adjustments in power after the defeat of the Toyotomi clans and of the persistent (and unfounded) rumours reporting of the survival of Hideyoshi's son.

All in all, both Saris' and Cocks' accounts present a fragmented picture of the Japanese archipelago. They don't seem to aim at conveying a coherent imaginary of Japan, but rather at relating a practical kind of knowledge, strictly interconnected with the activities of the English factory, mingled with "curious account", which could appeal to a European readership.

The letter by Hatch,⁴⁹³ dated November 25, 1623, provides, on the other hand, a much more general and all-encompassing – albeit brief – description of Japan. It opens by addressing the physical

⁴⁹³ "A letter touching Japon with the government, affaires and later occurrents there, written to me by master Arthur Hatch minister, lately returned thence", in Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...], Volume 10*, cit., pp. 83-88. The volume can be accessed online at the following url: <http://archive.org/stream/hakluytusposthu05unkngoog#page/n6/mode/2up> (last access: December 2, 2013).

characteristics and climate of the archipelago – described as chiefly mountainous (so that only two-thirds of its territories are actually inhabited or cultivated), temperate and healthy, even though disturbed by frequent storms and earthquakes.

It then proceeds to focus on the political system of the country. Japan is described as governed by an “Emperour”, controlling “threescore and five Kings”, backed up by a “Counsell” of five, who

commonly are such, that for Wisdome, Policie, and carefull vigilancie in managing the State affaires, in preventing of Treasons and Rebellions, in executing of Justice and continuing of peace and quietnesse may bee compared with many, nay most in Christendome.⁴⁹⁴

The text relates moreover about the “Emperour” himself – remarking how he only seldom leaves the Courts and reportedly entertains relationships only with one wife (contrary to the common use of the other men of the country) – and about his relationship with the Japanese feudal lords (“Princes”). In particular, Hatch describes what are the basics of the practice of *sankinkōtai* 参勤交代:

All Rivers doe in a kinde of thankfull renumeration returne their waters to the Sea, because they tooke them from thence, but the Princes of Japon doe cleane contrarie, for they receive nothing from the Emperour, and yet they give all to the Emperour, for they doe even impoverish themselves, by enriching him by presents; nay, they strive and contend who may give the greatest and chiefest Present. And each of those severall Princes must alwayes bee either himselfe in

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

person, or his Brother, eldest Sonne, or the chiefe Nobleman within his Realme at the Emperours Court; the reason of it is not well knowne, but it is pretended, that it is done to keepe the severall Kingdomes in quiet, and free from tumults, treasons and rebellions. The Emperour doth ordinarily requite his Princes presents after this manner: hee gives them a Feather for a Goose, some few Kerrimoones or Coates, for Gold, Silver or other precious and rare commodities; and that they may not grow rich, and of sufficient abilitie to make head against him, he suffers not their Fleeces to grow, but sheares them off, by raising Taxes on them for the building of Castles, and the repairing of Fortifications, and yet they are not suffered to repaire their owne, or any way to fortifie themselves.⁴⁹⁵

A brief overview of the principal castles and fortifications of Japan is then followed by a description of the more general customs of the Japanese, who get singled out (as it had been the case in previous descriptions) for their courteousness and hospitality:

The people are generally Courteous, affable and full of Compliments, they are very punctuall in the entertayning Strangers, and they will assoone lose a limbe as omit one

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 84. The rule of *sankinkōtai* (*daimyō*'s alternating Edo residence) required every *daimyō* to periodically move from their possessions to Edo, where they were supposed to spend alternate years, leaving behind, when absent, part of their families as hostages. As underlined by Hatch, the core motive behind the practice was that the expenses required from the *daimyō* to afford the periodical trip and the maintenance of their residence in the capital would deprive them of the practical means to oppose the shogun (and any attempt at rebellion would similarly be discouraged by the presence of hostages). The practice had been introduced, in its basics, under Hideyoshi's rule, and had evolved ever since the Keichō era (1596-1615) and into the Kan'ei era (1624-1644), reflecting the progressive shift in the political relationship between the *daimyō* and the shogun. In 1635, it was finally included in the *Buke shohatto* 武家諸法度 (the law system for the Military Houses). See Maruyama Yasunari, *Sankinkōtai*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2007, pp. 61-66.

