

# EUROPE - CHINA

INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS  
(16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES)

EDITED BY  
LUÍS FILIPE BARRETO



Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, I.P.  
Ministério da Educação e Ciência

# EUROPE - CHINA

## Intercultural Encounters

### (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

---

EDITED BY  
LUÍS FILIPE BARRETO

Lisbon, 2012



Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, I.P.  
MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO E CIÊNCIA

# Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Foreword</b>  | 7   |
| <b>About the Authors</b>   | 9   |
| <b>Ronnie Po-chia Hsia</b><br><i>Matteo Ricci, Portugal and China</i>  | 15  |
| <b>Willy Vande Walle</b><br><i>The Linguistic Horizon in the Intercultural Encounter<br/>between Europe and China (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)</i>  | 29  |
| <b>James K. Chin</b><br><i>Export Chinese Ceramics, Ilha da Veniaga<br/>and the Sanchoão Island</i>  | 65  |
| <b>Elisabetta Corsi</b><br><i>Our Little Daily Death<br/>Francesco Sambiasi's Treatise on Sleep and Images in Chinese</i>  | 79  |
| <b>Lim Jongtae</b><br><i>Western Learning as Learning from Qing China:<br/>Cultural Encounters between Korean Travelers and the<br/>Jesuits in Beijing and the Rise of Western Learning in Late<br/>Chosŏn Korea</i> | 97  |
| <b>Isabel Murta Pina</b><br><i>Chinese and mestizo Jesuits from the China Mission (1589-1689)</i>  | 117 |

- Eugenio Menegon** 139  
*A clash of court cultures: papal envoys  
in early eighteenth century Beijing*
- Paolo De Troia** 179  
*The Geography of the others: Giulio Aleni, Marco Polo and  
Pliny in seventeenth-century China*
- Roderich Ptak** 189  
*Intercultural Zoology:  
The Perception of Exotic Animals in Chinese Jesuit Works*
- Noël Golvers** 219  
*Portuguese printed books and their readers in the SJ mission  
of China (17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries):  
A first historical-cultural interpretation of book historical data,  
on the basis of the Beitang catalogue and external testimonia*
- Joyce Lindorff** 241  
*Tomás Pereira and 17<sup>th</sup>-century western music theory*
- Arnaldo do Espírito Santo  
Cristina Costa Gomes** 249  
*Tomás Pereira - Latinist*



EUGENIO MENEGON  
*Associate Professor of Chinese History*  
*Department of History, Boston University, USA*

## **A clash of court cultures: papal envoys in early eighteenth-century Beijing**

### **Prologue: comparing courts and systems of international relations**

In 1691, on the eve of the great theological battles of the Chinese Rites Controversy, and a few years before the departure of the first papal legation to China (1703), the French Jesuit Louis Le Comte wrote in his famous and controversial *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine*:

Political strife among the princes and the other aristocrats of the kingdom [of China] is quite similar to that of any European court. They continually exert themselves in order to learn each other's tastes, inclinations, moods, designs, and the more they keep hidden and dissimulate, the more they try to study each other. They are mindful of everybody, and they show propriety even towards their enemies. Since violence and duels are not accepted by the State, they coldly plot in secret their vendettas. It is hard to explain how many detours and tricks they will employ to destroy each other, without giving the impression of having any part in it. They are not only dissimulators, but also very patient, to a level that reaches insensibility, as they will wait and wait until the moment is favorable to declare themselves, and make their move.<sup>1</sup>

---

I thank the Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, and the scholars who commented at the time, for inviting me to present part of this research in Lisbon in 2010; Elisabetta Corsi and Maria Antonietta Visceglia for their warmth and the opportunity to be a visiting scholar at the Dipartimento

In this description, prepared for the cultivated public of Europe, the ways of the European and Chinese courts seemed quite close. Le Comte's description, based on the reports of his confreres at the Chinese court did reflect the daily dynamics of power relations among important figures of the civil government and of the Qing Inner Court. However, we must remember that Le Comte was targeting an educated and courtly audience, and that the Jesuit meant to convey the mechanisms of the Chinese system in familiar terms, while also titillating his readers' taste for intrigue and gossip.

In fact, in their internal correspondence and in their "intelligence reports," the Jesuits residing at court tended to emphasize the *difference* between the Chinese and the European courts. Another French Jesuit, Jean Mathieu Ventavon, who lived in Beijing between 1766 and 1787, wrote in a 1784 letter to Propaganda Fide that "the court of Peking is extremely dissimilar from the European courts, and someone who has not experienced it, cannot imagine the difference."<sup>2</sup> By then, the Jesuits could indeed claim that they had more than a century of experience at court. They occupied a truly unique role at the Qing court: they were both cultural and linguistic interpreters, explaining the etiquette of the court as well as literally interpreting documents and conversations from Chinese and Manchu to the European ecclesiastical and civil authorities. In their reports and during the rare stay of European embassies traveling to Beijing, the Jesuits would not only explain to their European counterparts the internal dynamics of the court they belonged to, but also insist on the need to understand the system of international relations of

---

di Storia Culture Religioni, University of Rome "La Sapienza," and present an Italian version of this essay at the conference "La politica internazionale del papato nella prima età moderna. Spazi e uomini" in June 2012. Finally, I am most grateful to Giovanni Pizzorusso and Giuseppe Marcocci for their friendship, comments, and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Louis Le Comte (Frédérique Touboul-Bouyeure, ed.), *Un Jesuite à Peking: Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine 1687-1692*, Paris: Phébus, 1990, pp. 293-94. This delightful and shrewd comparative picture of court life in Qing China and Europe is addressed to Jérôme Phélypeaux (1674-1747), Secretary of State of the Maison du Roi and Navy Minister from 1699 onwards, and founder of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres during the reign of Louis XIV.

<sup>2</sup> Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples or 'De Propaganda Fide', Roma (hereafter APF), *Acta CP* (CP = Congregazione Particolare delle Indie Orientali e Cina), vol. 14 (1780-84), f. 43v.



the Chinese empire, and to keep a respectful attitude towards Chinese ceremonial. Otherwise, any attempt at dialogue would have failed.

This essay will examine two examples of such failure, i.e. the diplomatic exchanges between the Qing empire and a peculiar European power, the papacy, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The 1704-05 and 1720-21 papal legations to Beijing, organized by order of Clement XI (Giovanni Francesco Albani; pontificate 1700-1721) are empirical cases particularly useful in illuminating the dynamics of the encounter and clash of a mature European court culture, such as the papacy, and the Chinese court and diplomatic system. We should remember, however, that the legations were received in Beijing with a special status, because of their religious nature, linked to the problem of the Chinese Rites and papal jurisdiction over the Asian missions against the privileges of Portuguese missionary patronage. Because of imperial favor towards the Jesuit, moreover, the reigning emperor Kangxi treated these missions with particular interest and lenience. In spite of this, they remain emblematic of the degree of incommensurability between East Asian and European court systems, and reveal the limitations of papal diplomacy in extra-European contexts. These limitations mainly stemmed from institutional and personnel constraints, as I suggest through an analysis of the selection process of the legations' members in Italy, and the preparations to the actual 'negotiations' in China within the context of the Roman Curia and Congregations before the departure of the envoys.

The first short section of the essay describes the role of the Jesuits at the Qing imperial court, both as "courtiers" and bureaucrats integrated in the administrative machinery. I then offer a brief introduction to the system of international relations of the Chinese empire, and how the activity of the papacy and the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Asia and in China prepared the ground for the two legations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Specialized literature on late imperial China and the Jesuit mission offers in-depth research on the relationship between the Qing Empire and the Jesuits. We do not know as much about the so-called "Propagandists" and the papal diplomatic initiatives in China. There are two monographs on the legations: Antonio Sisto Rosso, *Apostolic Legations to China of the Eighteenth Century*, South Pasadena: Ione & Perkins, 1948; Giacomo Di Fiore, *La Legazione Mezzabarba in Cina (1720-1721)*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1989. Several articles focus on specific aspects or characters linked to those religious-diplomatic missions. However, while the predominant focus of research up to now has been on jurisdictional and theological issues, few scholars have discussed the career trajectories of the legates and their parties, in relation both to the European and Chinese court contexts.

In the longer part of this essay, I concentrate on the legations' preparations in Rome and the selection of personnel. Although the Holy See and Propaganda refined their preparatory process between the first and the second legation, objective limitations in the system of recruitment and in the level of religious, cultural, and professional formation of the candidates strongly diminished the efficacy of these diplomatic initiatives. I then close commenting on the concepts of "curia" (court) that clashed in Beijing in the eighteenth century, briefly describing, with the help of some primary documentation, the level of comprehension of the Chinese court gained in Rome, and how the differences between the two court structures played a relevant role in the failure of both negotiations.

By shifting the analytical terms of the question from the doctrinal/jurisdictional to the career/bureaucratic field, and by integrating the Chinese point of view, I hope to enrich our comprehension of this encounter and clash between Rome and the Chinese empire beyond merely cultural or theological arguments.

### Rome and Beijing

To better understand the circumstances surrounding the two diplomatic-religious initiatives of Clement XI in East Asia, and how they were perceived by the Chinese counterparts, some context on the Jesuits' role at the court of Beijing, the Qing government organization, and the imperial system of international relations is needed.

As well known, the Jesuits were the founders of the first stable Catholic mission to China in early modern times. From the strategic outpost of Macao and with the financial support of the Portuguese Crown, Matteo Ricci and his companions 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, the Jesuits under Portuguese missionary patronage (*padroado*) received the new Qing 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 Directorate of Astronomy, 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. The personal relationship of the Kangxi Emperor with the Jesuits 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.<sup>4</sup>

The influence of the court missionaries was facilitated by the structure of the Chinese government itself. In the early Qing period, the Manchu monarchs further developed the traditional bipolar structure of Chinese governance, formed by the Inner Court, centering on the emperor and his household, and by the Outer Court, constituted of six ministries (Ministries of Personnel, Economy, Punishments, War, Public Works, and Rites), and of the complex bureaucratic machine in the provinces (governors-general, governors, and local magistrates at different administrative levels). Early Qing monarchs strengthened the role of the Inner Court as seat of executive power, creating informal *ad hoc* offices that were eventually formalized during the course of the eighteenth century (an example is the Grand Council).

