

# ILLUSION AND DISILLUSIONMENT

TRAVEL WRITING IN THE MODERN AGE

*Edited by*  
ROBERTA MICALLEF

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Ilex Foundation  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Center for Hellenic Studies  
Trustees for Harvard University  
Washington, D. C.

Distributed by Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

## **Illusion and Disillusionment: Travel Writing in the Modern Age**

Edited by Roberta Micallef

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Published by Ilex Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts and The Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.

Distributed by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England

Production editor: Christopher Dadian

Cover design: Joni Godlove

Printed in the United States of America

Cover image based upon *Typus Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Orbelius, 1570. Library of Congress. In the public domain.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Micallef, Roberta editor of compilation.

Title: Illusion and disillusionment : travel writing in the modern age / edited by Roberta Micallef.

Description: Boston, Massachusetts : Ilex Foundation ; Washington, D.C. : Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University ; Cambridge, Massachusetts : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2018. | Series: Ilex Foundation series ; 18

Identifiers: LCCN 2018020374 | ISBN 9780674984479 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Travel writing. | Travelers--Psychology. | Perception.

Classification: LCC G156 .I525 2018 | DDC 910.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018020374>

## Contents

List of Images .....	vi
Foreword.....	vii
<i>Roberta Micallef</i>	
Introduction.....	1
<i>Eugenio Menegon</i>	
Desire, Truth, and Propaganda: Lay and Ecclesiastical Travelers from Europe to China in the Long Eighteenth Century .....	11
<i>Elizabeth C. Goldsmith</i>	
Travel, Adventure, and Self-Fashioning: A Frenchman's Journey to New Orleans in 1729 .....	42
<i>James Uden</i>	
Gothic Fiction, the Grand Tour, and the Seductions of Antiquity: Polidori's The Vampyre (1819).....	60
<i>Sunil Sharma</i>	
The Chameleonic Identities of Mohan Lal Kashmiri and His Travels in Persianate Lands .....	80
<i>Margaret Litvin</i>	
Fellow Travelers? Two Arab Study Abroad Narratives of Moscow .....	98
<i>Roberta Micallef</i>	
Imaginary Travels: Halide Edib's Illusory Encounters with India .....	121
<i>Mary Beth Raycraft</i>	
A Glimpse of the American West: A French Schoolteacher's 1893 Pioneering Adventure .....	141
<i>Sarah Frederick</i>	
The Travels of a Japanese "Girl": Yoshiya Nobuko's 1928–29 World Tour.....	161

## Images

“Ceremony of shaving, on passing the line,” from F. B. Spilbury, <i>Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, Performed by His Majesty’s Sloop Favourite, in the Year 1805, Being a Journal of the Events Which Happened to That Vessel</i> .....	28
A mule litter in northern China in the early twentieth century.....	32
“Noms des Poissons,” by Marc-Antoine Caillot .....	45
“Le Saint Louis,” by Marc-Antoine Caillot .....	46
Portrait of Mohan Lal Kashmiri .....	81
Title page of Mohan Lal’s <i>Journal of a Tour through the Panjab, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Hkorasan, and Part of Persia</i> .....	83
Title page of Mohan Lal’s <i>Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan, &amp; Turkistan, to Balk, Bokhara, and Herat: and a Visit to Great Britain and Germany</i> .....	85
Adivar Halide Edib, “Hindistan’a Dair” .....	122
<i>Alberuni’s India</i> .....	127

## Foreword

IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE to welcome *Illusion and Disillusionment: Travel Writing in the Modern Age* into the Ilex Foundation Series. The volume, edited by Roberta Micallef, provides an excellent companion to *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, edited by Sunil Sharma and Roberta Micallef and published in the Ilex Foundation Series in 2013. Both these collections originated in the lively conversations and wonderfully productive workshops held at Boston University in recent years and dedicated to the topics of travel and travel writing. Together, the articles presented in *On the Wonders of Land and Sea* and its fine new companion, *Illusion and Disillusionment*, address a range of interrelated topics and themes from a variety of disciplinary perspectives; collectively the articles in the pair of volumes greatly illuminate our appreciation of recurrent structures and complexities in the narratives and commentaries that comprise pre-modern and modern travel writing.

The articles in *Illusion and Disillusionment* juxtapose the recorded experiences, observations and inner reflections of a highly varied set of travelers, and repeatedly challenge the generic boundaries of the “travelogue.” Like *On the Wonders of Land and Sea*, the present volume incorporates valuable insights arising from the study of Orientalism and post-colonial studies, and at the same time seeks to extend the study of travel writing beyond the frameworks of these approaches. Comprised of the editor’s introduction and eight articles, *Illusion and Disillusionment* focuses especially on the recurring emotional patterns represented in the travel accounts of a highly diverse group of individuals, male and female, of various social and professional backgrounds, and of East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and European backgrounds. These individuals, who undertook their long and often arduous journeys from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, traveled in multiple directions, and for a wide variety of purposes. The articles presented in *Illusion and Disillusionment* bring to light a common emotional structure, consisting of four distinct parts: the preconceptions that shape travelers’ plans, expectations, and perceptions; the effect of the experience of travel on travelers’ perceptions of themselves and of others; travelers’ choices of the literary vehicles and stylistic methods by which to express their experiences of travel; and finally – and this element proves especially prominent in the modern context of these

travels – their encounters with global inequalities, and the tensions they perceive between travel and tourism. It is fascinating to note the recurrence of even quite specific details, in contrasting contexts, across pairs of articles. It is an unusual and particularly valuable feature of the articles gathered in the present volume that, as a corollary of their emphasis on emotional patterns, they pay substantial attention to the travelers' inner journeys as well as their physical ones. *Illusion and Disillusionment* constitutes an outstanding and extremely stimulating contribution to the study of modern travel literature.

L. Marlow

Executive Editor

Ilex Foundation Series

# Introduction

Roberta Micallef

**I**LLUSION AND DISILLUSIONMENT: *Travel Writing in The Modern Age* is the outcome of a faculty discussion group that met over the course of two years (2014–16), at Boston University, culminating in a daylong workshop in 2015. Eight papers were presented at this workshop, followed by a keynote address by Professor James Buzard of MIT, who also participated in the discussion of papers. This project was designed to take the discussion initiated with our previous volume, *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*,<sup>1</sup> to a broader level. Through a careful examination of Middle Eastern and South Asian travel narratives, *On the Wonders of Land and Sea* focused attention on modern travelogues in an attempt to understand nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel writing through a lens other than that of Orientalism or post-colonial studies.<sup>2</sup> The present collection examines a set of travel narratives spanning a longer time period, a wider geography, and, in an interdisciplinary move, several literary and historical genres. The essays included here illuminate a set of interconnected cultural webs and global cultural flows that go far beyond the East-West binary that has dominated the field of travel literature for so long and is only recently starting to be outgrown.<sup>3</sup>

## Title and the Organization of the Volume

Across the chronological, geographic, and generic range of the travel accounts considered in this volume, a single emotional structure comes up with surprising frequency. Our title, *Illusion and Disillusionment: Travel Writing in the Modern Age*, is meant to highlight that structure. Our essays probe its contributing elements: the preconceptions that shape how the travelers perceive their voyage and the places they visit; the journey's effect on their self-perception and their notions of other; their stylistic decisions about how to represent their experiences as travelers; and finally, the distinctly modern component: their encounters with global inequalities and the ever-present tensions between travel and tourism.

1. Micallef and Sharma 2013.
2. Micallef and Sharma 2013, 1.
3. Huggan 2009, 1–3.

The works studied in this volume range from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries and describe male and female East Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and South Asian travelers voyaging around the globe. The travelers included in this volume increasingly benefited from the technological advances and greater freedom of movement afforded by the early modern and modern age to travel long distances, from Europe to India, to North America, to China, or from Japan to North America. Writing in a time period that spanned the consolidation of empires to their collapse, when borders and boundaries were shifting and individuals were reassessing their roles vis-à-vis one another, their families and their “imaginary community,” some of the travelers increasingly revealed more about their inner journeys than about what they saw and learned about the lands they were visiting. Some travelers also described what they saw and how it paled in comparison to the descriptions they had read or heard before embarking on their trips. None of the travelers included in this volume were wealthy and none represent class privilege. Every single one, including the women travelers, were professionals and all but one, Yoshiya Nobuko, were traveling for professional reasons. However, even she was a professionally successful woman who funded her trips through her own financially successful writings. As this trip became the subject of one of her books, her voyage also constitutes a “professional” voyage. These travelers had benefitted from the social mobility and opportunities for travel afforded by the modern age and, as importantly, by changes in the workforce and perceptions of professional life, particularly related to gender. In addition, the emergence of our group of travelers as professional men and women allowed us to test with some inspiration from Professor Buzard the question of what is and what is not travel. While these travelers may have been exposed to earlier and more romantic notions of the locations they were visiting, and these notions may have influenced their illusions, their position as “professional” men and women allowed their gaze to be more distanced and ironic.

During the course of our meetings, we intentionally paired readings of texts generated from different parts of the world. Many similar strands run through our analyses of these texts. For example, we discovered that many of our texts challenge the boundaries of travel writing and that the non-European travelers writing autoethnographies in new contact zones enriched the genre. However, whether because of the texts themselves or the interests of their interlocutors, certain geographic-thematic overlaps among the texts arose naturally, and that is how we decided to group them for this volume.

We begin our volume with “Desire, Truth, and Propaganda: Lay and Ec-

clesiastical Travelers from Europe to China in the Long Eighteenth Century” by Eugenio Menegon. The letters written by his early modern eighteenth-century traveler, the Italian Serafino da San Giovanni Battista (1692–1742) provide a stark contrast to the other travelers and essays in the collection, thus providing a good starting point for our discussion. Penned as utilitarian documents, these letters were not meant for printed public consumption. The correspondence does not offer lengthy reflections on cultural difference, or the meaning of Serafino’s voyage. However, the letters do include reports on the logistics of travel, and relate the difficulties of early modern travel, just before the onset of modernity in travel writing. The focus on the material reality in Menegon’s essay diverges from the literary representations of voyages included in the rest of the volume, but is also linked to them in its exploration of illusion and disillusionment in missionary travel and activities.

We follow with “Travel, Adventure, and Self-Fashioning: A Frenchman’s Journey to New Orleans in 1729” by Elizabeth Goldsmith. Goldsmith explores a travel narrative that was re-discovered in 2005, written by Marc-Antoine Caillot, a seafaring clerk in the French Company of the Indies. Caillot provides us with a much more personal, subjective account, and draws explicitly on literary models as he recounts his travels from Paris to New Orleans. Composed in 1730, his memoirs exploit the tropes of an assortment of narrative genres, from literary to legal, while also constituting a highly original and lively tale of the adventures of a young man in the early years of formalized trade routes between France and her colonies in North America. Goldsmith highlights the highly personal voice of the narrator, how he draws on literary models to construct his own traveling persona, and how he tries to keep himself attached to, and promote, a particular idea of French identity in this very early moment in what we might call the history of tourism.