Ceremonie in welcomming their friend; they use to give and receive the emptie Cup at one the others hands, and before the Master of the house begins to drinke, hee will proffer the Cup to every one of his Guests, making shew to have them to begin though it bee farre from his intention.⁴⁹⁶

Food and drink habits are very generally presented, and the author comments on the effects drinking commonly has on the Japanese people:

They have strong Wine and Rack distill'd of Rice, of which they will sometimes drinke largely, especially at their Feasts and meetings, and being moved to anger or wrath in the heate of their Drinke, you may assoone perswade Tygres to patience and quietnesse as them, so obstinate and wilfill they are in the furie of their impatience.⁴⁹⁷

As in most of the published descriptions of Japan, the author includes, comments on the Japanese justice system and on the diffusion of literacy:

Their Lawes are very strict and full of severitie, affoording no other kinde of punishment but either Death or Banishment: Murther, Theft, Treason, or the violation of any of the Emperours Proclamations or Edicts, are punished with death; so is Adulterie also if it bee knowne and the parties pursued, but the Devill their master in those actions hath taught them such cleanly conveyances, that seldome or never are they apprehended; they proceed both in Controversies

⁴⁹⁶ Samuel Purchas and James MacLehose (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes [...]*, Volume 10, cit., p. 86.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

and criminall causes according to the verdict of the produced witnesses, and the Sentence being once past, they will not revoake or mittigate the severitie of it, but if the parties attached have deserved death they shall surely have it, and for the manner, they are either Beheaded or Crucified ; hee kneeles downe on his knees and then comes the Executioner behind him and cuts off his head with a Catan or their Countrie-sword, and his head being off, the young Cavalleers trie their weapons on his limbes, and prove whether they can cut off an Arme or Leg at a blow; the other have their armes spread abroad on a Crosse, which done, they set the Crosse upright in the ground, and then comes one either with a Lance or Speare and runnes the partie through the bodie, where hee hangs untill he rots off, no man being suffered to take him downe.

Every one may change his Name three times, when he is a childe, when he is a young-man, and when he is old; some change their names more often, every one as hee pleaseth may make choyse of his owne name, and they are commonly named either by the King, or else by some Noble or Great man with whom they are chiefly in favour.

They have the use of Writing and Printing, and have had the space of many yeeres, no man knowes certainly how long. They have seven sorts of Letters, each single letter serving for a word, and many of them in their placing serve for sixe or seven; and each Alphabet hath eight and fortie Letters, and yet with all these letters they are not able to write our Christian names; they have not the true pronounciation of H. B. T. and some other letter, and a Chinesse if his life lay on it, cannot truely pronounce D.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 87-88.

The letter finally closes with some remarks on Japanese festivities:

They observe no Sabbath, but certaine Feast dayes according to the Moone, as the first of the Moone, the 15. or 28. ; on these dayes they goe to the Church, visit the Sepulchers of the dead, and use many foolish and apish Ceremonies, which time will not permit me now to relate. The ninth day of the Moone throughout the yeere they hold for accursed, and therefore in tmt day they will not begin or undertake any worke of consequence and importance. They strictly observe a Fast on that day of the moneth, in which their Father or Mother dyed, which they doe so precisely keepe, that they will not touch or eate any thing that hath blood.⁴⁹⁹

All in all, while offering a more general overview of Japan, Hatch's account did not add in a significant way to the information already circulated in the published materials in Europe. If anything, it confirmed an imaginary of the country that had already been conveyed by the all-encompassing Jesuit narratives – further spreading and affirming, through the popularity of Purchas' collection,⁵⁰⁰ the knowledge about a country that “to European readers at the beginning of the seventeenth century [...] was perhaps the most familiar place in Asia”.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁵⁰⁰ Of such popularity there is little doubt: while Purchas was largely criticized by contemporary writers for the heavy editing of the accounts he included in his work (see in this regard: James P. Helfers, “The Explorer or the Pilgrim?”, cit., pp. 167-168) he received, on the other hand, open praise for the readability of work, even by a number of notable readers – such as king James, who apparently read through the work seven times (E. G. R. Taylor, “Samuel Purchas”, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 75 No. 6, 1930, pp. 536-539.)