The Jesuits were positioned between the Inner and the Outer Courts. As imperial preceptors and artists-technicians, they were directly at the service of the emperor, in a role similar, in some aspects, to that of the “bondservants,” bodyguards and officials directly attached to the imperial clan. These figures were employed in important managerial roles, especially in the Imperial Household Bureau, an institution of the Inner Court that took care of the material welfare and the security of the monarch and his extended family. Most missionaries serving at court were supervised by the Imperial Household Bureau, and this identified them as figures of the Inner Court. Only a few among them, employed in the Directorate of Astronomy, held official positions in the imperial bureaucracy, and were in fact employees of the Ministry of Rites, a paradoxical situation since that Ministry, as guarantor of Confucian

---

<sup>4</sup> On the career of Verbiest, the most successful among the few Jesuit “bureaucrats,” see Willy Vande Walle, “Ferdinand Verbiest and the Chinese Bureaucracy,” in John W. Witek ed., *Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688): Jesuit Missionary, Scientist, Engineer and Diplomat*, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994, pp. 495-515. On the Jesuits’ informal role as members of the Inner Court, see most recently the essays by Paul Rule, António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, and Eugenio Menegon in Artur K. Wardega and António Vasconcelos de Saldanha eds., *In the Light and Shadow of an Emperor: Tomás Pereira, SJ (1645-1708), the Kangxi Emperor and the Jesuit Mission in China*, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK): Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

rituality, was traditionally hostile to Catholic activities in China. Even if they had no decisional power in matters of state, owing to the personal favor granted by the emperor and to their network of connections at court, both in the Inner and Outer Courts, the Jesuits monitored the political situation and the factional struggles at court, and acted as intermediaries with Western powers, including the papacy, within the context of Sino-centric international relations that I am going to briefly illustrate below.<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese empire as a rule did not send ambassadors out of its borders, nor established embassies in other states. States considered “tributaries” in different ways by Beijing, such as Korea, Vietnam and Siam, orbited at variable political, economic and military distances from China, and sent temporary missions to the Chinese capital with regularity. These missions had both ceremonial and commercial roles, facilitating the exchange of merchandise during fairs connected to the visits. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Ming dynasty created complex bureaucratic regulations on the basis of legal and diplomatic precedents in order to manage these embassies, as well as other state or semi-state entities (including European powers) emerging along the maritime coast and the northern steppes, outside of the tributary framework of relations with East and Southeast Asia. It was precisely at this juncture, in the second half of the sixteenth century, that the first Catholic missionaries reached the Chinese coasts on Portuguese vessels and under the Crown’s protection.

The Manchu took over the Ming dynasty’s government in 1644, and their new regime inherited, but also modified, the earlier traditional system of international relations. As members of a non-Han ethnic group originating in territories outside the Ming borders, the sovereigns of the new Qing dynasty gave great importance to relations with the populations living at the northern frontier of the empire, especially the Mongols, and created a special agency for dealing with them (the *Lifan yuan* or “Court of Colonial Affairs”). The diplomatic relations with the European maritime powers were instead coordinated by the Ministry of Rites, traditionally in charge of imperial ceremonial, and since the Ming period also charged with receiving the tributary missions from Southeast Asia, which reached China via the southern

---

<sup>5</sup> The following treatment is based on Eugenio Menegon, “Cina e Occidente dagli Han ai Qing” In Mario Sabattini and Maurizio Scarpari eds., *La Cina. II. L’età imperiale dai Tre Regni ai Qing*, Torino: Einaudi, 2010, pp. 289-354.



ports. Although the Portuguese had the strategic advantage of their base in Macao, they still needed to send an embassy to Beijing in 1670, to avoid the complete ruin of their commerce during the policy of coastal evacuation of the southern Chinese coast decided by the Manchus to defeat the Ming resistance and the warlord Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga). This initiative was followed by another similar mission in 1678, and, thanks to the intermediation of the court Jesuits, eventually resulted in the legalization of commerce in Canton in 1679-80. The imperial decision taken in 1684 to open the Chinese ports to foreign vessels, regardless of previously existing tributary relations, meant the beginning of a new phase, characterized not so much by the expansion of commerce with the Europeans, then at a historical low, but rather by an exponential growth of Chinese maritime commerce and emigration towards Southeast Asia.

The papacy actively inserted itself in the Asian missionary stage in the 1680s, sending the first Vicars Apostolic with the powers of bishops to Asia. This created grave tensions with the Portuguese Crown over religious jurisdiction. Such jurisdictional quarrels, together with the theological diatribes of the Chinese Rites Controversy, eventually led to Clement XI's decision to send the first apostolic legation to the Chinese imperial court.<sup>6</sup> The period 1680-1720 was the apex of the Chinese Rites Controversy, a *querelle* over the permissibility for Chinese converts to perform ancestral rituals and the rites to Confucius. Chinese literati, members of the imperial court, and the Kangxi Emperor in person, besides the missionaries, the papacy, and several European Catholic powers, intervened in the dispute. A first period of internal discussion in China lasted between around 1680 and 1693, the year in which the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, Charles Maigrot MEP (1652-1730) issued an interdiction of the rites in his Vicariate. During this period, the Jesuits collected testimonies in Chinese on the meaning of the rites, and some prominent converts supplied philological explanations on Chinese rituality supporting the Jesuit position. Between 1693 and 1700, the two parties produced and published in Europe a vast body of literature. Finally, this acrimonious debate reached the Kangxi Emperor in person in 1700, when the court Jesuits appealed to the monarch, asking

---

<sup>6</sup> The regime of Portuguese missionary patronage had so far prevented a direct contact between the papacy and the Chinese empire, even if Michele Ruggieri, the first Jesuit to enter China proper, proposed a papal embassy and an exchange of gifts between the pontiff and the Chinese monarch already in 1586, an initiative supported by his superior Alessandro Valignano, but never realized.

him to supply a definitive explanation on the “civil” value of the Chinese rites to send to European scholars and theologians. The emperor finally endorsed the Jesuit interpretation. In the meanwhile, the anti-Jesuit front orchestrated a condemnation by the Theological Faculty of the Sorbonne that same year.

In 1701 Clement XI decided to send a legate to Beijing to communicate on these contentious matters directly with the emperor, and establish papal control over all the China missionaries, concurrently undermining the Portuguese *padroado* and disciplining the internal affairs of the mission. The noble Piedmontese prelate Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710) was selected for the position and reached the Chinese capital in December 1705. Kangxi initially welcomed the legation, but changed his attitude after understanding the true charge given to Tournon, that is the condemnation of the Chinese Rites (in the meanwhile forbidden by order of the pope), and the establishment of a papal representative or a “nunciature” in Beijing. On his way back to Europe, in Nanjing, the legate issued a condemnation of the Rites, which provoked an immediate imperial reaction. The Qing government requested from all missionaries an oath of obedience to the Jesuit position, and ordered the Portuguese to detain under home arrest the legate in Macao until the return from Rome of some Jesuits Kangxi had sent to deliver his version of the facts. The missionaries who did not swear the oath were expelled from China, and the atmosphere towards Catholicism in China became increasingly hostile. Besides religious controversies, military and geo-political preoccupations spurred provincial officials in charge of maritime defense to ask the expulsion of the missionaries. Only Kangxi’s personal protection of the court Jesuits avoided such step, in spite of later papal condemnations reaching China, such as the 1715 apostolic constitution *Ex illa die*.

Clement XI, in an attempt to repair the relationship with the emperor, sent another diplomatic mission in 1720, led by Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba (1685-1741). The new legate made some ritual concessions to soothe the monarch, but without modifying the 1715 constitution. The legation was again a failure, and Rome eventually forbade the so-called “permissions” by Mezzabarba, with the 1742 bull of condemnation *Ex quo singulari*.



### “La famiglia del legato”: personnel selection

The organization of the Chinese legations was part of a general trend in the papacy of Clement XI. Pope Albani firmly believed in the spiritual and political primacy of the pontiff, and this rigid conviction, combined with his general lack in international experience, his narrow formation as an erudite member of the Roman Curia, and his uncertain political line, embroiled him in losing battles with lay authorities all over Europe and beyond. He also entertained a centralized planetary vision of evangelization, and for that reason always supported the suggestions of the ever more powerful Congregation of Propaganda Fide. The quality of the diplomatic personnel available to him to pursue this project of defense of papal prerogatives, however, was far from perfect. Stefano Andretta, biographer of Clement XI, is particularly severe on the selection of Tournon: “By choosing Tournon, not endowed at all with the flexibility and ability necessary in such an enterprise, Clement XI followed his usual centralizing criteria, trusting that an authoritative intervention of the Holy See would carry to a resolution, bringing unity in the missions according to Rome’s will, establishing direct relations between the pope and the Sino-Manchu emperors, and strengthening the Vicariates Apostolic.”<sup>7</sup>

The process of selection of the legates and of the legatine personnel (“famiglia”) that I am about to describe indeed confirms the structural and cultural limitations of the Albani papacy. Almost all members of the legations were Italian, coming from several states of the peninsula, often long-time residents of Rome with positions in the papal bureaucracy, or in Roman convents and other institutions. They were minor figures, on whom we usually have limited biographical information. We can identify four professional typologies among them:

1. ecclesiastics from the Roman Curia, with administrative and economic positions;
2. ecclesiastics from different institutes and orders, who left with missionary/

---

<sup>7</sup> Stefano Andretta, “Clemente XI, papa,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana – Treccani, vol. 26 (1982), online edition (<http://www.treccani.it/biografie/>); see also Stefano Andretta, “Clemente XI,” in *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana – Treccani, 2000, online edition ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/clemente-xi\\_\(Enciclopedia\\_dei\\_Papi\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/clemente-xi_(Enciclopedia_dei_Papi)/)).

- pastoral intents;
3. "virtuosi" (physicians, pharmacists, musicians, painters etc.) both ecclesiastics and laymen, selected to serve at the imperial court;
  4. domestics.

Some members of the legations left with the intention of remaining in Asia, especially the missionaries. Others, including perhaps even the second legate, Mezzabarba, some of the administrative personnel, and of the virtuosi, probably went to China with the intention to return one day to Italy. Thus their career outlook went beyond the China mission, and was part of a path beginning in Italy, and ending in Italy. As we will see, the Roman curial apparatus, the procurators of the religious orders recruiting missionaries, as well as the personnel of the legations and the Propaganda missionaries joining these journeys, all lacked the cultural preparation, the flexibility and the cosmopolitanism necessary to face the Chinese political system and diplomatic culture.