The third essay in this volume is James Uden’s contribution, “Gothic Fiction, the Grand Tour, and the Seductions of Antiquity: Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819).” In analyzing the anxieties brought on by the grand tour and the juxtaposition of tourist versus traveler, this essay captures some of the larger questions regarding European travel in the nineteenth century. This traveler’s gaze is not that of a tourist but rather that of a disillusioned employee, a cynical outsider. He certainly is not Pratt’s “seeing-man,” or the white male subject “whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.”<sup>4</sup> The next three essays examine South Asian and Middle Eastern travelers: “The Chameleonic Identities of Mohan Lal Kashmiri and His Travels in Persianate Lands,” by Sunil Sharma; “Imaginary Travels: Halide Edib’s Illusory Encoun-

4. Pratt 2008, 9.

ters with India,” by Roberta Micallef; and “Fellow Travelers? Two Arab Study Abroad Narratives of Moscow,” by Margaret Litvin. The essays in this section share a concern with “autoethnography” and “contact zones.” Contact zones as defined by Pratt are social spaces where different cultures, often in asymmetrical power relations, meet and engage one another. Subjects previously separated by geography and history are present in the same space and their stories intersect.<sup>5</sup> Autoethnography refers to the ways in which colonized subjects engage the colonizers’ language to represent themselves. These texts are usually addressed to both the narrators’ home audience and the metropolitan reader.<sup>6</sup> Sharma’s study of Mohan Lal Kashmiri demonstrates the hybridity of this autoethnographic travel text written in English but using Persian travel narrative tropes. Micallef’s traveler is writing in English for a metropolitan audience but describing her earlier encounters with India, some of which are distinctly Turkish. For Litvin’s travelers the dorm room becomes a contact zone where students from different parts of the globe encounter and confront each other’s views of the world.

The final two chapters, “Marie Dugard Goes West: A French Schoolteacher’s 1893 Exploration of the American West,” by Mary Beth Raycraft and “The Travels of a Japanese ‘Girl’: Yoshiya Nobuko’s 1928 World Tour,” by Sarah Frederick, are about two decidedly distinct, single, professional women travelers. In her essay, Raycraft argues that Dugard offers a fresh perspective that challenges national and gendered stereotypes. Having distinguished herself through both teaching and dynamic engagement in Paris education circles, Dugard was selected as the sole female member of the French delegation to the Congress of Education at the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago during the summer of 1893. After giving a lively presentation on the state of girls’ education in France at the Congress, Dugard made an abrupt decision to extend her trip and undertook a six-week tour of the western United States. As one of few French women of the time to share impressions about the western United States, Dugard’s travel narrative stands out for its balanced, investigative approach and its future-oriented conclusions. Her spirited account challenges national and gendered stereotypes put forth by other travelers and offers readers a fresh perspective on the fascinating yet unsettling customs and conventions of the New World.

The traveler that Frederick is concerned with, Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973), was one of Japan’s bestselling writers of the twentieth century and a participant in the women’s magazine and print culture boom of the 1920s

5. Pratt 2008, 7.

6. Pratt 2008, 9.

and 30s. With her proceeds from one of her newspaper novels and movie adaptation deals she and her girlfriend, Monma Chiyo, embarked in 1928 on a world tour, with Paris as the main destination, and published a book-length travelogue in 1929. Beginning her stance as a young woman from the Orient visiting Paris with romantic notions, her travelogue reveals encounters that disrupt those images, including encounters with poverty in Europe, boredom in the face of great culture, and discrimination against immigrants. Yet rather than writing a story of maturation via the journey that might have her growing out of her curiosity or even her desire for the same sex, Yoshiya Nobuko consciously avoids narratives of progress in her travelogue. Instead, she uses repetitions that create insight and ironic criticism via vignettes and self-contained stories, fictional and non-fictional, that highlight the multiplicity of the places she visits even while noting the contradictions in these societies and her own. Frederick's essay pays particular attention to modern forms of mediated representation in Yoshiya Nobuko's travelogue: sections on "movies watched on my trip," photographs, the disconnect between media representations and her direct experience, and the use of modern melodrama plots to tell her own travel stories, sometimes in ways that pointedly reject traditional Japanese travel narrative traditions such as the haiku diaries of Bashō. The chapter ties these moves to Yoshiya Nobuko's own connections to media culture, and the ways these connections allowed for her own mobility and self-awareness as a queer cosmopolitan who could take a "honeymoon" journey without marriage and observe without a sense of hierarchy a quotidian aspect of "the West."

### Travel Literature and Genre

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, Tim Youngs, the doyen of travel literature studies, discusses the difficulty of defining travel literature as a "hermetically sealed"<sup>7</sup> genre. Whether focused on the actual trip or not, all the essays in this volume are concerned with works written by authors who physically traveled to a place that they then wrote about but who also imagined that place in myriad ways. Travel writing is seen as overlapping with fiction, autobiography, memoir, ethnography, and letters, to name a few. Uden's contribution examines the intersection of travel and antiquarianism in the early nineteenth century and is partially based on analysis of diaries. Sharma's and Litvin's essays observe how modern writers reshape Persianate and Arabic travel writing traditions in contact with Western languages and/or Western travel writing traditions.

7. Youngs 2013, 1–2.

Micallef's contribution looks at the fictionalized nature of first-person travel writing by examining two versions of a text published first in English, a metropolitan language, and four years later in Turkish, the author's natal language. Halide Edib's recollections, while autobiographical and replete with memoir-type details, colorfully demonstrate that reciting past events leads inevitably to the creation of some fiction. Menegon introduces yet another genre in his examination of the communication between Catholic missionaries and their homeland: their letters. Epistolary communication builds a kind of travel narrative while providing historical information. The author who forms the subject of Frederick's chapter explicitly acknowledges the porous divide between travel narratives and fiction. To explore her sexuality, Yoshiya Nobuko chooses a setting that echoes Japanese fictional settings where such an exploration would be possible. Goldsmith's essay examines an experimental travel journal – one voyager's attempt to write an honest, entertaining, and self-consciously French travel narrative at an early moment in the history of transatlantic voyages. Raycraft's analysis shows that Dugard's text, too, is hybrid: part travel narrative and part scientific study, drawing on personal observations, interviews, and official documentation as well as literary sources, but using an appealing diary-like format to seduce European readers.

### Motivation for Travel

Tim Youngs has written that a main motivation for travel to Africa, South America and other places in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was to fill the blank spaces on the map.<sup>8</sup> The author of an anthology of primary texts, Geoffrey Nash, adds imperialism and colonialism as the chief stimulus to travel in this period.<sup>9</sup> As we ruminated on the motives and incentives of East Asian travelers to the United States and South Asian or Middle Eastern travelers to parts of the Islamic world, we had recourse to James Buzard's article on what is *not* travel.<sup>10</sup> Buzard suggests that we study the ways in which travel itself has a history and how what counts as travel changes.<sup>11</sup> We had interesting discussions about the distinction between mobility and travel, tourism and travel which are reflected in our individual essays. We found that the distinction among these categories varies. The motives for travel included in this volume are less varied than the genres, but they go well beyond curiosity and colonization.

Four of the texts are by travelers who embarked on their voyages due to

8. Youngs 2006, 1–18.

9. Nash 2011, xi–xix.

10. Buzard 2005, 43–61.

11. Buzard 2005, 43–44.

the demands of their jobs. According to Susan Bassnett, who studies European gender and travel writing between the Victorian age and the 1920s, the female travelers in the works she has studied often appear to be escaping the constraints imposed by their families or societies, whereas male travelers write of themselves as heroic risk takers.<sup>12</sup> We found that these distinctions were not as clear for our more internationally varied group of travelers, whose national, economic, and professional statuses intersected in various ways to make a gender-based dichotomy impossible. Students on limited scholarships to politically sensitive countries tend to relate ironically to the persona of the heroic risk taker. An unmarried female schoolteacher selected to participate in the International Congress for Education is a pioneer, but the freedom she seeks is professional rather than social or personal. A couple of the travelers representing companies or the Society of Jesus were part of larger economic or cultural colonialism projects, but their self-presentation is not particularly heroic. A traveler discussed by Eugenio Menegon, the Italian Discalced Augustinian Serafino da San Giovanni, complains bitterly about the expense and hardship of the trip to reach China.

### Travel and Power

We considered the relationship between power and travel from different vantage points, engaging in a broader conversation that moved beyond the East-West binary in travel and representation. Communities, whether national, ethnic or religious, at some point have to be imagined.<sup>13</sup> We explored how a sense of community and identity based on language, location, gender, class, education, or any combination of these attributes, shifted as our travelers became mobile and changed locations, interacted with other peoples of different classes, or wrote for different audiences in different languages. We questioned whether or not the travelers' imagined communities were as fluid as their identities. Travel writing is also influenced by the narrative and storytelling strategies of different cultures. Many of the travelers included in this book were writing in dominant or prestige languages, such as English or French.<sup>14</sup> A discussion of the contact zone necessarily raises questions about relationality and intersectionalism. As we discussed how contact zones had influenced our travelers' notions of self, identity, and belonging, another concept articulated by Pratt became relevant: the distinction between autoethnography and ethnography. Pratt writes: "Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are

12. Bassnett 2002, 225–42.

13. Anderson 1983.

14. Casanova 2013, 379.

representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts.”<sup>15</sup> It is not surprising that these would be useful concepts and terms for the travelers from South Asia and the Middle East, in particular those writing in the dominant language. It was interesting and productive to think about dormitories in the study abroad setting as contact zones, or the role of language as a contact space when a Middle Eastern or South Asian writer is writing for a western audience about a community with which he or she has an affinity. Naturally, “the contact zone” is an important space for all parties involved.

The relationship between Byron and his personal doctor Polidori, a young man with literary ambitions, captures the inequities among Europeans. Caillot, the young Frenchman who traveled to New Orleans, finds himself participating in a shipboard ritual enacted by the sailors as their boat crosses the Tropic of Cancer. The fierce-looking crew frightens him. He laughs to relieve himself of his anxieties. Marie Dugard, our other French traveler, has to adjust her preconceived notions about Native Americans when she interacts with them while traveling through the American West. She reflects that the experience has pushed her to acknowledge the complexity of their situation. As a French female traveler, her role vis-à-vis the Native Americans was quite different from that of the American settlers. The Italian missionaries discussed by Eugenio Menegon were sharing the same trade routes as the colonial officials, military personnel, and merchants. This contact zone was not simply one that included the Italians and Chinese. The Japanese traveler Yoshiya Nobuko’s reflections about a poverty-stricken French woman, unable to afford shoes but able to give money to a beggar, forces the reader to consider the multiple levels and webs implied in this type of interaction and the relativity of power relations.

While broad, this book does not pretend to be comprehensive. For instance, while we do not all agree with Buzard’s move to exclude forced migration literature from the analysis of “travel writing,”<sup>16</sup> the essays in this book do not analyze any accounts of coerced travel caused by war, poverty, trafficking, or environmental degradation. By necessity, the book has left many other geographic, chronological, and thematic gaps as well. Nor do we pretend to offer a unified global theory of travel writing – an effort that would say more about the theorist than the object of study in any case. We hope that our readers will perceive these gaps not as shortcomings but as “blank spaces,” invitations and provocations to future scholarly journeys.

15. Pratt 1991, 35.

16. Buzard 2005, 53–56.

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# Desire, Truth, and Propaganda: Lay and Ecclesiastical Travelers from Europe to China in the Long Eighteenth Century \*

Eugenio Menegon

## Early Modern Missionary Travel to China

Ah golaccia, golaccia, quante spese fai fare!  
(Oh, gluttony, gluttony, how much do you cost us!)<sup>1</sup>

This colorful expression appears in a letter written in March 1738 in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, by the Italian Discalced Augustinian Serafino da San Giovanni Battista (1692–1742) to Procurator Arcangelo Miralta (1682–1751), the ecclesiastical administrator in Macao on behalf of the papal Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*).<sup>2</sup> Serafino was then

\*A preliminary Italian language version of this essay is Menegon 2015. I would like to thank for their comments and encouragement Prof. Gianvittorio Signorotto (University of Modena, Italy) and the members of the Boston University Travel Literature Reading Group.