⁵⁰¹ Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 4*, cit., p. 1886.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

All in all, the Dutch and English sources published in the earlier decades of the seventeenth century didn't add much to the corpus of knowledge on Japan already relayed to Europe by the Christian missionaries. The works of Linschoten, Hakluyt and De Bry owed much to the published Jesuit sources (and, in the case of Linschoten, to unpublished Portuguese lay documents). Hatch's letter and the accounts by Adams, Cocks and Saris, on the other hand, did include original information, and often added "curious" details lacking in the published Jesuit letters (affected by the board of censors). On the other hand, the works fit into the general purpose of Purchas' work, which was "not to generate propaganda in a narrow sense" but to "fulfill the more traditional goals of literature: to teach and delight an audience who themselves might never travel far."⁵⁰² In other words, they didn't adhere to a coherent intellectual purpose much as the Jesuit (and generally Christian) sources did. This lack of scope is reflected in their still scattered and unorganized nature, which in turn limited their role in the divulgation of knowledge about Japan. Primacy, in this sense, was retained by Jesuit sources up to end of the 1630s.

The expulsion of the Catholic missionaries and merchants after Shimabara would provide a decisive change in scenery. Dutch sources would largely remain the only access to Japan for the European readership up to nineteenth century. Moreover as discussed by Kowner,⁵⁰³ the approach to the description of Japan would, in the long run, take a new turn, with the birth of the discourse on race.

⁵⁰² James P. Helfers, "The Explorer or the Pilgrim?", cit., p. 186.

⁵⁰³ Rotem Kowner, "Skin as a Metaphor", cit.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century materials, on the other hand, would not fall into oblivion with the end of the “Christian century”. The unpublished English and Dutch accounts have only more recently been re-evaluated as sources and reunited in a more organized corpus,⁵⁰⁴ but the value of the Jesuit reports as historical sources on Japan has been long recognized. I have already discussed their impact on contemporary works. Even from the 1640s onwards, however, massive derivative works, such as the one by Bartoli,⁵⁰⁵ would continue to appear, and achieve great diffusion and success in terms of public. Early historians, such as Engelbert Kaempfer, would moreover rely heavily on the published materials for their works.

The source materials of the sixteenth and seventeenth century could, probably, be explored in new and even more compelling ways today, in the light of some of the historiographical trends that since the 1980s have gained weight both in Europe and Japan – such as social history, local history, or the so-called “history of mentality” (*shinseishi* 心性史). The reports do not stick to the narration of political events, but offer an all-encompassing picture of Japan’s culture and society – one that stems from a view point different from that of the official Japanese chronicles. Moreover, as the Jesuit letter-books, include detailed accounts focusing singularly on all the different Jesuit seminaries and residences located on the archipelago, they can testify, to an extent, regional divisions and differences.

In order to access to this kind of information, however, understanding the way the sources approach the description of Japan is essential. It means being able to discern the reliable pieces of

⁵⁰⁴ By works such as the already mentioned Anthony Farrington, *The English Factory in Japan*, cit.

⁵⁰⁵ Daniello Bartoli, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Gesù. L'Asia descritta dal P. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia. Parte prima [- terza]*, Roma: Ignatio De Lazzeri, 1653.

historical information about the Japanese archipelago from the constructions born of the intellectual background of the works. And something more about how early modern Europe viewed itself in relation to the Japanese “other” may be learned in the process.

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