### **The world of the Roman Curia and the Tournon legation, 1701-05**

The first mission was organized on the basis of partial data, and with excessively optimistic expectations on the situation in Asia. The Holy See's information on China came from some Vicars Apostolic and Propaganda missionaries in the Chinese provinces. Propaganda did not have any agent in Beijing, was trying to avoid at all costs Portuguese interference, and considered the Jesuits as enemies to keep at bay rather than disinterested and useful informers. In Rome, Propaganda relied for information about China on some of its missionaries who had returned to offer assistance on the Chinese Rites matters, in particular the Frenchman Nicolas Charlot MEP, and the Italian Vicar Apostolic Giovanni Francesco Nicolai a Leonissa OFM. These returnees spent much of their energy on theological issues, but were also consulted on the advisability to send a legation, and on practical issues connected to it.<sup>8</sup> The Bishop of Beijing, the Franciscan Bernardino Della

---

<sup>8</sup> Nicolai, for example, sent a long letter to Tournon, then preparing to leave Rome, on February 3, 1702. The letter contained detailed advice to the legate on the provisions and gifts to take to China,



Chiesa (1644-1721), and his Vicar Carlo Orazi da Castorano (1673-1755), were the Propaganda sources closest to the Chinese capital, but both were rather alien to the courtly world. Della Chiesa, named bishop by the Portuguese, but in fact depending on Propaganda and thus marginalized by the *padroado* missionaries in Beijing, was unable to settle in the capital, and established his seat in a small town in the nearby province of Shandong, assisted by his confrere Castorano.<sup>9</sup> The information on the Qing court and its organization available to Rome was, in sum, secondhand.

The idea of sending an apostolic legate to China had been repeatedly suggested by Bishop Della Chiesa himself since 1693. Between August 1696 and January 1697 Propaganda proposed for the position a certain Abbot Terzi and discussed the powers to grant him, but finally decided that the times were not ripe to send him off. Terzi, however, remained the candidate for the position until 1701. In spite of limited intelligence, and even if no Propaganda missionary lived at court, the Congregation in September 1701 again advised the recently elected pope (who had ascended the throne on November 23, 1700) to launch the diplomatic initiative, apparently suggesting the name of Tournon. How his name emerged remains still obscure, although we can make some speculations, given the professional background of the new candidate.<sup>10</sup>

Tournon was chosen from within the fiercely competitive world of the Roman Curia that pope Albani knew so well. The Curia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, due to the venial nature of many ecclesiastical positions, was composed of officials that we would not hesitate to define as “career bureaucrats,” or even courtiers. In fact, Rome was the seat of many small courts, the courts of cardinals and their “families”, although during the tenure of any given pope the papal court occupied the

---

the best navigation routes, and some personnel matters, including advice to reduce the number of missionaries traveling at once. However, the document does not mention once anything related to the court of Beijing, but only to the provinces familiar to Nicolai; see Fortunato Margiotti and Antonio Sisto Rosso, eds. *Sinica Franciscana. Relationes et epistolas primorum Fratrum Minorum Itolorum in Sinis saeculi XVII et XVIII*, Roma, 1961, vol. VI.1, pp. 262-289.

<sup>9</sup> Giuliano Bertuccioli, “Della Chiesa, Bernardino,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 36 (1988), online edition; introduction to Anastasius van den Wyngaert and Georgius Mensaert, eds. *Sinica Franciscana. Relationes et Epistolas Illmi. D. Fr. Bernardini Della Chiesa*, vol. V, Roma, 1954.

<sup>10</sup> Some information on the discussions held at Propaganda between 1693-1701 about the legation can be found in Anastasius Van den Wyngaert, “Mgr. B. Della Chiesa, Evêque de Pékin et Mgr. C. Th. Maillard De Tournon, Patriarche d’Antioche,” *Antonianum* 22 (1947), pp. 65-91, especially pp. 70-72.

central position.<sup>11</sup> The elective nature of the papacy, the fact that popes were usually selected in their old age, and the competitive nature of the electoral system, created an environment ripe for political intrigue at the highest levels of the hierarchy, and for stressful career competition at the lower levels. This was compounded, until the end of the seventeenth century, but even later, by the phenomenon of nepotism, with the rise and fall of the family favorites of each pope. The presence in Rome of representatives of all main Catholic powers, moreover, further exacerbated the nature of the competition, offering occasions for corruption and factionalism in a city that was called “il teatro del mondo” for its international atmosphere, in spite of its rather modest size.

The Roman Curia, that is the bureaucratic administration of the papacy, was a composite body, including members who were pure bureaucrats, especially in legal and administrative positions; and the service personnel of the pope, cardinals, prelates and various ambassadors (chamberlains or *maestri di camera*, butlers, and servants of all kinds), whom we could more properly call “courtiers.” But the division was not extremely clear, and the two worlds overlapped. In sum, there was a stable Curia, made of career officials organized by the seventeenth century in several central judiciary and administrative bodies, such as the various Segnatura and the Rota, and in over 30 so-called ‘Congregations’; and a more fluid Curia, which was formed and undone at the election of each new pope, and was formed of his clients, starting with the “Cardinal Nepote.” By the late seventeenth century, the stable Curia counted around 600 main administrators of different ranks in so-called venial posts (that is purchased). These were for the most part legal jobs in canon or civil law. The positions in papal Congregations were not ‘venial’, but staffed by papal decision with members of the Curia and other available personnel, and counted by the late seventeenth century over 900 members, with overlaps with the ‘venial’ careers. This structure guaranteed a relatively high degree of continuity and

---

<sup>11</sup> An extensive literature explores the organization of the papal bureaucracy and the social and cultural life of the papal court in the early modern period, with several impressive prosopographic studies by German, Anglo-Saxon and Italian scholars, as well as online resources. The multi-author volume *Roma: la città del papa*, in the series *Storia d'Italia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, offers excellent summaries of the scholarship up to that date. My summary of the organization of the Curia and papal court is based on Wolfgang Reinhard, “Le carriere papali e cardinalizie. Contributo alla storia sociale del papato,” in *Roma: la città del papa*, pp. 263-292.





stability in spite of changes in popes, and the turn-over at the top was rather limited. Honorific positions were instead only venial, and were bestowed on another 3,200 individuals, including scions of the Roman nobility. Many members of the Curia originated from a small number of families, true dynasties of bureaucrats. In terms of provenance, 30% of the officials were Romans; 50% were subjects of the Pontifical States; and in total, 77% of all officials were from Italian states.

It would be inappropriate, however, to separate religious and professional roles within the Curia, as they were usually intertwined, not unlike in the papal bureaucracy of our days. It is in this world of fierce competition among middle-level prelates and officials that we find the first man chosen to become legate in China, Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon. At the time, Tournon had no particular experience in government or in nunciatures abroad, but was an erudite member of the curia, employed in legal and administrative functions, and, during the late 1680s and 1690s, a supporter of the party of the “zealot cardinals” (“cardinali zelanti”). He appears to have been particularly close to Cardinals Leandro Colloredo, Baldassare Benci, the elderly Alessandro Caprara, and, by association, the future pope Albani.<sup>12</sup> Born in 1668 in Turin, in the Dukedom of Savoy, in the noble family of the Marquises de Tournon, Carlo Tommaso was first educated by private tutors; later on, while his older brother started a military career, he was chosen for the ecclesiastical career, as customary for cadets of noble families. He received a degree in *utroque iure* at the University of Nice, and then moved to Rome. There he took all the obligatory steps to create useful connections in the Curia, such as, for example, to become a

<sup>12</sup> This group of cardinals received such moniker due to their rigid support of papal supremacy against the attacks of the Catholic powers. Albani was elected with their support. On the cardinals' parties, see e.g., Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia eds., *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492-1700*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. To trace some of Tournon's connections to the “zelanti,” see for example Tournon's request for an ecclesiastical benefice in Vercelli, forwarded to Clement XI Albani and advocated by Colloredo, probably around 1700-1701, “Letter by Charles de Tournon Malliaro to His Holiness Our Lord,” Albani Fund, Oliveriana Library, Pesaro, online call number 1-27-226; and mention of Caprara as Tournon's counselor in a letter by Giovanni Ercole Gromo, Biella, August 26, 1701, quoted in Giorgio Dell'Oro, “Oh quanti mostri si trovano in questo nuovo Mondo venuti d'Europa! Vita e vicissitudini di un ecclesiastico piemontese tra Roma e Cina: Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710),” *Annali di storia moderna e contemporanea* IV.4 (1998), p. 323. Cf. also Franca Petrucci, “Colloredo, Leandro,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 27 (1982) online edition, and Giancarlo Angelozzi, “Caprara, Alessandro,” in *ibid.*, vol. 19 (1976), online edition.

member of the Accademia de Concilij of the “Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide.” This was a learned ecclesiastical society, which, once publicly praised by Innocent XI Odescalchi (papacy 1676-89), became crowded with “all kinds of people, as they know that Our Lord [the pope] has it in great esteem.”<sup>13</sup> Tournon was briefly back in Turin in 1688, where he obtained the title of “maestro teologo,” but already in late 1689 he abandoned a teaching post in Piedmont, and returned to Rome to become auditor (i.e. administrative secretary) of the future “zealot” Cardinal Baldassare Benci. Benci was then Prefect of the Cubiculi of His Holiness, and later became Assistant at the Pontifical Throne. This started Tournon’s curial career: he also obtained an official post in the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, and cumulated the titles of Honorary Chamberlain (*cameriere d’onore*) and Prefect of Christian Doctrine. He also continued to participate in the cultural life of the city, becoming in 1690 one of the founders of the “Accademia dell’Arcadia,” a literary group that would become culturally pervasive in eighteenth-century Italy. To join such initiatives was a way for ambitious young members of the Curia to meet cultural and political patrons, such as Queen Christina of Sweden, who had dominated Roman culture between 1668 and 1689 after her conversion to Catholicism and transfer to Rome, or the Venetian cardinals Antonio and Pietro Ottoboni, organizers of a brilliant literary group, and powerful political figure in the pontifical capital.

But Tournon’s daily life was rather modest, in spite of all these honorifics and initiatives. To save on rent, in 1692 he decided to share an apartment with Giovanni Ercole Gromo di Terlengo, another ecclesiastic from a noble Savoyard family. The place, furnished with furniture rented from the “Jew Benjamin of Modena,” besides their rooms included a kitchen, a cellar, and small quarters for servants. Moreover, his job in the employ of Cenci was heavy, and was not showing promise to develop in a good career. As his friend Giovanni Ercole put it “I told you that the job of auditor [under Cenci] was not for you, and that by taking such task you would die before your time to satisfy your sense of duty [“debito della coscienza”] and to assuage your ambition to have a reputation [“stimolo della reputazione”].”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps moved by these words and by his plight, Tournon left Rome for Turin, and spent a year and a half there in 1694-95, living with his family, hoping that Duke Vittorio Amedeo II

<sup>13</sup> See Maria Pia Donato, *Accademie romane. Una storia sociale, 1671-1824*, Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Dell’Oro, “Oh quanti mostri...,” p. 321.



would ask the pope to name him Bishop of Vercelli. But the relations between Turin and Rome were tense, as the Duke was embarking on a series of policies to curtail church powers and financial income in his state. When the Duke received news that Tournon had been promised in Rome benefices attached to the Abbey of Susa in Piedmont, he sent a threatening note to his father the Marquis, making sure that the offer would not be accepted, as the Abbey's income was now part of the state patrimony. These tiffs with the Duke not only ruined any chance for Tournon to get the positions and benefices in Savoy he was hoping for, but also alarmed him, and hardened his pro-papal ideological stance.<sup>15</sup>

Besides his "ambition to have a reputation," i.e. his attempt to advance his career and to add luster to his noble family, Tournon was also inspired, no doubt, by his "sense of duty," i.e. more idealistic and "political" motivations. Career concerns in fact were never separate from political and religious concerns. As an adherent of the zealot cardinals' party, Tournon had developed a very strong aversion to the reforms against papal prerogatives by the states in France, Savoy and elsewhere. In a letter to Tournon by his companion Gromo, we find a clear statement of the position the two shared: "The authority of the Pontiff is like a mathematical point, it cannot be challenged, and to deny one part of it is to deny it completely."<sup>16</sup> Both were convinced that state attacks on church jurisdiction would undermine the stability of the social and spiritual order of Christendom. The accommodating policies of Innocent XII towards the pretenses of Savoy on matters of ecclesiastical benefices profoundly disappointed Tournon, besides hurting his prospects for advancement in his native land.