1. Serafino da San Giovanni Battista to Arcangelo Miralta, Nanchang, 1 March 1738, f. 2v, in Archivio Storico della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli or *de Propaganda Fide*, Vatican City (hereafter abbreviated as APF), *Procura Cina*, box 30.

2. The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, in Latin *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, and today officially called “Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples,” was established in 1622 by order of Pope Gregory XV. *Propaganda* or *Propaganda Fide*, as the Congregation is commonly known and as it will be referred to in this article, was a belated outcome of the institutionalization and bureaucratization of the papacy initiated by the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545–63). Organizationally, Propaganda replicated the structure of older, more established “Sacred Congregations of Cardinals” (*Sacra Cardinalium Congregationes*), also called “dicasteries” of the papal government (meaning “law-courts” in Greek, and equivalent to ecclesiastical “ministries”), established at the end of the sixteenth century. The Congregations derive their name from the fact that they literally “congregate” cardinals as official collaborators of the sovereign pontiff. Some Congregations were established to assist the pope in the administration of the affairs of the entire Church (e.g. the Congregations of the Holy Office, of Sacraments, of Rites, of the Index of Forbidden Books, etc.), while others assisted him in the administration of the temporal dominions of the Holy See. After a period of experimentation during the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Holy See decided to establish the Congregation of Propaganda to exercise universal jurisdiction on Catholic missions across the world. The delay in the foundation of the Congregation was in part due to the role played by the Spanish Crown, and to a lesser degree by the Portuguese Crown, in defending the rights of royal patronage over missionary work in the colonies, as well as by the resistance of religious orders laboring in mission lands; on the organization of Propaganda, see Pizzorusso 2000.

traveling by boat on Chinese rivers, on the last leg of a long journey from his native Lombardy in Italy to the Qing capital, Beijing, where he would arrive on April 8, 1738, approximately twenty-three months after leaving his convent in Milan, including seven months of residence in Rome, seven months of oceanic sailing (December 18, 1736 to July 20, 1737), and six months in Macao.<sup>3</sup> The expenses he mentioned here were the transportation costs as well as the numerous additional tips and fees that he had been forced to pay since leaving Macao, in order to ship some luxury food items destined to his confreres in the capital. He continued: "my dear wine, my very dear chocolate! Custom fees in Macao, custom fees in Canton, custom fees in Ganzhou, transportation fees [to carry the trunks] across the mountains, loading and unloading to and from the boats."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, in almost all the letters penned during the journey, including the continental crossing of Europe to reach the embarkation port in France, and later during the oceanic sail, Serafino repeatedly remarked on the exorbitant travel costs as the single most pressing and worrisome issue he faced. The letters had no pretense to literary style, and they were not, in fact, "travel literature" in the classic sense of the term. They were instead utilitarian documents, penned to inform his ecclesiastical superiors about his progress across Europe, the oceans and China. These letters were not meant for printed public consumption, like the famous *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* on overseas missions published by the Jesuits and their editors in France between 1703 and 1776. They also did not belong to the genre of hagiographic missionary relations circulated as manuscript accounts in convents, and read aloud to novices during meals to inspire their missionary zeal for distant shores. Finally, Serafino's correspondence did not offer any extended reflection on cultural difference, or the meaning of his voyage.<sup>5</sup> What we

3. Serafino left Lombardy for Rome around January 18, 1736; he began his journey from Rome to Beijing, accompanied by Sigismondo Meinardi da San Nicola, probably in August 1736, taking thus nineteen months to reach the Chinese capital, as also confirmed by Sigismondo in his correspondence; see several letters in Archivio di Stato di Roma (hereafter ASR), *Congregazioni religiose, Agostiniani scalzi in Gesù e Maria al Corso*, busta (envelope) 156, registri (fascicles) 117 and 118, unnumbered folios. Unless otherwise noted, the following citations from Serafino's correspondence in this archive will be from the same section, envelope and fascicles; since the folios are not numbered, and the letters are mostly unbound, references for the purpose of documentary identification will only mention the date of the individual letter, the writer and addressee if known, and the acronym "ASR."

4. Here "dear" ("caro" in Italian) is a double entendre, meaning both expensive and desirable: "Caro il mio vino, carissima la mia cioccolata!" Serafino to Miralta, Nanchang, 1 March 1738, f. 2v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

5. For a sampling of Jesuit missionary reports about China, including several travel descriptions prepared for the lay public, see Boothroyd et al. 1992, 109-251.

have are, rather, reports on his movements and the logistics of travel, collections of tips for other missionaries who would follow in his steps, requests for financial support to cover the increasing costs of the trip, and reports on his daily life in Beijing. To elicit an appropriate response from the addressees, mostly in the form of financial help, these missives openly relate the discomforts and difficulties of early modern travel. They also offer glimpses of the actual mechanisms of travel in the eighteenth century, and of the patronage networks needed to travel to and reside in China.

Reaching China from Europe remained a difficult task in the eighteenth century, and required the support of multiple networks, both within and without the Church, in Europe, and in Asia. Unlike other European countries, the Italian states did not have a colonial or commercial presence in East Asia in the early modern period. The papacy was the only power in Italy that maintained direct contacts with China, mainly through the religious orders involved in the missions and its own Congregation of Propaganda Fide, a sort of “ministry of missions” of the Holy See. A missionary such as Serafino traveling from Italy to China ought therefore to rely not only on the diplomatic and religious system of the Church, but also on the commercial and secular networks linking Europe and Asia. He had to use means of transportation and financial systems managed by the various Companies of the Indies, the Catholic crowns, private merchants, and Asian states, including, of course, the Qing Empire.

This essay employs Serafino’s letters to reconstruct his itinerary, the challenges he faced and the networks he employed to travel, and some of the issues he faced in Beijing. Rather than offering an analysis of literary tropes about travel (which are practically absent in this small corpus), the essay offers a study in contrasts, focusing on the material reality of travel in Serafino’s rather prosaic missives, as opposed to the mostly idealized and literary representations of voyages showcased in the rest of this volume. As I will show, from his letters we derive a sense that the difficulties of the journey, the residence in Beijing, and the demanding schedule of work as an artist at the imperial court slowly eroded Serafino’s faith in his religious mission. After 1724, when Christianity was officially forbidden in China, the only way for missionaries to legally remain in the imperial capital was to offer technical or artistic skills to the Qing government, thereby also staying close to the center of power, in order to protect better the underground and illegal religious operations of the Church still found in the provinces of the empire. While we do not have a clear sense of what specific motivations might have inspired Serafino to leave Italy, we can suppose that he combined the missionary zeal typical of his religious order with some personal

ambition and a sense of adventure. The Order of the Discalced Augustinians (in Latin, *Ordo Augustiniensum Discalceatorum*, acronym OAD) was a reformed branch of the older Augustinian order. Established in 1592, the Discalced Augustinians developed quickly, especially in Italy, attracting many to an austere life of begging and popular missions among the poor and illiterate. Detachment from the world was signaled by the adoption of a religious name, inspired by a saint (in Serafino's case, Saint John the Baptist), and abandonment of the original family surname. The missionary spirit of the order soon led to the creation of missions outside Europe, including northern Vietnam and China.<sup>6</sup> Upon his arrival in Beijing in 1738, in his first report to the vicar general of the order in Rome, Serafino mentioned that he had traveled so far for "the great aim of the conversion of these poor infidels, and to take care of these few Christians [in Beijing]."<sup>7</sup> The "desire for the Indies," often paired with a yearning for martyrdom, was a common urge among early modern missionaries, and received particular attention among the Jesuits.<sup>8</sup> However, the adolescent impulse to reach an imagined far-flung heroic mission confronted its first challenge in the difficult "truth" of actual travel. In fact, superiors often selected for the missions psychologically mature men who could withstand, both physically and mentally, the demands of the voyage, and had enough practical spirit to navigate the political and religious compromises, and the economic strictures, commonly faced in the complex enterprise of maritime travel. In the rest of this essay, therefore, rather than emphasizing ideals and desires, we will focus on the economic and global transportation networks of the early modern era, how our missionary used them to reach distant China, and how the trials of residing on the other side of the world and work in the mission field and at the Qing court eventually might have engendered some disillusionment in Serafino.

Three categories of people traveled to East Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: colonial officials and military personnel, merchants, and missionaries. Although the motivations that drove these three groups to the journey were very different, all of them used the same trade routes, with variations depending on the ships' country of origin, and the ports where they were allowed to dock. These trade routes were not, however, open to anyone indiscriminately. The East India Companies and Protestant captains (Dutch, British, Swedish, and Danish), for example, did not look kindly upon

6. See Campanelli 2001.

7. See Serafino to Vicar General OAD, Macao, December 18, 1737, in ASR.

8. On the Jesuit "desire for the Indies," see Roscioni 2001, Russell 2011 and 2013, Massimi and Colombo 2014; on the eighteenth-century missionary vocation and travels of priests of the *Missions Étrangères de Paris*, see Marin 2007.

the Catholic clergy, and for religious and political reasons the missionaries usually tried to avoid a passage on Protestant vessels, opting instead for Portuguese and French ships (and occasionally Spanish). This did not apply to the transport of freight, mail, and money for the missions. In fact, during the eighteenth century, more and more of these items were sent to Asia via the fastest and most efficient trading vessels of northern European powers.

The European trade networks that allowed the missionaries to reach Macao and Canton, however, did not extend inside China. Once they reached the Chinese coast, European merchants had to rely on the sophisticated and dense transport system for the internal exchange of goods within the empire, and by law they could not go beyond a few designated ports open to foreign trade. Canton emerged in the eighteenth century as the only entrepôt within imperial borders open to Westerners.

This was not the case for the missionaries. Until 1724, despite moments of difficulty, the imperial government tolerated Catholic missionary activities in the capital and the provinces. From the strategic outpost of Macao and with the financial support of the Portuguese Crown, the Jesuits succeeded in establishing residences in the Chinese provinces, and insinuating themselves at the Ming court as experts in calendric matters. After the 1644 Manchu takeover of the Ming dynasty and the establishment of the new Qing dynasty, the Jesuits under Portuguese missionary patronage (*padroado*) received the new imperial regime's protection in exchange for their technical-scientific services and their political loyalty. A few of them eventually became official members of the imperial bureaucracy within the Astronomical Directorate, participants in court life, and important diplomatic intermediaries between the Qing Empire and European powers. During the Kangxi reign (1662–1722), the Jesuits, whose contingent increased with the arrival of a French mission sent by Louis XIV, reached the apex of their influence in China. Their personal relationship with the Kangxi Emperor as preceptors and coordinators of editorial, scientific, and artistic projects directly commissioned by the throne, rather than their marginal position inside the imperial bureaucracy (only few of them had official posts), allowed the missionaries to protect and aid the development of the Catholic missions in China. In Beijing, about thirty missionaries worked at court as scientists, technicians, and artists. While most of them were Jesuits of the Portuguese and French missions, a small contingent of the papal Congregation of Propaganda Fide arrived in 1711, and Serafino was intent on reaching them.