Tournon had no choice but return to his old job in Rome, where he continued to be active among the residents of the "nazione sabauda" (Savoyard nationality), both ecclesiastical and lay. He would receive requests for recommendations from compatriots, and would forward them to aristocratic patrons back home. When Innocent XII fell ill in 1700, Tournon, still in the employ of Cardinal Cenci, then Assistant at the Pontifical Throne, became particularly busy with administrative tasks. The pope passed away in late September 1700, and Giovanni Francesco Albani was elected as Clement XI with the support of the "zealot cardinals" in November

<sup>15</sup> Dell'Oro, "Oh quanti mostri..." p. 316.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

1700. Tournon seems to have been uncertain about his career in the first year of the new pontificate, and again hoped to leave Rome and join the delegation of the new nuntius to Savoy. His trusted friend Gromo dissuaded him from taking such a step: “in a new pontificate, probably a long one, to displease the pope by abandoning the Holy See’s interests in such crucial juncture could be *prejudicial to the advancement that you can reasonably expect in the Court of Rome.*”<sup>17</sup>

The possibility to move to Savoy eventually did not materialize. However, a new, unexpected career opportunity came to Tournon from the highest possible authority. At the end of September 1701, Clement XI himself called Tournon to his palace for a private meeting, and asked him to become his legate to China. More research is needed to understand how the pope came to this decision, but it is not unlikely that one of the “*cardinali zelanti*”, perhaps the immediate superior of Tournon, Baldassarre Cenci, or Leandro Colloredo (himself a member of Propaganda’s cardinal commissions), Alessandro Caprara, or some other curial linked to those circles, might have suggested his name to Propaganda and the pope. He was given only three days to decide. He spent those days in meditation and prayer in the house of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians or Lazarists) at Montecitorio, where he had attended the famous “Tuesdays’ spiritual conferences” organized for the devout clergy of the capital. He was assailed by doubts and fears, given the dangers of the journey, and his own weak physical constitution.<sup>18</sup> He finally accepted this challenge out of spiritual zeal and of his faithfulness to the politico-religious vision pursued by Clement XI. To accept the charge, moreover, was also a way to impart a decisive turn to his stagnant career, and to bring notoriety and luster to his family, as he himself mentioned in a letter to his father: “in a hundred years of life I would have not succeeded in bringing as much luster to our House as this high ministry that I unworthily am charged with will do, ... His Holiness made known his decision in a full Consistory, a decision that elicited the applause of the entire College [of Cardinals] and of the entire city of Rome.”<sup>19</sup> His sense of aristocratic pride is evident here.

<sup>17</sup> Dell’Oro, “Oh quanti mostri...,” p. 323. Italics are mine.

<sup>18</sup> Tournon, letter to his father, December 6, 1701, Biblioteca Casanatense (BC), Roma, ms. 1626, f. 3v.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., f. 4v.



Nevertheless, the fact that he was physically weak, and that he had no experience in diplomacy or governance, should have weighed against his selection. Tournon might well have been chosen because no other better candidate was available. Important members of the pontifical diplomacy, often belonging to powerful families of the Italian peninsula, would have not accepted to undertake such a dangerous mission in an extra-European context, where one's merits would have been less useful to obtain immediate rewards at the papal court. This astonishing choice eventually elicited some criticisms, directed both at Tournon and the pope, from his old friend Gromo. Tournon's religious fervor - Gromo suggested - would have been spent equally well in Piedmont, while avoiding "such a long, difficult, and dangerous pilgrimage, out of your yearning to employ your skills at the service of the Holy See." Gromo also expressed scandalized surprise at the lack of prudence shown by the pope in beginning that enterprise during the initial conflicts of the War of Spanish Succession.<sup>20</sup>

The task of assembling the rest of the legation fell to Propaganda Fide, with the assistance of Abbot Giovanni Iacopo Fatinelli (1653-1736), named as Tournon's procurator in Rome.<sup>21</sup> The selection of the members of the legation has so far remained unexplored, and many details are still buried in the archives. Tournon accepted the dignity at the end of September 1701. Between October and December 1701, perhaps even earlier, the specific membership of the legation was being planned out, since Tournon wrote on December 6: "Twelve to fourteen priests will also travel together with the Apostolic Visitor to renew those missions so blessed by God."<sup>22</sup> Documentation in the Propaganda Fide archives offers some clues. On

<sup>20</sup> Dell'Oro, "Oh quanti mostri..." pp. 327-328. In 1707, Alvaro de Benavente, Vicar Apostolic of Jiangxi, in a letter to the King of Spain commented on Tournon's lack of experience: "... the Patriarch is not yet 40, and has never been in positions of [ecclesiastical] governance before his election; moreover, he has no experience of things Chinese or any other business"; see António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *De Kangxi para o Papa, pela via de Portugal: Memória e documentos relativos à intervenção de Portugal e da Companhia de Jesus na questão dos Ritos Chineses e nas relações entre o Imperador Kangxi e a Santa Sé*, 2002, Macau: Instituto Português de Oriente, vol. 2, doc. 55, p. 282; cf. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Cecilia Asso, "Fatinelli, Giovanni Iacopo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 45 (1995), online edition.

<sup>22</sup> See *Memorie storiche dell'eminentissimo Monsignor Cardinale di Tournon esposte con monumenti rari ed autentici non più dati alla luce*, Venezia: appresso Giuseppe Bettinelli, 1761, vol. 1, p. 4.

December 30, 1701, the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Carlo Barberini, requested the cardinals of the Special Congregation for the East Indies and China (Carpineto, Spada, Colloredo, Sacripante, Paolucci and Imperiali) to set the annual provision for the legate, the budget for the gifts to the emperor, for travel expenses, and for liturgical vestments and implements. The expenses of the legation, according to later accounting, eventually amounted to 20,474 Roman scudi,<sup>23</sup> and were partly covered by the pope himself, as Tournon mentions in a letter to his family: “regarding the expenses, [Our Lord] assured that he will cover them with largesse...” Before the actual departure in June 1702, Tournon had already spent or transferred to agents a total of 10,000 Roman scudi.<sup>24</sup>

On December 31, 1701, the Congregation also drafted a list of 17 ecclesiastical candidates both from the secular clergy and from orders and congregations (a Jesuit, a Lazarist, and two Franciscans).<sup>25</sup> Among them, six would finally travel with the legate as follows:

---

<sup>23</sup> APF, *Scritture Originali della Congregazione Particolare delle Indie Orientali e Cina* (= SOCP), vol. 21 (1701-1703), ff. 277r-v (Dec. 30, 1701); APF, SOCP, vol. 42 (1740-41), f. 8r (doc. dated 1739).

<sup>24</sup> On the pope's financial role, see Tournon's letter to his father, December 6, 1701, BC, ms. 1626, f. 3r; the ledger of expenses is dated June 23, 1702, in *ibid.*, f. 11r, “Nota tutta di penna del Legato di 10 mila scudi spesi in Roma del giugno 1702 per cose e persone da portare alla Cina.”

<sup>25</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 21 (1701-1703), f. 279r, “Soggetti deputati per le missioni della Cina dalla Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide,” 30 dicembre 1701 (those with numbers, as noted in the original document, were the selected ones, at least for the first screening): “Abb. Ignazio Giampe' da Camerino (1); Gio. Batta Sidotti palermitano (4); Francesco Giacinto Blandra di S. Giorgio Torinese; Giuseppe Cordero del Mondovì (2); Gio. Batta Sarti Cremonese; Ilarione Sala Romano; Ferdinando Frosio Bavarese; Andrea Candela messinese (5); Gio. Batta de May da Nizza di Provenza; Sabino Mariani da Bari; P. Gio. Martino Gurgo dell'Oratorio di Fano; P. Abb. Filippo Maria Resta Can. Reg. Lateranense (3). Impedito; P. Domenico Antonio Bigi da Forli della Congr. della Missione. Impedito; P. Teodorico Pedrini da Fermo della Congr. della Missione; Frat. Ermanno Widemeyer della Congr. della Missione; P. Gio Batta da Seravalle Missionari Osservanti Riformati (6); P. Sebastiano da Furia Missionari Osservanti Riformati (7).” The two Franciscans were recommended by their procurator in response to an appeal from Bishop Bernardino Della Chiesa. Some of the names in this list eventually travelled separately, such as Pedrini and Sala, reaching China at different times.



### Ecclesiastics

| Name                    | Age | Origins                    | Education and employment  |
|-------------------------|-----|----------------------------|---|
| Giovan Battista Sidotti | 34  | Palermo (Sicily)           | Secular priest  |
| Sabino Mariani          | 40  | Cellamare (Bari - Puglia)  | Curia official; priest  |
| Andrea Candela          | 41  | Messina (Sicily)           | Curia official (secretary); priest/chaplain                         |
| Francesco Sangiorgio    | 38  | Torino (Piedmont-Savoy)    | Nobleman; priest; former soldier                                    |
| Giuseppe Cordero        | 36  | Mondovì (Piedmont - Savoy) | Nobleman; abbot; not yet ordained as priest; in Rome for many years |
| Giovan Battista De Maij | 27  | Nizza (Provence - Savoy)   | Priest; skilled in drawing maps of cities and fortresses            |

In addition, four lay members joined the train as well, with service tasks:

### Laymen

| Name              | Age | Origins            | Education and employment |
|-------------------|-----|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Giovanni Borghese | ?   | Mondovì (Piedmont) | Physician                |
| Marcello Angelita | ?   | ?                  | Secretary                |
| Pietro Sigotti    | ?   | ?                  | Surgeon                  |
| Louis Eloins      | ?   | ?                  | Cook                     |

We do not have homogenous information on all the members, but some examples will suffice to give a sense of the personal and institutional motivations contributing to the formation of the legation's personnel.

**Andrea Candela** (ca. 1660-?), from Messina, had been secretarial officer of the Archbishop of Palermo, later named to the see of Seville, Jaime de Palafox y Cardona (1642-1701). In that position Candela had traveled to Spain, working as secretary and interpreter of the prelate's agents, but in 1701 he was probably



seeking employment, since Palafox had recently died. To his letter of application to Propaganda, Candela attached some samples of official correspondence drafted in Italian, Latin, and Spanish, showing command of different documentary styles. As ideal motivation for joining the enterprise, Candela mentioned his frequentations of the spiritual conferences of the Congregation of the Mission at Montecitorio, a common denominator to several members of the legation. Moreover, he argued a bit immodestly that, given his linguistic skills, “[I] will also be sufficiently prepared in learning any other language [besides Latin and Spanish].”<sup>26</sup> Tournon’s procurator Fatinelli recommended him for an interview with the Rector of the Collegio Urbano, who had been deputized to conduct a first screening before presenting candidates to Propaganda’s Secretary. A note from the procurator praised Candela’s docility (“he is above all docile, and can accommodate himself to circumstances as wished”) and work ethics (“he does not seem Sicilian”). The sense of obedience and the alacrity Candela demonstrated, virtues that Fatinelli deemed precious in serving faithfully the legate as secretary and eventually chaplain, were accompanied by a certain naiveté and oblivion to the difficulties ahead, as Fatinelli himself seemed to hint in his note: “I feel like I am taking a lamb to be sacrificed when I introduce such a man for China.”<sup>27</sup>

**Sabino Mariani** (1665-1721), native of Cellamare near Bari (Puglia), had lived since his childhood in Rome, and had become a pro bono employee (perhaps a sort of apprentice) in the Apostolic Dataria, in an attempt to advance within the papal bureaucracy, supporting himself with income from his family’s landed estates in Puglia. His decision to join the legation was probably dictated both by his attendance of the spiritual conferences at Montecitorio, and by his desire to accelerate his career’s progress. The massive correspondence he produced while at Tournon’s service in Asia reveals that he was a shrewd businessman, administering through his letters while in China, Macao and India, his family properties and ecclesiastical benefices in far-away Italy. Nevertheless, he never enjoyed that income, including a pension he insistently requested from Propaganda, since he died in India on his way back to Europe.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 21 (1701-1703), f. 283v.

<sup>27</sup> Note by Fatinelli, APF, SOCP, vol. 21 (1701-1703), f. 289r.

<sup>28</sup> Giacomo Di Fiore, “Mariani, Sabino,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 70 (2010),





**Giovanni Borghese** (?-1714), native of Mondovì, was recommended to Tournon by the famous professor of the Faculty of Medicine at the University La Sapienza and “Protomedico dello Stato Ecclesiastico”, Paolo Manfredi. Perhaps also known to Tournon as a member of the Savoyard nationality in Rome, Borghese joined the mission hoping to become imperial physician in Beijing, and to engage in erudite correspondence from Asia with his European counterparts. In 1704, for example, he wrote a long “letter” (rather a diary of 245 pages) to Manfredi, including “medical anatomical, botanical natural and other kinds of observations” about his journey from Rome to India, published the following year in Rome by Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, secretary of the Arcadia Academy.<sup>29</sup> In his “letter” Borghese mentions how Manfredi pushed him to join the legation “even if my friends tried to dissuade me with very many objections.”<sup>30</sup> Scientific ambition and the influence of his teacher led him eventually to join the Chinese adventure. Once in China, however, he never earned imperial favor, encountered the jealous obstruction of the court’s Jesuit physicians, was kept in captivity in Canton, and ended his life during a violent scuffle against his guards, without ever realizing his professional dream. This miserable end could not have been a more different outcome than what he had envisioned in his ambitious plan to earn glory in the East, and perhaps return to Italy as a celebrity in the academic-scientific world.

These brief biographical notations suggest how ideal motivations and personal career goals, often conditioned by critical professional junctures (loss of employment, or temporary positions), were factors conditioning the profile of the legation’s personnel.

---

online edition.

<sup>29</sup> See Gaspare De Caro, “Borghesi, Giovanni” (but should be ‘Borghese’, as he signed in his letters), in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 12 (1971), online edition; Maria Pia Donato, “Manfredi, Paolo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 68 (2007), online edition.

<sup>30</sup> Giovanni Borghesi, *Lettera scritta da Pondisceri à 10 di febbraio 1704, dal dottore Giovanni Borghesi, medico dalla missione spedita alla China dalla Santità di N.S. Papa Clemente XI*, Roma: Zenobj, 1705, p. 6.

### Learned lesson? The Mezzabarba legation, 1719-21

The Tournon legation failed completely in its objectives, irritating the Kangxi emperor and earning the legate and his train the imperial wrath. As a consequence, Tournon was detained by the Portuguese under home arrest in Macao on his way back to Europe. There he died in 1710, soon after receiving the cardinal's hat, bestowed on him since the pope believed the mission had succeeded. Borghese died violently in Canton. Mariani eventually died on his way back to Europe in Madras. Some of the legation members, such as Candela, were able to return to Rome, but had to face economic difficulties once back, rather than receive the rewards they might have expected.

In spite of this debacle, soon after Tournon's death three Propaganda missionaries obtained in 1711 imperial permission to settle in Beijing owing to their (presumed) technical and artistic skills. The Lazarist Teodorico Pedrini was invited to court for his musical knowledge; the secular priest Matteo Ripa as a painter; and the French Augustinian Guillame Bonjour-Fabre for his astronomical expertise. Although their level of competence was uneven (Ripa was a mediocre painter; and Bonjour was rather a linguist, not an astronomer, having only compiled a short treatise on the calculation of Easter days), two among them, Pedrini and Ripa, succeeded after great efforts in settling in the capital, and started sending reports to Propaganda, revealing to the Roman Court some of the behind-the-scenes happenings at the Beijing Court.<sup>31</sup>

In the meanwhile, the Kangxi Emperor sent to Rome as imperial legates some Jesuits, carrying copious documentation on the imperial opinion about the Rites, and the imperial version of the proceedings of the Tournon legation in Beijing. Kangxi suspected that the pope had not been correctly informed by his men in China and wished to bypass the legate, sending his own trusted agents directly to Rome. Two of the Jesuit imperial envoys died in a shipwreck; a third, Antonio Provana (1662-1720), reached Rome in 1709, with the intention to illustrate the emperor's position to the pope and the Curia. After delivering the Chinese notarized materials given

---

<sup>31</sup> Details on Pedrini and Ripa's activities in Beijing in the 1710s in Fabio Galeffi and Gabriele Tarsetti, "Documenti inediti di Teodorico Pedrini sulla Controversia dei Riti Cinesi," in Filippo Mignini ed., *Humanitas. Attualità di Matteo Ricci: testi, fortuna, interpretazioni*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011, pp. 215-50; Michele Fatica ed., *Matteo Ripa. Giornale (1711-1716)*, vol. 2, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1996.



to him at court, and publishing their Italian translation (*Atti Imperiali Autentici*, 1710), Provana faced total obstruction of his efforts in Rome. The opponents of the Jesuits denied him legitimacy as imperial legate, and had him isolated. Provana lived in Milan until 1717, and was able to re-embark for China only in 1719, dying during the journey. This 10-year delay in his envoy's return further stirred Kangxi's suspicions towards the pontifical diplomacy, which in the meanwhile was preparing its second legation.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, after Tournon's death, the papacy had started to consider ways to remedy the disastrous outcome of that mission. In 1715 the pope issued a new papal brief, *Ex illa die*, condemning the Rites. It was now necessary to send the brief to Beijing and obtain imperial assent for it, something that optimistic reports from the Propagandists in Beijing (especially by Pedrini), seemed to assure. Besides errors in China, mistakes had been committed also in Europe at the time of the first legation, and for the new legation the pontifical diplomacy decided to completely alter its strategy, especially towards Portugal.<sup>33</sup> Tournon had traveled through Spain and on Pontifical and French vessels, and had been instructed to maintain distance and secrecy towards the Portuguese Crown. This time, instead, the new legate was to travel via Lisbon with Portuguese assent and protection.

Here I again only limit myself to consider briefly the selection of personnel and the preparations for the new mission, rather than the complex international diplomatic scenarios. More circumspection in this preparatory phase, in comparison with the previous legation, seems to indicate a better knowledge of the Chinese reality and court, derived from the reports of the members of the Tournon legation in previous years, the Propagandists residing in Beijing, and even the Jesuits. Yet, in spite of this, the selection of personnel was once again dictated by what was available in the Roman Curia, rather than the special needs of the Chinese context.

The choice of the legate was the first step to take. Not surprisingly, the search was quite laborious. Prominent prelates preferred to avoid the Chinese minefield following Tournon's debacle. After considering and rejecting the idea of a legate of

<sup>32</sup> John Witek, "Sent to Lisbon, Paris and Rome: Jesuit Envoys of the Kangxi Emperor," in Michele Fatica and Francesco D'Arelli eds., *La missione cattolica in Cina tra i secoli XVIII-XIX: Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1999, pp. 317-340.

<sup>33</sup> As observed by Giacomo Di Fiore, "to avoid the same mistakes that had led to the failure of the Tournon Legation, good relations with Portugal became a priority since inception"; Di Fiore, *La Legazione Mezzabarba*, p. 34.

Portuguese nationality in 1715, the pope consulted several “China experts” residing in Rome about possible candidates. In 1716, for example, the names of the Bishop of Bertinoro in Romagna, Pontifical States, Giovan Battista Missiroli (1659-1734), and of the Genoese Abbot Leonardo Spinola (?-1720), brother of the Governor of Corsica, were proposed. Missiroli was selected in a consultation among the former Vicars Apostolic of China, Mgrs. Nicolai and Maigrot (the latter expelled from China by Kangxi in 1707 for his role in the Tournon legation), Tournon’s procurator Fatinelli, and Propaganda’s Secretary, Giovanni Silvio De Cavalieri, on June 16, 1716. The following day, Fatinelli hastened to contact Missiroli, who replied obediently but substantially in the negative due to his advanced age: “I am 57 years, 5 months and few days old... nevertheless I am completely ready [to obey the call]...”<sup>34</sup>

The search continued without results for at least a year. Alessandro Borgia (1682-1764), Bishop of Nocera Umbra, was proposed in 1718, and officially selected by a commission in early 1719.<sup>35</sup> Borgia had diplomatic experience earned in the nunciature of Cologne in Germany, and fame of great erudition. The pope personally met him to propose the charge on January 16, 1719. We read, however, in a report produced by Borgia himself:

His Holiness with utmost clemency ordered the Bishop of Nocera to gather full information on the Chinese and East Indian missions’ matters before taking a positive commitment over the planned expedition to those lands. The Bishop has so far made all efforts to acquire such information by reading the correspondence registers and the documents sent him by the most illustrious Mgr. Secretary of the Sacred Congregation De Propaganda Fide, as well as through meetings with informed individuals indicated by his Holiness. Anybody can easily imagine the difficulties and natural dangers in such arduous journeys and long navigations, with changes in climate and food, and plenty of other discomforts. The Bishop

<sup>34</sup> Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter ASV), *Fondo Albani* 263, ff. 311-12, Fatinelli to Bishop of Bertinoro, Rome, 17 June 1716; ASV, *Fondo Albani* 263, ff. 313-14, autograph reply by Missiroli; cf. Carte Margiotti, Archivio Generale Ordine Frati Minori, Roma (AGOFM), SM 1209-3.