The missionaries were in fact the only Europeans the Qing court allowed to enter the empire and reside in the capital. Even after the prohibition of religious proselytizing in the provinces in 1724, during the reign of the third

emperor of the dynasty, Yongzheng, the missionaries were allowed to stay on at court, and used their professional identity to protect illegal Christian communities in the provinces, and keep the Beijing churches open. To illustrate the almost absolute monopoly of the Church on direct relations with the interior of the Chinese empire, especially in cultural and religious matters, we leave Serafino on his riverboat for a moment, and consider another Italian, who traveled the same route nearly forty years earlier and whose experience is really the proverbial exception that proves the rule.

### Gemelli Careri in China and the Missionary Monopoly on Travel

The only Italian early modern traveler who went to China “for pleasure,” so to say, without direct colonial or ecclesiastical patronage, was the native Calabrian and Neapolitan by adoption Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri (1648–1724). His story illustrates how the Chinese imperial government allowed only missionaries to enter, travel, and reside long-term in China, and suggests how unusual Gemelli Careri’s case was. Unlike missionaries, whose journey was the first act of a life-long dedication to religious proselytizing in China, even if under the guise of arts and sciences, Gemelli Careri was a true “traveler,” reaching Asia for the pleasure of learning about different cultures, to satisfy his curiosity, and with the intent of leaving those shores and returning home to narrate his exploits. Such European solo travelers to East Asia were very rare in early modern times.<sup>9</sup>

An official of the viceroyalty of Naples and a volunteer against the Turks in Hungary, Gemelli Careri was an adventurous and ambitious man. Driven by his insatiable curiosity, hope to gain fame, and a wish to escape the intellectually and professionally stifling environment of Naples, he set his mind on reaching the inaccessible imperial capital of China. He embarked on an epic journey in June, 1693, crossing the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India, from where he reached China. Then he went on to the Philippines, and across the Pacific reached Mexico, to return finally to Naples in December 1698, where he published his famous account of his circumnavigation of the globe in six volumes.<sup>10</sup>

Supporting himself with business transactions from one port to the next (he was a master at calculating commodity prices), and thanks to his skills

9. The Dutchman Samuel van de Putte also traveled out of his own curiosity to Persia, India, Tibet, China, and Indonesia in the early eighteenth century; he was in Beijing in 1734, as recorded by the Jesuit Antoine Gaubil, a member of the French mission at the Qing court. On van de Putte, see e.g. Lequin 1985.

10. On Gemelli-Careri and his journey to China, see de Vargas 1955; Fatica 1998; Doria 2000; Amuso Maccarrone 2000.

as a dissimulator, a good dose of luck, and the sympathy of consuls, colonial officials, merchants, members of religious orders, and scholars, Gemelli Careri arrived in Macao in August, 1695. From there he made it to Canton, in Chinese territory, through the intercession of the Macanese authorities, and once there he went to the residence of the Spanish Franciscans, who ran a mission in the capital of Guangdong. The missionaries were astonished, to say the least, at his unexpected arrival, and did not believe that he had subjected himself to such a dangerous journey just out of a desire to visit Beijing. These were years of struggles between the Portuguese Crown, trying to defend the rights of its royal patronage on the missions, and the Holy See, which had founded the Congregation of Propaganda to break that religious monopoly, and tried to establish a network of vicars apostolic in Asia (the equivalent of bishops in mission territories). The government and the ecclesiastical authorities of Macao looked upon the Spanish Franciscans of Canton with great suspicion, as they swore an oath of obedience to the vicars and sided with the pope, even if they remained subject to the royal patronage of Spain.<sup>11</sup>

Despite statements to the contrary by the Neapolitan traveler, who was fluent in Spanish and French, the friars became convinced that he was a Discalced Carmelite or a priest, secretly sent by the Holy See to visit the missions and establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. They apparently told him that “since a path to China had been open, never had they seen an Italian layman, no less, a Neapolitan, arrive there.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, in those years the papacy considered sending a legate to the emperor, an enterprise that would be realized in 1704 with the dispatch of the famous Patriarch and later Cardinal Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710).<sup>13</sup>

The Franciscans of Canton rightly observed that Gemelli was the first

11. In 1695, the following Spanish Franciscans resided in Canton: Jaime Tarin (1644?–1719), superior of the church *intra muros* of the Porziuncola, and provincial commissar of China for the Spanish Franciscan mission; Agustin de San Pascual (1637? - 1697) and Blas Garcia (1635 - 1699) in the church of St. Francis, outside the city walls; see Wyngaert 1942, 175; Mensaert 1965, 407.

12. “Since I arrived at the time of these disorders, everyone was firmly persuaded that I had been sent by His Holiness, to make a secret inquiry. Some thought I was a Discalced Carmelite, some a priest. And though I made every effort by telling the truth in order to eliminate this suspicion from the minds of the Franciscan Fathers, stating that I was a Neapolitan, that I was traveling only out of my curiosity, that His Holiness had not given me a penny to make such a trip, and that I wanted to know nothing of their Missions, for all that I could not change their strong impression, and they would tell me that since the path of China had been open, never had they seen an Italian layman, no less, a Neapolitan, arrive there”; see Gemelli Careri 1700, IV, 30.

13. On the papal legations to China and their organizational and logistical dimensions, see Menegon 2012.

Italian layman to enter Chinese territory, and he himself admitted in his diary that he had succeeded only thanks to the misunderstandings about his identity. This confirms that the monopoly for long-term residential contacts between China and Europe was firmly in the hands of the missionaries, chiefly the Jesuits at the imperial court. Gemelli Careri was traveling with letters patent of all the major religious orders except the Jesuits, and therefore made use of religious as much as governmental global networks to travel. But to reach Beijing, where the Jesuits were indispensable intermediaries in relations with the West, perhaps it was better to surprise, rather than warn.

As a subject of the Spanish viceroyalty of Naples, Gemelli received in Canton the help of the Spanish Franciscans, but gained as well the protection of Carlo Giovanni Turcotti (1643–1706), superior of the local Jesuit mission, and a native of Varallo Sesia in the state of Milan, then under Spanish Hapsburg rule. Turcotti, being by birth a subject of the Crown of Spain, had traveled to Asia on Spanish vessels, and had initially worked as a missionary in Celebes (now Sulawesi in Indonesia) under Spanish auspices. Once in China, he submitted himself to the Portuguese religious patronage in order to stay more easily in Canton. The *Giro del mondo* thus reports about the meeting between Gemelli and Turcotti:

Having resolved to go to Peking, I spoke to the Father Superior of the [Spanish Franciscan] Convent [of Canton], where I was staying, to provide me with some reliable fellow [as a guide]. Because of a sense of subordination to the Fathers of the Society [of Jesus], he secretly sent word to Father Turcotti, to hear his opinion. Being a good Lombard, Turcotti told them to let me go, while if it had been a Portuguese, he would have definitely opposed the journey. My determination, nevertheless, still made them suspicious, and they firmly believed that I was a Pontifical Commissar, here to gather secret intelligence on the disorders of China, since they saw I was going to the Court. I believe that this suspicion in fact facilitated my journey, which would have normally been very difficult.<sup>14</sup>

So the journey went on in spite of, or rather, thanks to these suspicions, and once in Nanjing, the metropolis of the south, Gemelli Careri met three Ital-

14. Gemelli Careri 1700, IV, 27. The superior who received Gemelli Careri was the provincial commissioner Jaime Tarin. Gemelli Careri reports that Turcotti had worked in the mission of Ternate (Moluccas). But we know that the Spanish had abandoned the Moluccas in 1663, and that Turcotti arrived in Manila only in 1671. He rather went to the island of Siau (north of Celebes, now known as Sulawesi in Indonesia) in 1674, a mission that the Jesuits abandoned in 1677; see Dehergne 1973, 276.

ian Franciscans sent by Propaganda Fide residing there, including Bishop Bernardino Della Chiesa (1644–1721). They again advised him against travel to Beijing, telling him that “the [Jesuit] Portuguese Fathers do not want any European to have knowledge of the Court, and that if ... [he] went there, no doubt they would have been discourteous to ... [him].” Our indomitable traveler was not discouraged at all, replied with temerity that he would seek hospitality with the Jesuits once in the capital, and continued on his path. Once in Beijing, where he arrived on November 6, 1695, the vice-provincial of the Portuguese mission, the Italian Claudio Filippo Grimaldi (1638–1712), welcomed him at the Jesuit College, but did not grant him a room for fear of imperial sanctions, sending him to an inn in the Chinese part of the city, expressing astonishment at his boldness:

Father Grimaldi and all the Portuguese Fathers could not but marvel about my arrival at the Court, saying they wondered who had advised me to come to Peking, where no European can enter without a summon from the Emperor. I replied that I had come to Peking with the same freedom that I enjoyed in visiting the courts of the Grand Lord [the Sultan of Turkey], the King of Persia, and the Great Mogul, as those monarchs are no less powerful and protective of their kingdoms than the Emperor of China.<sup>15</sup>

In the following days, according to the version by Gemelli Careri that several scholars have found plausible, Grimaldi, director of the Astronomical Directorate, led him to an imperial audience as if he was a new member of the Jesuit mission, for fear that, if he failed to do so, the Kangxi emperor could learn from his spies of the presence of a visitor lacking government permit.<sup>16</sup>

The *Giro del mondo* was a great publishing success, but for the most prudent among the China missionaries these were times of silence rather than public statements, given the internal disputes over religious jurisdictional issues, and the risk of misinformation about China in general, and their mission in particular. Grimaldi himself revealed to Gemelli that “having read the last time he traveled to Europe so many lies they had published about China, not to reproach many authors of spreading fabrications, he had refrained from issuing anything in print.”<sup>17</sup> Gemelli Careri obviously had no such qualms, and, with the stylistic assistance of the erudite Matteo Egizio

15. Gemelli Careri 1700, IV, 97–98.

16. Despite later doubts about Gemelli Careri’s account, and even his presence in China, contemporary missionary sources confirm his movements in the Chinese empire; see de Vargas 1955, 430; Margiotti and Rosso 1961, 196–97.

17. Gemelli Careri 1700, IV, 389.

(1674–1745), quickly produced his bestseller, liberally using existing literature on China, much of it, in fact, produced by Jesuit missionaries. Gemelli Careri did not leave private correspondence: all we know about him comes from scattered personal remarks within his expansive “encyclopedia” of world travel. As Giuseppe Tucci, a great explorer himself, observed long ago, in some parts of his work the reader gets the impression that “the things surrounding him were mute, and that he was almost blind and inert,” while elsewhere he makes acute and precise observations.<sup>18</sup> Yet, in spite of his limitations, Gemelli Careri aspired to offer an erudite and all-embracing view of the world, with a certain degree of philosophical ambition. In his preface he encouraged his readers to believe him, as he offered eyewitness accounts of what he described. He also dismissed the chatter (*ciance*) of those who “deem that the world is confined to just the space they can see with their own eyes, and do not trust that others might have seen those countries where they themselves are afraid to go, even with their own imagination.”<sup>19</sup> What we find in the personal letters of a missionary like Serafino, however, is quite different.

### The Journey of Serafino: European Networks

Gemelli Careri’s aims in his peregrinations were to satisfy his curiosity and acquire fame through the publication of his travel feats. Serafino’s aspirations could not be more dissimilar. Like Grimaldi, the Discalced Augustinian did not publish any report on his experience in China, and this has spread a veil of oblivion over him. But it is precisely his ordinary testimony, preserved in letters never intended for publication, that in fact offers us a complex and fascinating picture, neither hagiographic nor celebratory, of the social, economic, and logistical mechanisms of missionary travel to China, and of the global networks that sustained it. Given the nature of this correspondence, we will take Serafino as a travel companion from Italy to Beijing, to reconstruct the concrete conditions and obstacles encountered by missionary travelers at the time, show the complexity of the political borders and economic networks they had to navigate through, and how illusions and disillusionments followed each other in the process of journeying from Europe to China.