<sup>35</sup> See “Vota circa destinationem et personam novi Legati Apostolici in Sinis, Romae 7 Ianuarii 1719,” in *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. VI.1, pp. 367-368, where Borgia was preferred to the Bishop of Civita Castellana and Orte, Giovanni Francesco Tenderini (1668-1739). See Giuseppe Pignatelli, “Borgia, Alessandro,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 12 (1971), online edition.



would gladly suffer all of those as long as there is moral certitude that in this way God and the Holy See would be served. However, he finds the affair that he would have to charge upon himself as already completely compromised by what happened in the past because of the conspiracy against the preceding expedition of Mgr. Tournon...<sup>36</sup>

Borgia's refusal was clearly motivated by practical as well as political reasons: he feared for his physical survival, and he thought the mission was politically useless, if not damaging to the Holy See. The search continued. Finally, the noble prelate Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba from Pavia assented. He had no diplomatic experience, but rather experience in the papal bureaucracy and in the governance of the Pontifical States, very much like pope Albani.<sup>37</sup> From the point of view of diplomacy, he was, once again, an imperfect candidate (although he had a degree *in utroque iure*). Perhaps he was considered apt to survive the long journey and the experience at the Chinese court for his relatively young age of 35, his good health (unlike Tournon), his good record in practical governance, and his accommodating character. After several refusals, finally a feasible candidate had accepted.

Also the selection of personnel for the legation was more careful this time. Between 1719-20, Propaganda's Special Congregation for the East Indies and China screened the recommendation letters and curricula of around fifty candidates, including a) missionaries, b) members of the legatine train, and c) "virtuosi" for the court, as follows:

a. 23 missionaries

b. 2 auditors (ecclesiastical)

2 assistant secretaries

<sup>36</sup> APF, SOCP vol. 26 (1712-13), f. 199r. This document was probably written in 1719, and was inserted later in this earlier volume.

<sup>37</sup> See Giacomo Di Fiore, "Mezzabarba, Carlo Ambrogio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 74 (2010), online edition: "Cadet son, at a very young age joined the ecclesiastical career ... In 1711 he graduated from the University of Pavia *in utroque iure*. Once transferred to Rome, he entered into the good graces of Clement XI, who named him first chamberlain, then "referendario delle due Segnature," later governor of Todi (1717) and of the Sabina (1718)."

- 1 chaplain
- 1 “gentilhuomo” (gentleman)
- 4 physicians and surgeons (two from the Hospital of S. Spirito in Sassia; one from the town of Subiaco; one from Turin)
- c. 2 painters
- 1 sculptor
- 1 organ maker
- 2 jewelers
- 12 musicians (among them some violin and flute players, and singers)

Some of those who finally left for China can be found among the fifty names of the initial selection (indicated by an asterisk\* in the list below), but others were added later, probably recommended separately by the procurators of the religious orders in Rome:

#### **Ecclesiastics in the legatine train or “family”**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| *Bernardino Campi    | Secular priest, auditor                                |
| Benedetto Roveda     | Secular priest   |
| Sostegno Maria Viani | Servite (Servants of Mary, OSM), Secretary- chancellor |
| Gian Domenico Fabri  | Servite  |

#### **Missionaries for the Chinese provinces**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| *Ferdinando Fioravanti                           | Secular priest   |
| *Giuseppe Vittoni                                | Secular priest   |
| *Rinaldo di S. Giuseppe (= Rinaldo Romei)        | Discalced Carmelite (OCD)                              |
| *Volfango della Natività (= Wolfgang Thumsecher) | Discalced Carmelite                                    |
| Simone Soffietti                                 | Clerics Regular Minor (Caracciolini or Adorno Fathers) |
| Arcangelo Miralta                                | Clerics Regular Minor                                  |
| Salvatore Rasini                                 | Barnabite (Clerics Regular of Saint Paul)              |
| Alessandro Alessandri                            | Barnabite  |
| Sigismondo Calchi                                | Barnabite  |



**“Virtuosi”**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Domenico Volta                           | Secular priest, physician  |
| Angelo di Borgo S. Siro                  | Franciscan, clockmaker   |
| Niccolò Tomacelli                        | Clerics Regular Minor, illuminator   |
| Cassio di S. Luigi (= Cassio Brandolisi) | Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools (S.P. - Scolopi Fathers), mathematician |
| *Filippo Telli                           | Layman, musician   |
| *Giorgio Sippel (Scipel)                 | Layman, sculptor   |
| *Dionisio Gagliardi                      | Layman, surgeon  |
| *Antonio Maldura                         | Layman, pharmacist   |
| *Michele Arailza                         | Layman, painter  |

The letters of recommendation reveal the support networks behind the candidates. A good example of “petty patronage” is offered by the figure of the former China Vicar Apostolic Mgr. Nicolai. His family resided in Rome, and Nicolai in fact lived in his elderly father’s house, administering the economic affairs of his relatives and also fending off some of their lawsuits. He became very active in proposing names of ecclesiastics and lay people for the legation, including a jeweler he personally knew, a certain Marc’Antonio Golia, who lived at the arch of the Madonna near the Chiesa Nuova, a location still existing in Rome. The surgeon Gagliardi, employed at the Hospital of S. Spirito in Sassia (still a hospital today), instead, applied for the mission twice with the support of the Governor of Rome.<sup>38</sup>

The letters of application, more than those of recommendation, reveal sometimes the naiveté of the candidates. These individuals did not fully realize the cultural and geographical distance separating Europe from China. The Venetian painter Arailza, for example, asked to join “the planned expedition to China as a painter of sacred images, so that the budding Christian communities of those lands can celebrate the divine service with more fervor,” without understanding that his probable role at the Chinese court would have been to paint profane subjects.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), f. 196r (Golia) and 917r-200r (Gagliardi). A letter by Nicolai recommending other members of the legation is published in Margiotti and Rosso, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. VI.1, pp. 369-70.

<sup>39</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), f. 206r. Arailza was a disciple of the Roman painter Benedetto

The procurators of the religious orders could also directly propose candidates. At times, as observed by Giacomo Di Fiore, the procurators might have even suggested candidates whom they wanted to get rid of.<sup>40</sup> But, more honestly, they would also advise against an unsuitable candidate's departure. The procurator of the Servites in Florence, Pio Rossi, for example, wrote in July 1719 to Propaganda to discourage the acceptance of his confrere Giuseppe Maria Salveri:

... I can tell you in all frankness that he is no master or theologian. True, he is discerning and can listen to confessions, as he is well versed in cases of conscience. But I do not deem him endowed with the knowledge required to be a missionary and to be counted among those Fathers theologians already destined to China together with the Apostolic Legate ... in all confidence, this priest is by nature fickle and restless; querulous, he is never content, today is in a certain mood, tomorrow in another, he gladly quarrels and wants that his opinions be the most accepted. Thus Your Excellency can see that he would risk creating conflicts with those learned priests. As to the rest, he is morally upright, and Your Excellency may recall that he is very amusing in his conversations, and admirable in imitating people, as he was imitating Magliabechi, and Count Fede, and many others. If your Excellency does not send any news, I will not make further inquiries about his wish [to leave for China].<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes the candidates were shameless self-promoters, and reached involuntary comic accents, as in the case of Giobatta Papi da Pesaro, Reformed Observant Minor Friar, who wrote on January 10, 1719:

Thank God, I have a very strong complexion, and enjoy perfect health. I am only

---

Luti (1666-1724), on whom see Alessandro Serafini, "Luti, Benedetto," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 66 (2007), online edition.

<sup>40</sup> See Giacomo Di Fiore, "Propaganda e missioni," in Flavia Cuturi ed., *In nome di Dio: l'impresa missionaria di fronte all'alterità*, Roma, Meltemi, 2004, pp. 128-131.

<sup>41</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), ff. 180r-v & 182r. Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714) was a noted bibliophile and the librarian of the Medici Library in Florence; "Count Fede" is probably Count Giuseppe Fede (?-1777), a famous collector and antiquarian, involved in the re-discovery of Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.





47 years old. I am used to any hardship regarding travel, meals, clothing, weather, dangers in navigation, and everything else. I am used to any schoolwork, and can spend at my desk if necessary 12 or 14 hours a day. I am already well informed about those [Chinese] controversies and decrees. I am inclined to different languages. I know Latin, and I would also know French if only I had practiced it. As a rhetoric student, I studied the principles of Greek language, and I hope that God will grant me the grace to learn Chinese, even if it is very difficult for the great number of its letters. I am currently Guardian of my Convent, but to serve the Holy See, I would even abandon the Generalate of my Order; and to go to China, I would leave behind any other more sublime dignity, in order to propagate the Catholic Faith and face (if possible) the happy ultimate fate of the Most Eminent De Tournon.<sup>42</sup>

Since he did not receive any reply to his yearnings for martyrdom from Propaganda, Papi wrote again on September 1, 1719 to the Secretary of the Congregation, Pietro Luigi Carafa, enclosing a list of all his positions (among them “theologian of the Eminent Cardinal Pignatelli, uncle of Your Excellency”) and of his skills, such as “perfect reading comprehension of French, and a little Spanish.” He closed reminding Carafa that they had met “first on the road to Urbino, then in the house of Mgr. Passionei.” Elsewhere he had also let Propaganda know that he was “known to Cardinal Tanara.” Such unctuousness must have failed to impress, since Papi never left for China.<sup>43</sup>

The curricula and the recommendations give us a sense of the religious and professional networks of the time, showing that the talent available to the Holy See was limited, especially for a desperate enterprise like the legation to China. What is most striking, in my view, is the provincialism of the pool of candidates.

In spite of this, Propaganda invested heavily in the preparations for the mission.

<sup>42</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), f. 234r.

<sup>43</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), ff. 244r-v. Pietro Luigi Carafa jr. (1677-1755), nephew of Cardinal Francesco Pignatelli senior (1652-1734), was Secretary of Propaganda Fide between 1717 and 1724. Domenico Silvio Passionei (1682-1761), well known for his Jansenist leanings and later named cardinal, was at the time engaged in several missions for the pontifical diplomacy. Reference to Papi’s connection to Cardinal Sebastiano Antonio Tanara (1650-1724) is in APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), f. 160r.