### Serafino in Italy

Who was Serafino? We only know his religious name, Serafino da San Giovanni Battista, and we learn some meager biographical information in a

18. Tucci 1949, 110.

19. Gemelli Careri 1728 (Venice edition), IV, 3.

posthumous note that qualifies him as a member of the religious province of the Discalced Augustinians in Milan: “a Milanese noble, relative of the Lords Visconti and of other nobility in Rome.”<sup>20</sup> From indirect sources we learn that Serafino was prior of the monastery of S. Ilario in Cremona, Lombardy, between 1728 and 1731, a position from which he seems to have been deposed for conflicts with his superiors. He spent the period 1731–36 in Milan, occupied as confessor in the convent of Saints Cosma and Damiano in Monforte, seat of the provincial prior. Although he apparently succeeded in being reinstated in his priory with the support of the Bishop of Cremona, Alessandro Maria Litta, Serafino decided to leave for Asia in response to an appeal of the Mission Procurator of his order. According to the gossip of the Vincentian missionary of Propaganda Fide Teodorico Pedrini (1671–1746), who was stationed in the Chinese capital, Serafino, once destined for China, nourished the ambition of becoming Bishop of Beijing. In fact, it was not he, but another Discalced Augustinian, Damasceno Salusti della Concezione, who would rise to that dignity a few decades later.<sup>21</sup> Should we believe, with Pedrini, that it was this desire for advancement in the ecclesiastical hierarchy that attracted Serafino to the far-flung mission of Beijing? Or was it rather the adventurous journey and life at the imperial court, as a public artist and an undercover missionary? The sources are silent on explicit motivations, except for the formulaic expression of his desire to convert

20. Quotation from ASR, *Congregazioni religiose: Agostiniani scalzi in Gesù e Maria al Corso*, envelope 277, fascicle 722, “Registro Memorie,” f. 96 [bis]; cf. Barbagallo 1978, 15, bibliographic note. Serafino in fact seems to have known members of the Milanese elite, including Count Giuseppe Fedeli, police prefect and secretary of state during the governorship of Eugene of Savoy in Milan; see Serafino’s letter dated Paris, October 30, 1736, in ASR. The Count, who received the title in 1717, came from a family of wealthy jewelers, and his father had been general commissioner for transportation in the Duchy of Milan. His brother was the famous Dominican missionary and bishop of Isfahan in Persia, Giovanni Battista Fedeli, better known as Barnaba da Milano; see Sanfilippo 1995. In China Serafino received the name Zhang Chunyi 張純一—or Zhang Zhongyi 張中一, as recorded in materials at the Imperial Palace Archives and at the Zhalan Christian cemetery near Beijing; cf. Standaert 2001, 341.

21. The gossip is in a letter by Teodorico Pedrini to the Secretary of Propaganda, Beijing, October 3, 1744, in APF, *Scritture riferite nei Congressi* (SC), *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 24, 1744–45, f. 81v. The Milanese Alessandro Maria Litta was bishop of Cremona from January 10, 1718 to September 12, 1749, when he stepped down. We find confirmation of the presence of Serafino in Cremona between 1728 and 1731 in the surviving papers of the convent of S. Ilario, preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Milano, Italy (hereafter ASMi), *Fondo di religione*, 4361 and 4364, unnumbered folios, with three references in legal documents signed in 1728 by Serafino. After he left the priory in Cremona, we find Serafino mentioned in the summer of 1731 as confessor in the Milanese convent of SS. Cosma e Damiano in Monforte, seat of the provincial prior (ASMi, *Fondo di religione*, 1100); he is again mentioned as resident in the same Milanese convent in 1735 (ASMi, *Fondo di religione*, 1089, “Acta capituli et definitorii provincialis,” April 30, 1735). The “Acta” of June 1737 (ASMi, *Fondo di religione*, 1089), however, record him as already departed for the missions.

infidels and serve local Christians we have mentioned earlier. If Serafino entertained any illusions of success in evangelizing China, however, his fantasies were eventually dispelled by reality. As we shall see, disillusionment started to creep into his correspondence soon after he settled in the Qing capital, when he realized that the life of the court missionaries was far from glamorous or even heroic, and rather that imperial authorities treated the foreigners as “laborers and slaves.”<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, when leaving his native Italy, he must have been inflamed by a good dose of missionary zeal and sense of adventure, embarking upon what turned into almost two years of travel and training for the mission. Serafino arrived in Rome from Lombardy after a journey by land at the beginning of Lent, in mid-February 1736. In his first surviving letter, he already lamented the excessive cost of the trip, a quite common litany for all the missionaries supported by Propaganda, perpetually short of money. Serafino spent six months in the convent of Gesù e Maria al Corso in Rome, where he and his younger traveling companion, the Turinese Sigismondo Meinardi da San Nicola (1713–67), labored at learning the techniques of painting on enamel, illumination, and clock making. Propaganda had indeed received requests from its missionaries in China for new recruits with these skills, necessary in the imperial art workshops in which the missionaries of the capital were employed. It seems unlikely that an accelerated course of a few months could do miracles. Yet, we read in an inflated recommendation composed by the Discalced Augustinian General Procurator Ildefonso da Santa Maria for Propaganda in the summer of 1736 that Serafino possessed “to perfection the art of making clocks” and was “a master at drawing and miniatures,” while Sigismondo was “perfect in the art of making claviers, mappamondi, clocks, and any manual work.”<sup>23</sup>

In mid-August 1736, the two were busy preparing for their departure by sea from Civitavecchia, the port of Rome, to Genoa, and, from there, to France. The route Serafino took reflected the geopolitical changes that had occurred in the eighteenth century, when the papacy and members of religious orders outside the missionary patronage systems of Spain and Portugal started using the ships of the East India Companies to reach their Asian missions. The vessels of the *Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales*, in particular, became the preferred means of transportation for Propaganda missionaries, departing from the port of Lorient in Brittany towards China. The Jesuits of the China Vice-Province, however, still subject to the Portu-

22. Serafino to Miralta, July 19, 1739, f. 1v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

23. APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 21, 1733–36, f. 680r.

guese *padroado*, continued using Portuguese vessels leaving from Lisbon.<sup>24</sup> Correspondence in the Propaganda Archives reveals that Swedish, Danish, and English ships, often stopping in Cadiz (Spain), were also used to ship silver and trunks to China. For Propaganda missionaries, Paris became one of the stopovers on the way to East Asia, and the papal diplomatic network of nuncios (papal ambassadors), as well as the convents of the missionary religious orders, became the operational structure the travelers could use. Serafino, for example, received letters of recommendation (*lettera commendatizia*) from the Master General of the Dominicans, Tomás Ripoll (d. 1747), and from the General of the Capuchins, Bonaventura Barberini da Ferrara (1674–1743), granting him permission to be housed free of charge in any convent of their orders, especially outside Italy (*precipue extra Italiam*).<sup>25</sup>

### Across France

To reach France, the two Augustinians first had to sail from Civitavecchia to Genoa, where they arrived on September 23, 1736. A Discalced Carmelite, Ilarione Negroni, had arranged for them to join him and two Franciscans, all traveling to Asia, on a ship leaving for Marseille. But the sea journey was delayed by practical issues: currency exchange, and buying of clothing for the poor Sigismondo, who lacked “underwear and ... undergarments.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, the transportation of their personal baggage and the exchange of currency to pay the journey’s expenses were the more onerous and necessary tasks for the travelers. Each time a new border was crossed, money had to be exchanged, and Serafino complained that both in Genoa and in France exchanging his *zecchini* and *scudi romani* into local currencies meant losing value. He immediately notified his procurator in Rome, and wrote to the Prefect and the Secretary of Propaganda as well about this financial difficulty, hoping to receive more funds. The delay cost the travelers the passage for Marseille, and instead of getting on a French *tartane* (*tartana*), Serafino and Sigismondo embarked in early October on a lateen (*latina*) ship headed for Nice in Provence. The ship covered the 150 miles between Genoa and Nice in only twenty-four hours, avoiding a “horrible storm” the following day. The travelers decided to take a buggy (*calesse*) to Aix-en-Provence, and avoid Marseille, and then proceeded to Lyon. In Lyon they faced another difficulty. Taking a stagecoach (*diligenza*) from Lyon to Paris would have meant

24. See Wicki 1967.

25. See copy of the “Lettera commendatizia del Generale de’ Cappuccini,” September 2, 1736, and a reference to the recommendation letter from the Dominican Master General in letter by Serafino to Vicar General OAD, October 18, 1738, both in ASR.

26. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Genoa, September 25, 1736, in ASR.

not only paying an expensive ticket of 100 French *livres* per person, but also considerable transportation fees of six *sols* per *libbra* (i.e. pound) for their heavy baggage (*baulli ... pesantissimi*) of around 300 kilograms, bringing the cost to around 300 *livres*.<sup>27</sup> They then learned that in order to rent a buggy, it would be necessary to obtain a license from the postmaster, with an expense of twenty *écus* per person for the license alone. We can imagine Serafino communicating in his improvised French all along.<sup>28</sup> In a later letter of recommendations for future members of his order taking the same route, he indeed advised as follows: "Since we need to cross all of France, and then embark on French vessels, it is necessary to learn a little bit of French, so as to avoid being subjected to cheating and bullying, so often experienced by Italians in France."<sup>29</sup> He was probably thinking of his own experience.

To save on expenses, Serafino finally decided to rent horses (*cavalcatura*), and have a cart follow them with their trunks to the city of Roanne (he writes "Rouain"), the main point of embarkation on the Loire River, where the two Augustinians took a boat to Orleans. The trip was slowed by adverse winds along the route. Once in Orleans, the two priests boarded a public coach to Paris, reaching their destination, the Discalced Augustinian Convent of Notre Dame des Victoires, in another two days, on October 26. Their baggage continued to follow them more slowly by cart, with a considerable saving, as they only paid half a *sol* per pound.<sup>30</sup> But this further delayed their progress: without appropriate clothes, left in the trunks, Serafino was unable to arrange for an immediate meeting with the papal diplomatic envoy (nuncio) in Paris, Monsignor Raniero D'Elci (1670–1761; posted in France from January 2, 1731 until October 10, 1738).<sup>31</sup>

It is not surprising that the first duty Serafino wanted to discharge in the French capital was to meet the nuncio. This ecclesiastical diplomat had indeed a crucial role in supporting the operations of Propaganda Fide abroad. Nuncios acted as postal nodes for the papacy and the missionary Congregation of Propaganda, receiving and forwarding letters and packages from Rome and from the missions, and using diplomatic channels as much as possible to avoid interceptions and custom fees. They offered intelligence

27. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, September 30, 1736, in ASR. Serafino only mentioned the total expense in *livres* (300) and the cost per pound. One *livre* (Serafino calls it *lira francese*) corresponded to twenty *sols* (*soldi*); Serafino used the weight unit called *libbra*, i.e. Italian pound, corresponding to 330 grams; this means that 300 *livres* would have been enough to pay for 330 kilograms. Here is the math:  $300 \text{ livres} \times 20 \text{ sols} = 6,000 \text{ sols} / 6 \text{ sols} = 1,000 \text{ libbre} \times 330 \text{ gr.} = 330 \text{ kgs.}$

28. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, October 30 1736, in ASR.

29. Serafino to Vicar General OAD, Macao, December 18, 1737, in ASR.

30. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, November (?) 1736, in ASR.

31. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, October 30, 1736, in ASR.

to Rome, while also implementing central orders on behalf of the Roman congregations. They provided financial services to traveling missionaries, transferring funds coming from Rome to banking agents, even all the way to India and East Asia if necessary. They paid back to the headquarters of East India Companies loans taken by the Procurator of Propaganda in Macao and Canton, upon receipt of letters of exchange, or sent caskets of silver species directly to the Procurator via commercial agents and vessels of the East India Companies. They reimbursed travel expenses of missionaries in transit and connected them to government agencies and royal officials in the country where they resided as nuncios. They obtained needed passports, and often bargained with ship owners or royal agencies for discounted or free passage for missionaries. They purchased gifts on behalf of missionaries, to mollify authorities and the imperial court in China. They also sometimes recommended local priests for missionary service to Propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

While the nuncio certainly informed Rome of the travelers' whereabouts, Serafino also communicated directly with the highest authorities in Rome about the journey, and especially stressed his financial needs. On November 5, 1736, he wrote letters to both the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Vincenzo Petra (1662–1747) and to Cardinal Giuseppe Renato Imperiali (1651–1737), cardinal protector of the Augustinian order and member of the congregation of cardinals supervising Propaganda, to lament the high costs of travel in France, and obviously hoping to obtain more funds.<sup>33</sup>

In Paris, Serafino also tried to communicate with French authorities. For example, he met with Adrian Maurice de Noailles (1678–1766), Maréchal de France, whom he had previously encountered in Crema (Lombardy), where the Maréchal was coordinating military operations in the War of Polish Succession (1733–38). De Noailles extended his patronage to Serafino, who was hoping to be received by the king. However, that meeting did not happen, as the monarch was in Versailles, and the missionaries urgently needed to obtain a sea passage.<sup>34</sup>

During their twelve days in Paris, the two Augustinians obtained

32. On the administrative functions of nuncios in the service of Propaganda, see Pizzorusso 1998. Members of religious orders continued to use their own internal communication networks as well. Sigismondo, for example, suggested to his brother in Turin that he send letters addressed in French to the librarian of the Augustinian convent of Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris, a certain "Father Eustache," who would then forward them to Lorient and China; letter from Lorient, December 18, 1736, in Meinardi 1964, 2.

33. On travel to France and related high expenses, see letter of Serafino to Cardinal Petra, Paris, November 5, 1736, in APF, *Scritture Originali della Congregazione Particolare dell'Indie Orientali e Cina* (SOCP), vol. 42 (1739), ff. 185r–v and 188r; and Serafino to Cardinal Imperiali, same place and date, ff. 186r–187r.

34. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, November (?) 1736, in ASR.

through the nuncio needed documentation and a passage on a French East India Company ship. They then proceeded as fast as they could to Nantes, the capital of Brittany, avoiding this time the capricious winds on the Loire River, even if travel by land cost them double. They then continued to the port of embarkation for the Indies, Lorient, further north along the coast, where they would spend around two weeks waiting for the departure of the China vessels. To find suitable accommodation in the busy town was not easy, and the money was dwindling, as the provisions Serafino was going to buy for the long voyage were sold very dearly there, and eight *livres* per day were necessary for meals for the two of them alone. Fortunately, his French was sufficient to find assistance from a local merchant, one Monsieur Allègre, who became a sort of agent and helped them to navigate the town.<sup>35</sup>

Since passengers on the ship were simply given a space over the wooden floor of the powder magazine (*santabarbara*), Serafino had to purchase several items to make the trip comfortable. He acquired mattresses and woolen blankets for the first leg of the trip in the cold climate of the northern Atlantic (elsewhere it was in fact rather hot); urinals made of tin (so they would not break with the movements of the sea); cloth napkins and towels; a water pitcher; glasses; and a knife for the dining table. Serafino observed that, curiously, forks and spoons were provided on French ships and in French inns, but never knives. He also purchased some linen cloth, since he learned that in China only cotton was available, and took along all the necessary implements for celebrating the Mass, to avoid borrowing anything from the ship's chaplain.<sup>36</sup>

Each missionary – as Serafino advised in a later letter, obviously based on his own experience – should have a small travel cellar (*cantinella*) with at least fifteen large bottles of Canary wine, both to celebrate mass, and to drink in small quantities “to reinforce the stomach, especially since in China there is only rice wine”; and also some aquavit for the same curative properties. In Lorient he also bought some specialty foods, good to combat seasickness: Seville oranges, apples, and salted sardines with onions. Apparently, preserved fish could prevent vomiting. To mitigate the effects of excessive heat when reaching the Tropics, he took along some containers of “refreshing preserves” (*conserva rinfrescative*). Last but not least, he exchanged all the remaining cash into Spanish *pesos* (*piastre*), “since that’s the only currency that is accepted in China without a loss in value.” He observed, however, that even in case one still had French silver *écus*, it would be possible to have

35. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, November (?) 1736, in ASR.

36. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, November (?) 1736, in ASR.

those exchanged in China, “since in China silver is cut into pieces, and the loss of value would be minimal.”<sup>37</sup>

To obtain a sea passage, Serafino followed a procedure that he later detailed in his instructions to future missionaries. He first introduced himself to the Director General of the *Compagnie des Indes*, and was informed that he and Sigismondo would need to embark on the vessel *Prince de Conti*. We do not find details on the price paid for the passage, but we know that the nuncio in Paris had negotiated a discounted fare. The Director was particularly pleased when Sigismondo repaired a clavier he owned, and recommended the traveling party to the vessel’s captain. Serafino paid a visit to the captain, and presented him some Genoese candied fruit as a small token of appreciation. He noted that Frenchmen paid much attention to such ceremonies and appreciated good manners, but also that members of religious orders were not particularly esteemed in France, and that it was thus very important to give a clear example of virtue and civility.<sup>38</sup>

## Oceanic voyage

The *Condé* and the *Prince de Conti*, two East Indiamen of 600 tons each, left Lorient for China on the same day, December 18, 1736.<sup>39</sup> Serafino and Sigismondo embarked on the *Prince de Conti*, together with two other Italian Discalced Augustinians and two “*Minori Osservanti*” or “*religiosi di S. Tomaso*.”<sup>40</sup>

Serafino recommended that priests on the ship should scrupulously follow the schedule of recitation of the divine office, and celebrate mass whenever possible. Moreover, a certain distance had to be maintained with the crew and other passengers. In a report for the benefit of future recruits, he suggested that traveling missionaries “should not be on familiar terms with anybody [on the ship].”<sup>41</sup> But the social life of the ship could not be

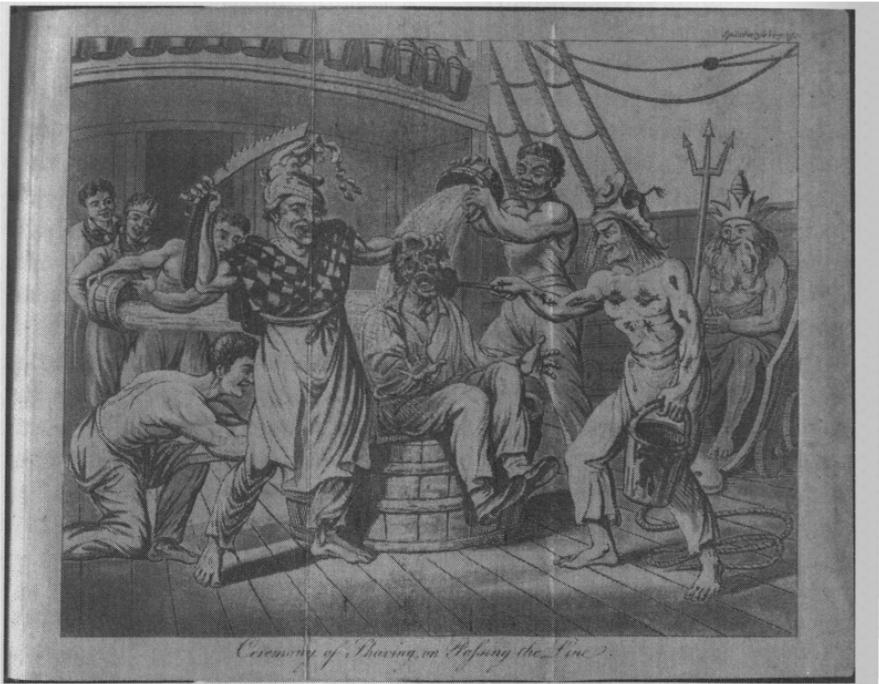
37. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Paris, November (?) 1736, in ASR.

38. Serafino to Ildefonso da Santa Maria, Lorient, December 1, 1736, in ASR.

39. These data are drawn from a variety of Serafino’s letters in ASR and Sigismondo’s letters in Meinardi 1964; details on the Asia trip of the *Prince de Conti* in 1736–38 are available in the database *Mémoire des hommes* of the French Ministry of Defence <http://www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/>, with many references to the navigational documents in the Archives nationales, section *Marine*, Paris; and at the Service historique de la défense, Lorient.

40. Meinardi 1964, 2. One of the Discalced Augustinians traveling with them was Adriano da S. Tecla, who would go on to Vietnam (see Meinardi 1964, 6). For a biography of Adriano and a description of the missionary efforts of the Order in Southeast Asia, see Adriano di St. Thecla [sic] 2002.

41. Serafino to Vicar General OAD, Macao, December 18, 1737, in ASR.



**Image 1.** “Ceremony of shaving, on passing the line,” from F. B. Spilbury, *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, Performed by His Majesty’s Sloop Favourite, in the Year 1805, Being a Journal of the Events Which Happened to That Vessel*, London: R. Phillips, 1807; Wesleyan University Library, used with permission.

totally ignored. The line of the Tropic of Cancer was crossed on January 9, and the Equator on January 25, and the favorable winds helped maintain the course. On that occasion, Serafino reported what he called a “ridiculous ceremony” held by the sailors at the passing of the Equator, an enactment that they called “baptism.” This was in fact the well-known line-crossing ceremony also described by Marc-Antoine Caillot in his 1729 transatlantic journey to Louisiana, as detailed in Elizabeth Goldsmith’s chapter in the present volume. The ceremony took the form of a raucous hazing affair, where sailors dressed up as members of the court of Neptune or as Africans, and mocked the passengers and officers in a carnival parade, requesting tips. Unlike Caillot, Serafino did not find the situation amusing, and tried to avoid becoming the object of ridicule during the ceremony. In his advice to future missionaries, he recommended giving a contribution of one *peso* per person (less would be *spilorcheria*, stinginess) when a basin was passed around at the end of the function, “to avoid being insulted and be drenched with water from

head to toe.” Tipping the gunner, the butler (*maestro di casa*), and the waiter serving at the table was also customary, to maintain a good level of service and abide by custom.<sup>42</sup>