The initial budget comprised 12,000 scudi for travel expenses, 2,600 for viaticum and incidentals for the individual members, 500 for domestics, and 3,000 a year for the personal stipend of the legate. The pope integrated with 1,000 scudi, later raised to 2,000, and through ecclesiastical benefices granted to Mezzabarba (who, however, was unable to cash on them before his departure). The total costs of the legation eventually amounted to 25,000 scudi, of which 21,900 were paid by Propaganda.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, great care and expense was lavished on the gifts for the emperor, following advice from the members of the previous legation and the Propagandists in Beijing: Venetian crystals, cases of chocolate prepared in Florence, precious cloths, wooden inlaid boxes, silver filigree objects, clocks, mathematical instruments, recent books with illustrations of the ancient and modern monuments of Rome, musical scores, musical instruments (miniature organs; violins, guitars; flutes; harpsichords), medicines and balms, and a musical automaton of a life-size shepherd, for a total expense of 2,255 scudi. The cost was notable, especially considering that packing and transportation to China was going to be extremely expensive.<sup>45</sup> Given that Tournon's gifts had been almost completely ruined during his prolonged journey in several tropical countries, the munificence of the Mezzabarba gifts was perhaps thought as

<sup>44</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), f. 8r; *ibid.*, vol. 42, f. 9r.

<sup>45</sup> As a term of comparison, the gifts that the popes donated to the first-borns of the European royal houses at their birth (called "fascie") amounted to 1,600-2,000 scudi. On the Mezzabarba legation's gifts, produced by the artisans of the Sacred Palace and by individual Roman professionals, see APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), ff. 149r-151r: "Nota de' regali che dovranno presentarsi in nome della Santità di Nostro Signore Papa Clemente XI all'Imperatore della Cina et altri della di lui Corte da Mons. Patriarca Mezzabarba, destinato nuovo Visitatore Apostolico in quei Regni, proveduti a tenore delle insinuazioni di quelli Missionarij, che passarono alla Cina coll'antecedente spedizione del fu Sig. card. Tournon, e sono ritornati in Roma." A copy of this "Nota," preserved in the archives of the Scolopi Fathers in Rome is published in Goffredo Cianfrocca, "Il dossier di padre Cassio Brandolisi missionario in Cina con la Legazione Apostolica del card. [sic] Mezzabarba (1720-1721)," in *Archivum Scholarum Piarum* vol. 27, no. 53 (2003), pp. 22-25. A detailed ledger of the gifts produced in Rome is contained in ASV, *Palazzo Apostolico, Computisteria* 1054, "Giustificazione del regalo fatto da Nostro Signore all'Imperatore della Cina nell'anno 1719." The cost noted there is 1,855 scudi. A document in ASV, *Fondo Albani* 263, f. 341v (1719), however, mentions the higher amount of 2,255 scudi, probably including the extra cost for a shipment of Venetian glassware; see Emily Byrne Curtis, *Glass Exchange between Europe and China, 1550-1800: Diplomatic, Mercantile and Technological Interactions*, Farnham, England & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, p. 82; a transcript of the glassware list at pp. 83-91.



a reparation of that debacle, and a way to soothe the Manchu monarch by exploiting his curiosity for Western sciences and arts to the advantage of the missions and the new legation.

### **“Diplomatic Correspondence” and Concepts of “Curia/Court” in Rome and Beijing**

The legations, as we have seen, were composed of mediocre personnel, and all Italian. Once in China after long and difficult journeys, these pontifical diplomatic missions faced the complex Chinese bureaucracy, and the ceremonials and procedures of a rather alien system of international relations. Since its inception Propaganda Fide had asserted the need to establish representatives in China, as we read in the famous 1659 “Instruction for the Vicars Apostolic of Cochinchina, Tunkin and China”:

[We should] avoid that the Chinese, concerned by the geographical distance and the difficulty to appeal to the Holy See, use as a pretext not to embrace our faith the near impossibility for the head of that faith to send to their country his orders. [You, Vicars, should] show with your example the solicitude demonstrated by the Roman Pontiff to solve this problem, even when not requested, by naming bishops endowed with very ample powers. Let them know that if God will grant that Christianity be better established in China, *the Pontiff will even send a nuntius to compensate for the distance, with no objection to expenses or difficulties*, as it already happens without problem in other countries, even when not as far away as China.<sup>46</sup>

The idealistic spirit of this Instruction, written when Propaganda had still very little experience with China, offers a stark contrast to the harsh reality of the period 1700-1720. In the same document, Propaganda also famously recommended

---

<sup>46</sup> “Istruzione per i Vicari Apostolici della Cocincina, del Tonchino e della Cina,” 1659, in Massimo Marcocchi, *Colonialismo, cristianesimo e culture extraeuropee: l'istruzione di Propaganda Fide ai vicari apostolici dell'Asia Orientale (1659)*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1980; online version. Italics are mine.

adaptation to local customs, and most of all, prudence on the part of missionaries towards political involvement in loco, a veiled criticism of the Jesuits. To send a legation, however, obliged the papal court and other courts to communicate on the political level, and palace intrigue had to be taken into account, even if the objective of the mission remained religious.

As Francis Rouleau noted in an important study on the imperial audience granted to Tournon in Beijing, the key negotiation point that the legate kept paramount in his mind was the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Qing empire, or, as Tournon put it, “a correspondence between the Curia of Rome and that of Beijing,” entrusted to a “prudent, upright and doctrinally sound person.”<sup>47</sup> Tournon cultivated grand illusions on this “correspondence,” encouraged by unfounded advice from his informers: “I can attest with certain knowledge that His Majesty, in his yearning for glory, would like all the Princes of Europe to send their Ministers [to China].” And again: “The Emperor is so eager to be known and esteemed in the entire world that he asked Mgr. Patriarch [Tournon] to beseech the Pope to suggest to all European rulers that they send envoys.”<sup>48</sup> Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Jesuit Filippo Grimaldi, for thirty years at the service of the Imperial Court, during a consultation organized by the Jesuits to prepare for the arrival of the legate in Beijing, had already indicated that neither the Dutch nor the Portuguese planned any more embassies to Kangxi after those they had already sent in preceding years because they considered them damaging to the honor of their rulers, and useless in establishing stable relations.<sup>49</sup>

A famous exchange between Tournon and Kangxi during the dramatic audience of December 31, 1705, exemplifies not only the incommensurability of the politico-diplomatic positions, but also that the institutional and personnel obstacles were a mighty impediment to a successful outcome.<sup>50</sup> Kangxi asked the legate to explain

---

<sup>47</sup> Francis Rouleau, “Maillard De Tournon, Papal Legate at the Court of Peking.” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 31 (1962), pp. 264-323 (p. 289, note 49).

<sup>48</sup> Both quotations from ASV, *Fondo Albani* 250, f. 212; cited in Rouleau, “Maillard De Tournon,” p. 294, note 58.

<sup>49</sup> Reference to this meeting, held on April 8, 1704, is found in a report by Kilian Stumpf SJ dated 20 October 1704, in *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* (ARSI), *Japonica Sinica* 168, f. 149r; cf. Rouleau, “Maillard De Tournon,” p. 294, note 58.

<sup>50</sup> The following dialogue is contained in Kilian Stumpf’s *Acta Pekinensia*; see Latin text with



the nature of the position of “nuntius” he was proposing (the Emperor had simply suggested the creation of a “superior of all missionaries” and would have chosen a Jesuit). The legate replied:

Such a minister for future intercourse must be (these were his exact words) *de confidentia Summi Pontificis*, and he will [have to] know [the practices] of the Courts of the European princes, and in particular of the Roman Curia.

Here Tournon showed his true nature as a pontifical bureaucrat, a believer in the myth of “Roma teatro del mondo,” and in the supremacy of the European diplomatic order. With his typical irony, Kangxi replied:

China has no matters of common concern with the West. For the sake of religion I put up with you - while you in turn should have no concerns beyond your minds and your doctrine. Although your group came here from different countries, you all have the same religion, and for that reason any one of the Westerners here is capable of writing and receiving papal correspondence of the kind you have been talking about. I don't know what you mean about a man in the Pope's confidence. We make no such distinctions in choosing persons in China. Some are closer to my throne, some in the middle range, some further off. But to which of these would I entrust any business if there were any lack of due loyalty? Who among you would dare to deceive the Pope? Your religion forbids you to lie; he who lies offends God.

Kangxi here demolished the idea of a permanent nuntius, and of equal relationships between courts, underlining how in China loyalty (one of the cardinal Confucian virtues, *zhong* 忠) towards the emperor was crucially important. Political loyalty towards the pope was to be expected from the pope's own officials and ambassador, even when outside of Italy. But in order to remain in China, closeness and loyalty to the Qing throne mattered most. Religious obedience to the pope was acceptable (Kangxi himself respected the spiritual role of the Dalai Lama), but only as long as this obedience did not infringe upon imperial prerogatives. The Jesuits had shown sufficient loyalty to the Qing throne to merit imperial patronage.

---

commentary in Rouleau, “Maillard De Tournon,” pp. 318-19. My English translation here.

Tournon, quite undiplomatically after this imperial pronouncement, replied by attacking precisely the loyal servants of Kangxi, the Jesuits:

The missionaries dwelling here are honest men, but they lack inside knowledge of the Papal Court. Many envoys from other countries converge in Rome - and they are experienced in negotiation, and so are to be preferred to those who are here.

Here Tournon was projecting himself as the ideal candidate for the position, as the papal plenipotentiary envoy, the expert of the Curia's in-and-outs. In fact, his diplomatic credentials in Europe were non-existent. The Chinese system, at any rate, would have never allowed the creation of a nuntiature. Kangxi closed the matter, reasserting his trust in the Jesuits at his service, and subtly hinting that the legate and his advisors had shown ignorance of the Chinese imperial system, of the Chinese conceptions of international relations, and, in the end, of Chinese language and culture *tout court*:

If the Pope would send a man of impeccable conduct and spiritual gifts as good as those Westerners here now, a man who won't interfere with others, or dominate them, he'll be received as warmly as the rest. But if we give such a man power over the others, as you requested, there will be many and various difficulties. You have seen here Westerners who have stayed forty years with us, and if they are still somewhat *lacking in knowledge of imperial affairs*, how could someone just transplanted from the West do better? I would not be able to get along with him as I do with these. We would need an interpreter, which means distrust and awkwardness. Such a man would never be free from error, and if he were appointed the leader of all he would have to carry any blame earned by the others and pay the penalties according to our usage.