The vessel remained at sea until March 14, 1737, when it reached the Dutch colony of the Cape of Good Hope. Sigismondo – Serafino’s companion – could send a letter to his brother in Turin from the Cape by way of a returning Dutch ship. He reported that the voyage had been uneventful, favored with constant good weather, and not as difficult as earlier descriptions had led him to imagine: “During these three months we went through winter, and then spring when we sailed close to the Canary Islands, which we did not see. After crossing the equinox line, we encountered summer, and now [on the Cape] we have been enjoying ... a nice autumn [...] In a few days we will again encounter spring in the seas of Asia, without experiencing winter.” Here we palpably feel the excitement of the missionaries for what turned out to be a pleasant crossing. Yet, not all ships had the same luck. Sigismondo observed that while at the Cape, he witnessed the arrival from Amsterdam of a Dutch ship, which had taken nine months to reach the colony, and was by the time of its arrival in very bad condition.<sup>43</sup>

The Cape was the ordinary stopover for French ships on the way to Asia to get fresh water, supplies, and some rest, and the missionaries spent around three weeks there. Since the Dutch authorities forbade the open presence of Catholic priests in the colony, the missionaries had to dress in secular garb, with clothes borrowed from the ship’s officers. All knew their identity nonetheless, and Serafino commented that as Catholic clergy they had to be particularly careful to be above suspicion, “being in the midst of enemies who observe [us] carefully.” They found good accommodation through their ship’s captain, spending around one Spanish *peso* per day for their room and board per person. While the climate was very pleasant at the Cape, the warm tropical temperatures experienced in circumnavigating Africa, and those expecting them across the Indian Ocean and beyond, required the shedding of the traditional Augustinian long habit made of thick felt, in favor of shorter and lighter clothes. On April 4 they left the Cape, and the remainder of the journey was rather tranquil, so much so that the captain called it “miraculous” in his logbook, according to Sigismondo. However, on Good Friday the ship encountered a storm that “tossed [the passengers] out of the beds, which look like coffers.” The following day, however, recitation of the litanies of the saints brought back a calm sea in time for Easter Sunday.<sup>44</sup> By

42. Serafino to Vicar General OAD, Macao, December 18, 1737, in ASR.

43. Meinardi 1964, 7.

44. Meinardi 1964, 4.

May 3 they sighted the island of Java, but the absence of winds slowed their progress, and they were able to enter the Sunda Straits only on June 9. The ship cast anchor and loaded fresh drinking water there, and once more with favorable winds was able to reach Macao on July 20, 1737.

### From Macao to Beijing

The missionaries waited on board for instructions from the Procurator of Propaganda Arcangelo Miralta, and eventually moved to the convent of the Portuguese Dominicans in Macao, where Miralta had his quarters. The following six months were spent awaiting imperial permission to proceed to Beijing, to be issued via the office of the Governor General of Guangdong and Guangxi in Canton. The Augustinians relied in part on the connections of the Jesuits to proceed, and attached themselves to two members of the Portuguese Vice-Province, who since 1737 had been awaiting the required *placet* to reach the capital; these two men were the Italian, Giacomo Antonini (1701–1739), physician, and the Portuguese Felix da Rocha (1713–1781), a new member of the Astronomical Directorate. Serafino presented himself as a painter, and Sigismondo as a clockmaker. Once the imperial decree reached them, the party left Macao by boat for Canton on January 12, 1738. However, when they arrived at the provincial capital two days later, they met with a chilly reception. Apparently, the Jesuits in Beijing had petitioned to pay for the travel of their own men from the south, rather than relying on the imperial government as was customary; this initiative caused consternation among officials, as they could no longer administer the travel funds and profit in the process. Only after three visits to the governor's palace were the missionaries finally received, and still most other officials refused to see them, with the exception of the Manchu general in charge of the Canton garrison.<sup>45</sup> On January 28, the four foreign priests finally left by boat along the riverways. The Augustinians were accompanied by two Christians, who had arrived from Beijing to accompany them, and by a Cantonese cook, also a Christian, called Eustachio.<sup>46</sup>

The first stop was in Shaozhou a few days later, but the trip proceeded very slowly as the river's water level was low. Serafino lamented that the expenses were already becoming excessive, since at each new jurisdiction local soldiers would appear, discharge three salvos of their harquebuses in the air to salute, present themselves with a visiting card from their superior,

45. Serafino to Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Canton, January 28, 1738, in APF, SOCP, vol. 42, ff. 178r–v.

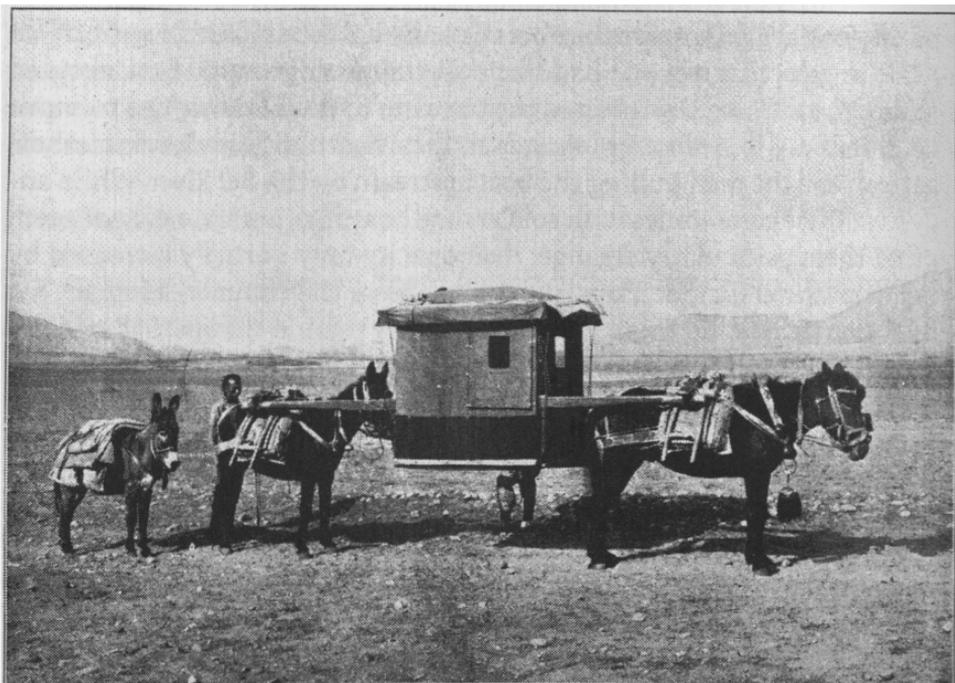
46. Serafino to Miralta, Nanxiong, February 13, 1738, ff. 1r–2r, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

and ask for tips. Antonini on one occasion offered the soldiers “two horrible sweets as gifts, that were so bad that even Italian dogs would have avoided sniffing them,”<sup>47</sup> and this obliged the travelers to double their tips to move along. Halfway to Nanxiong, moreover, they had to offer a lunch to their boatman and the men pulling the boat upstream on the Bei River. While annoyed at these ceremonies with soldiers and boatmen, Serafino did not seem to find them particularly strange, their opacity only partially increased by linguistic barriers. In fact, tips and rewards were the common lubricant for travel everywhere, no more common in China than in Europe. Sigismondo tried also to train their cook to prepare dishes according to the foreigners’ taste, but to no avail. The next city, Nanxiong, was reached only on February 13. They were well received there by the local Manchu military official, but had to remain an extra day due to heavy rain. That day their boatmen got terribly drunk, and recovered from the hangover only the following day. To reach the next stop, the party crossed by land over the Mei Pass using sedan chairs, assisted by sixty local porters (whom they paid one *masso* and six *gondorins* [*sic*] each, more than usual, since it was Chinese New Year).<sup>48</sup> Once in the town of Nan’an, Jiangxi province, they moved back to water transportation, renting a boat on the Gan River. However, as prices were high due to the approaching festivities of the New Year, they had to bargain hard, finally lowering the fare from 21 to 11.5 *taels* per boat. They arrived in Ganzhou on February 19, the day of the Chinese New Year, and in another six days, after passing the famously dangerous rapids of that region, they reached the provincial capital of Jiangxi province, Nanchang. The river journey was now over, and the rest of the itinerary would be by land, using mule litters (*lettiche*) for the two priests, and mules to transport their baggage.

They spent several days in Nanchang, to have the land travel arranged and the litters built, at a cost of six *taels* each. Since their trunks were too heavy for the litters (which reached capacity with a bed and a person each), they hired some extra mules, and rearranged the contents of some of the trunks, for an average weight of 180 *cates* (around 112 kgs) per mule, and a total cost for all their ten mules of 100 *taels*. Managing the Chinese helpers also required careful accounting. A young servant riding a mule led each of the two mule litters, and needed compensation for the trip all the way to Beijing, as well as for clothing and boots. Serafino thus decided to save

47. Serafino to Miralta, Nanxiong, February 13, 1738, f. 1r, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

48. Serafino to Miralta, Nan’an, February 19, 1738, f. 1r–v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30. *Maz* (plur. *maces*) and *conderin* or *condorin* were terms used by the Portuguese to indicate sub-units of the Chinese silver *tael* (in Mandarin, *liang*, corresponding to ca. forty grams of silver). One *tael* was equivalent to ten *maces* or 100 *condorins*.



**Image 2.** A mule litter in northern China in the early twentieth century, in all likelihood quite similar to the *lettiche* used by the missionaries. Photograph by Sanshichiro Yamamoto Studio, Peking, (ca. 1906). [Photo in public domain in Japan and USA: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sedan\\_chair\\_carried\\_by\\_mules.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sedan_chair_carried_by_mules.jpg)]

money by dismissing the Cantonese cook, as he had been too liberal for his tastes with tips and expenses.<sup>49</sup>

The land voyage was blessed by good weather and proceeded rather smoothly, in spite of occasional breakdowns of the mule litters, which necessitated repairs. At a distance of three days' journey from Beijing, where they would arrive on April 9, 1738, two domestics of the Beijing Jesuits reached the traveling party, bringing refreshments. One returned immediately to the capital to announce the arrival of the two new Jesuits and the two Augustinians. He was soon back with more refreshments, chickens, sweets, and wine. On the arrival day, the Jesuit Vice-Provincial André Pereira (1689–1743) traveled outside the city gates to meet them, and invited them to have a banquet at the Jesuit College of S. José. Ignaz Kögler (1680–1746), head of the Astronomical Directorate, visited them as well, in spite of having not yet fully recovered from falling off a horse a week earlier. Finally, the two missionaries got on their litters, and reached the residence of the only Propaganda missionary then in Beijing, Teodorico Pedrini, located at the Xitang

49. Serafino to Miralta, Nanchang, March 1, 1738, f. 1r–4v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

(Western Church) in the northwestern part of the city. To their great dismay, they found the rooms reserved for them in disrepair and without any furnishing.<sup>50</sup> But they were finally at their destination. All said and done, the final accounting for the trip from Macao to Beijing cost the Procurator Office a total of 459.3 Portuguese *reais*.<sup>51</sup>

The letters reported in detail place names and distances, travel expenses, small accidents along the route, conflicts among the travelers and with boatmen and porters, and weather changes. We would look in vain for any deeper cultural commentary in these short missives, precariously written on boats or during a stopover at a country inn. They were jotted down to inform superiors of the progress of the journey, not to enlighten a broader public on the nature of China's culture, geography, and customs. These notes offer rare glimpses of specific moments of the journey, capturing for us in micro-historical detail the complexity and difficulties of pre-modern travel. Serafino, however, had a particularly rosy view of his own journey. He had been quite lucky, since the oceanic sail had been remarkably uneventful, and he had met with mostly good weather for the entire trip between Macao and Beijing. After several months in the Qing capital, in October 1738 he wrote a letter to the vicar general of his order in Rome to encourage new recruits, stating that the experience of travel had not been as traumatic as he had been led to imagine before his departure, and that living conditions in China were rather good:

Please encourage members of our religious order to engage in this holy enterprise, and remove from their minds the fears that people over there placed in our hearts and in the hearts of all those who are about to start this journey. Now that the pilots have learned the right timing to sail, one does not encounter any longer the notorious dangers of the Cape of Good Hope, the passing of the Equator, the Agulhas Bank, the Strait of Java and so on. Rather, those [places] are all crossed in safety by all those who choose the right time to pass them, as the French, English, and Portuguese do. Here [in Beijing], moreover, there is bread and wine and everything else one might need, even if over there [in Italy] they said that there was none. In sum, the situation is not as bad as it is usually painted.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, in order to stimulate new arrivals Serafino was only telling a half-truth, especially on life in the Qing capital. The relief at having reached

50. Serafino to Miralta, Beijing, April 9, 1738, ff. 1r-v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30; cf. also Serafino to Vicar General OAD, October 18, 1738, in ASR.

51. "Stato della Cassa ... della Procura 1738," in APF, SOCP vol. 42 (1739), f. 140v.

52. Serafino to Vicar General OAD, October 18, 1738, in ASR.

their final destination without incidents had indeed initially contributed to a sense of elation and optimism despite the modest accommodation they found there, and to build good camaraderie with Propaganda's veteran in Beijing, Pedrini. A few days after their arrival, the new priests, with Pedrini's help, had presented their gifts to the court, including a small painting (*miniatura*) by Serafino. Soon after, in a sign of imperial approval for his work, Serafino had received orders to paint some more miniature scenes on paper, leather, ivory, and on tobacco boxes, receiving clothes, furs, and damask textiles as a reward.

Disillusionment, however, set in pretty quickly, already within the first month: "the emperor makes me work like a mule, and to serve him I have to spend all day at the desk, damaging my eyes to paint the very minute scenes that he likes so much." Moreover, without an assignment of imperial horses, he had to spend his own funds to reach the palace, consuming in the first month more than sixty *taels* of silver for transportation and food.<sup>53</sup> Even accounting for some exaggeration to force his superiors to send more funds, the sense of frustration was already palpable. Disenchantment reached a zenith when Pedrini finally revealed his true personality. On August 1, 1738, barely five months after his arrival in the Qing capital, Serafino wrote two separate letters to Procurator Miralta in Macao, one "official" and more neutral, and another confidential, addressed to him as a "friend" (*amico*) rather than as a superior, asking him to burn it immediately after reading it. Fortunately for us, the procurator not only did not comply, but actually forwarded a copy of the most telling "confidential" excerpts to Rome.<sup>54</sup> In his secretive letter Serafino explained the true reasons why that very day he and Sigismondo had abandoned the residence of the Western Church within the walled city of Beijing, and moved to the small and rather dilapidated house owned by the mission in Haidian, at the gates of the suburban imperial palace complex of the Yuanmingyuan:

The reasons for our departure listed in the [official] letter [sent to you along with this one], although true and very sincere, could have been overcome if the situation had remained the same as in the first month after our arrival in Beijing. However, later on things changed so much that, besides the distance from the Palace and the considerable expense to go there, we had also to face major inconveniences in

53. Serafino to Miralta, Beijing, May 11, 1738, ff. 1r-4v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30; quotation at f. 4r.

54. Original letter by Serafino to Miralta, Haidian, August 1 (?), 1738, ff. 1r-3v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30; cf. partial forwarded copy in APF, SOCP, vol. 42, f. 56v.

living in that house [with Pedrini], and so, for the former and latter reasons, we decided to leave.<sup>55</sup>

Serafino engaged in a weepy *mea culpa* for having disregarded the orders of the procurator to go directly to Haidian once in the capital, recognizing that the superior's prudent assessment of the situation was not only accurate, but in fact less shocking than the reality. Pedrini, on the pretext of illness, started refusing his services as interpreter and senior palace missionary to the newly arrived confrères, whose linguistic skills and personal contacts were still insufficient to function properly at court. Yet Pedrini was far from being sick, Serafino observed. Three men – he himself, Sigismondo, and a Chinese priest – had barely succeeded in wresting away from Pedrini's hands a poor Chinese servant whom he was “kicking and punching in the face, while pulling him all bloodied across the grounds [of the residence].” The Vincentian priest, then already in his late 60s, was “a man who for many years now has been using a rod [to beat his servants], and who almost daily punches and kicks [some of them].” He was also violent in his language, and threatened to “strangle” Serafino following an argument over administrative matters. After separating their residences, the two parties reconciled in words, but Pedrini continued to undermine his two confrères, depriving them of the help of a catechist stationed in Haidian, and disparagingly telling his own domestics in Beijing that “now that those two missionaries have left, I can hire two servants in their stead,” thus proving that he considered them no better than subordinates at his service. Serafino also added that “his natural satirical wit does not let pass any word, gesture, or action by other missionaries without stabbing them with his tongue and ridiculing them, even in front of domestics.”<sup>56</sup>

My examination of around eighty letters that Serafino wrote during the remaining five years of his life – he died on August 9, 1742, at age fifty – confirms his increasing sense of despair at the lack of financial support from Macao and Rome, his frustration at the pettiness and stinginess of the hated Pedrini (who outlived him by four years), and his chafing at the tough working conditions for artisans in the imperial service.<sup>57</sup> The China mission had turned out to be much less heroic and exciting than he probably believed before leaving Italy. Illusion had turned into disillusionment.

55. Serafino to Miralta, Haidian, August 1 (?), 1738, f. 2r, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

56. Serafino to Miralta, Haidian, August 1 (?), 1738, ff. 2r, 2v, 3v, in APF, *Procura Cina*, box 30.

57. The bulk of Serafino's correspondence can be found in APF, in the following sections: SOCP, vols. 42, 43, 44; SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 23; *Procura Cina*, box 30.

## Conclusion

Serafino's unpublished letters are the sole remaining traces of the journey he took from Italy to China, and chronicle for us the difficulties of a man caught between a desire for missionary heroism with its illusory rewards, and the disillusionment he experienced once faced with the truth of Chinese reality. As historians, we could use such sources to probe the mentality of the missionary, the psychological effects of travels, the consequences of cultural dislocation, and the workings of cross-cultural communication. Serafino's short missives, however, are less useful in this regard than many other travel accounts, published and unpublished, that have been extensively studied to understand the European ethnographic gaze and the local dynamics of encounters, including missionary ones.<sup>58</sup> His letters, in fact, are more precious as immediate testimonies of how the structural organization of communication and travel from Europe to Beijing functioned for missionaries in the eighteenth century, outside the older Portuguese patronage system, and how material constraints shaped ideological and religious goals. These sources thus turn out to illuminate the micro-historical study of the materiality of travel, as I have briefly illustrated in this essay. In conjunction with the analysis of more reflexive accounts of cultural difference and of philosophical musings on the meaning of travel, so abundant in published accounts (often post-facto systematizations rather than, like Serafino's letters, instantaneous records of travel), the reconstruction of the actual mechanics of voyages can bridge the gap between the ideal and the material dimensions of travel, and restore for us a fuller understanding of the experience of pre-modern travel.

Serafino's reports reveal the physical infrastructure that sustained cross-cultural contacts. Through the mechanisms and patronage networks offered by Propaganda Fide, the papal nuncios, the King of France, and the French East Indies Company, the journey of our two Augustinians went relatively smoothly all the way to Beijing. In Europe, papal nuncios and religious orders offered a flexible and reliable support network for Propaganda missionaries, in terms of communication, accommodation, transportation, and financial resources. In East Asia, the Procurator of Propaganda in Macao, whose powers were both disciplinary and logistical, acted on behalf of the papacy in a capacity similar to that of the nuncios in Europe. But obviously, within China itself, the support of local Christian guides, both from the Macao-Canton region and from Beijing, and imperial permissions and support

58. For a recent survey of European and Chinese sources on travel and ethnography in the early modern period, see Rubiés and Ollé 2016.

for those traveling to the court, made travel by foreign priests with almost no linguistic skills possible.<sup>59</sup> The case of the maverick Gemelli Careri, in its exceptionality, only confirms that travel and extended residence in China outside the missionary system or the occasional tributary embassy was virtually impossible. Yet, both for the vagabond Italian layman, and for generations of Catholic missionaries in the age of sail between the mid-sixteenth century and the nineteenth century, the synergy of European and Chinese social and economic networks offered the needed infrastructure to move people and objects from Europe to Beijing. If this feat of social, economic, and logistical coordination within pre-modern technological confines still astonishes, the limitations of Propaganda’s bureaucratic organization could not be overcome, and provoked a certain dose of cynicism and disillusionment among its China missionaries. The Congregation’s attempt to control the finances and internal life of the mission from distant Rome and Macao, the uneven quality and training of the missionaries recruited by the Holy See, and the endless jurisdictional conflicts that divided the energies of the China evangelists in competing sub-groups (Portuguese Jesuits, French Jesuits, and Propaganda) often contributed to turning rosy illusions into bitter disappointments.

Table: Chronology of Serafino’s Journey from Milan to Beijing, 1736–1738

Date	Travel
Late January 1736	Departs Lombardy for Rome
February 10-15 (?), 1736	Arrives in Rome
August 18, 1736	Prepares to leave Rome for France
After September 2, 1736	Departs from Rome
September 23, 1736	Arrives in Genoa
September 25, 1736	At Genoa, prepares to embark for Marseille or Nice
September 30, 1736	At Genoa, prepares to embark for Marseille with <i>tartana francese</i>
October 1, 1736 (?)	Ends up taking a <i>latina</i> for Nice, Provence
October 2, 1736 (?)	From Nice, takes buggy to Aix-en-Provence
	Aix-en-Provence to Lyon; Lyon to Roanne [Rouain] on horse and cart; from Roanne by Loire River to Orleans by boat; Orleans to Paris by coach in two days
October 26, 1736	Arrives in Paris (Notre Dame des Victoires)
November 11, 1736	Leaves Paris for Nantes by land
December 1, 1736	Arrives in Lorient

59. On the office of the Propaganda Fide’s Procurator in China, see Menegon 2017.

**Date**

December 17, 1736  
 December 18, 1736  
 March 14, 1737  
 April 4, 1737  
 July 20, 1737  
 January 12, 1738  
 January 14, 1738 (or 18?)  
  
 January 28, 1738  
 Late January–early February,  
 1738 (?)  
 February 13, 1738  
 February 14, 1738 (?)  
 February 15, 1738  
 February 19, 1738  
 (Chinese New Year's Day)  
 February 21, 1738  
 February 26, 1738  
  
 April 9, 1738

**Travel**

Embarks in Lorient  
 Departs Lorient on the ship *Prince de Conti* for China  
 Arrives at Cape of Good Hope  
 Departs from Cape of Good Hope  
 Arrives in Macao  
 Departs from Macao to Canton by boat  
 Arrives in Canton  
 (Guangzhou 廣州)  
 Departs from Canton by river  
 Passes through Shaozhou 邵州 by river  
  
 Arrives in Nanxiong 南雄, by river  
 Passage of the Mei Pass 梅關 by land  
 Arrives in Nan'an 南安 by river  
 Arrives in Ganzhou 贛州 by river  
  
 Rapids on Gan 贛 river  
 Arrives in Nanchang 南昌 by river  
 From Nanchang to Beijing by land  
 Arrives in Beijing

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