This meant that any "negotiations" (if there had been any) had failed. An "extraterritorial" ambassador was out of the question. The emperor ordered the legate to leave the capital. When Tournon decided to publish the papal prohibitions in Nanjing on his way back, Kangxi asked the Portuguese authorities to put him under house arrest in Macao, until his own Jesuit envoys would return with a



papal response. Kangxi wanted that men in his confidence, in particular the Jesuit Provana invested with an official capacity, represented his point of view to the Court of Rome. When the 1715 *Ex Illa Die* reached Beijing in 1716, Kangxi, offended by the papal intransigence, and surprised by the silence that surrounded his envoys to Italy, decided that the measure was full. He announced to the world his position and ordered that all European vessels in China, and the Muscovites, bring to Europe a trilingual Latin-Manchu-Chinese document, printed in 400 copies, stating that “only after the men sent by us will return to China, we will believe the information received.” Kangxi’s suspicions were well founded: the imperial envoys to Rome had been isolated and discredited. Provana received permission to return to China after nearly eight years, but with humiliating instructions to keep silent on the most delicate ritual matters. Papal diplomacy wanted to show outward respect to the emperor, but humiliated his envoys.<sup>51</sup>

In 1720-21, Mezzabarba did not discuss at all the question of a “nuntius” in formal terms, although the legate, as reflected in Chinese documents, requested permission to reside in Beijing as superior of all missionaries:

His Holiness has commanded me as his legate to ask about His Majesty’s health, and to petition for the imperial favor. There are two matters on which I petition: the first is to obtain the permission of His Majesty, the Emperor of China, that I, *his subject, can take care of all the European missionaries in China* (臣管在中國傳教之眾西洋人). The second is to grant the Chinese Christians to observe all prohibitions contained in the constitution [*Ex illa die*], which was issued by His Holiness a few years ago.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> For general narratives and collected documents on these events, see Rosso, *Apostolic Legations to China* (an English version of the document quoted above, known as the ‘Red Manifesto’, at p. 309); and Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *De Kangxi para o Papa, pela via de Portugal*.

<sup>52</sup> Chen Yuan 陳垣 ed., *Kangxi yü Luoma shijie guanxi wenshu yingyin ben* 康熙與羅馬使節關係文書影印本 (Collection of facsimile documents on the relations between Kangxi and the Roman Legations), Beijing: Palace Museum, 1932 (reprint, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1973, pp. 1-96), document no. 13, “Diario dei Mandarini” (1720-21), passage here at p. 42. My translations from this document, here and below, are based on the original and on the renderings by Rosso, *Apostolic Legations to China*, pp. 344-45; and Thomas Carroll, “The principal available Chinese documents having a bearing on the question of the Rites Controversy,” Licentiate Thesis, Jesuit Theologate of Zikawei (Shanghai), 1943, pp. 37-38.

Here the papal diplomacy repeated the same demands that had already wrecked the former Legation. Bishop Bernardino Della Chiesa provided a dramatic testimony to the inadequacy of the second legations, when he remarked after the conclusion of the mission in 1721, that “about these newcomers in China one can say that in such crucial matter as the legation ‘they have eyes, but do not see, they have ears but do not hear.’ They certainly cannot hear neither the easier Chinese language, nor indirect and obscure sentences. They fail to see gestures and actions etc., because they do not understand.”<sup>53</sup>

The imperial reaction to the legate’s requests was immediate and angry:

We, the Emperor of China, agree to the demands of your Pope. However, there are great differences between the Constitutions issued by your Pope, and the laws and customs of China. So your religion cannot be preached in China, and it is necessary to prohibit it. The Chinese ... cannot be subjected to the prohibitions of your Pope. Those foreigners who will be allowed to remain in China may comply with the prohibitions privately. ... This is the agreement to the demands of your Pope that I concede. After receiving this mandate, you are not allowed to seek again the imperial favor and disturb me with your memorials.<sup>54</sup>

This fulminating mandate caused panic in the legation. Despite the imperial firmness, the legate managed to obtain other audiences, prostrating himself at the emperor’s feet, and softening with some “permissions” the papal prohibitions. But that did not change the final result by much. Kangxi during the audience attacked the ambiguous methods of the papal diplomacy: “all other nations in conducting affairs make use of deception and procrastination, but ... the Chinese go straight to the main point.” The emperor granted Mezzabarba the option of returning to Rome to consult with the pope and submit imperial documents with his version of events, or to reside in Beijing, waiting for the return of his other envoys. Mezzabarba, perhaps cowardly, decided to return home, promising to come back.

To understand if the Roman Curia, particularly after the lesson of Tournon’s failure, had comprehended the working of the international relations of the

---

<sup>53</sup> Reference to a letter by Della Chiesa (September 7, 1721) received by Matteo Ripa, cited in Ripa, “Fede giurata,” see Di Fiore, *La Legazione Mezzabarba*, p. 229. The biblical citation is a reference to *Book of Psalms*, Psalm 113: “oculos habent et non videbunt, aures habent et non audient.”

<sup>54</sup> Chen, *Kangxi yü Luoma*, pp. 43-44.





Chinese Empire and the Beijing Court, and how this knowledge was transmitted to the departing legates, and used in China, will require more research. Besides an assessment of the preparations of the China legates, as I endeavored to do here, a close examination of the main imperial audiences, and of the role of European and Chinese actors at the Qing court in both Western and Chinese sources, would supply many answers.<sup>55</sup>

If we are to judge from the report that one of the candidates for the second legatine position, Alessandro Borgia, wrote in 1717, we should say that these lessons were not learned. After reading all the documentation about the first legation provided by Propaganda Fide on papal order, and consulting with individuals in Rome informed of the matter, Borgia concluded:

... it would first seem necessary, through the missionaries in Beijing, or those who have now been dispatched thither, to inform the Emperor that His Holiness is ready to send him a new, splendid, and honorable legation, but that the Common Law of the Nations, which no doubt has to be known to a Prince lover of justice, adorned with every moral virtue as he is, does not allow to employ the same authority which is used with one's subjects with the legates of other Princes and with their Ministers. [Moreover, it would be necessary to ask] ... that his Majesty deign to promise to treat the new legate, and all those who come with him, with the respect that the King of Persia and the monarchs of other gentile potentates of Asia show to the ambassadors of European Princes.<sup>56</sup>

There could be no clearer enunciation of the European idea of ambassador/nuntius, and a more obvious lack of understanding of the parallel and different system of international relations of the Chinese empire. At the same time, the same respect was hypocritically denied to the Emperor of China: his envoy Provana, as Borgia stated in the same document, could not be recognized as an official envoy since "he came without written credentials" (f. 201r), a ridiculously formal attitude given the amount of notarized imperial documentation brought by the Jesuit to Rome. Here Provana was treated as a subject of the pontiff, doubly bound to obey

---

<sup>55</sup> A team of international scholars, coordinated by the Macau Ricci Institute, is working to publish and analyze the *Acta Pekinensia*, reflecting the daily proceedings of the Tournon legation at the Qing court.

<sup>56</sup> APF, SOCP, vol. 29 (1718-20), ff. 201v-202r.

his Jesuit superiors and the pope, but not as the official envoy of his *de facto* secular ruler.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to show how the substantial failure of the legations, derived not only from insoluble problems of religious and political jurisdiction between Rome and Beijing, but also from a clash between different “curial” cultures (Roman and Chinese), and from divergence in the career trajectories of each court.<sup>57</sup>

The 1704-05 Tournon legation was formed with purely “curial” criteria, and with some naiveté, if not arrogance, in the selection of its staff, absolutely unprepared for this type of diplomatic mission and the Chinese cultural context. The 1720-21 Mezzabarba legation, given the disaster of the previous one, was formed with better intelligence from China, with the advice by “experts” returned from China and living in Rome, and with greater care in selecting the personnel, starting from the legate (who accepted after the renunciation of at least two other prelates).

Besides personnel issues, differences between the two court cultures suggest broader “structural” reasons for the failure of the whole negotiation. In short, the intelligence on the Chinese court in Rome around 1700 was very limited, as Propaganda did not have its own informants living in Beijing and employed at court. The situation changed in terms of intelligence with the second legation: two Propagandists (Ripa and Pedrini) resident at the court since 1711 sent suggestions to Rome on the preparation of the legation and the imperial system, acting as interpreters and intermediaries, before and during Mezzabarba’s visit. At the same time, a Jesuit arrived in Rome as Emperor Kangxi’s personal envoy, bringing official documents and messages from the monarch. The reaction towards this imperial emissary was negative in Rome: he was isolated and humiliated, while anti-Jesuit prelates who had returned to Rome from China (including the former Vicars Apostolic Nicolai and Maigrot) continued to have an active part in informing the

---

<sup>57</sup> Recent books revisiting the history of early modern European diplomacy in cultural terms are, e.g., Stefano Andretta et al. eds., *Paroles de négociateurs. L’entretien dans la pratique diplomatique de la fin du Moyen Âge à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Rome: École française de Rome, 2010; Renzo Sabbatini and Paola Volpini eds., *Sulla diplomazia in età moderna. Politica, economia, religione*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011.



Holy See and Propaganda on Chinese matters. Despite this surplus of information, institutional rigidity and political vetoes impeded any effort towards a mutually agreed solution.

The ultimate fate of the two legates shows how their missions were part of an all-Roman ecclesiastical career parable, which in the case of Tournon resulted in his “martyrdom” on the altar of diplomacy and international politics, but also, thanks to the slowness with which news traveled, with the realization of his curial dreams, his appointment as Cardinal of Santa Sabina.

Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba might have been derided for his weakness in allowing the “permissions” in China and for prostrating himself in front of the imperial throne. In fact, more than Tournon, Mezzabarba understood he was facing a very alien power system, whose rules had to be respected regardless of what was erroneously considered “the common law of nations.” A vast and militarily formidable empire like Qing China was not intimidated by the Europeans. This balance of power in the early modern period, less asymmetrical than in the modern age, allowed for the co-existence of the parallel Chinese international system.

The life story of the second legate confirms that the legations were, after all, a Roman affair, closely linked to internal ecclesiastical career dynamics. Despite his failure as a legate, Mezzabarba was able to return to Rome, carrying back the coffin of his predecessor who had died in Macao. He received from Innocent XIII as reward for his efforts the bishopric of Lodi and the revenues of the Abbey of Santo Stefano al Corno near Lodi. With those revenues, Mezzabarba rebuilt Lodi’s episcopal palace, and commissioned the construction of a chapel next to his family’s mansion in Pavia. He also enjoyed life at last. According to the testimony of the contemporary Lodi priest Anselmo Robba, Mezzabarba spent a good portion of the fifteen years of his episcopate away from Lodi, visiting relatives and vacationing. Robba also accused him of being an inveterate gambler, and of spending too much time in social conversations, accompanied by a “court worthy of a cardinal.” If Tournon, had died in that “hovel of Macao” after a long illness, Mezzabarba met a relatively premature death at the age of 56, but without experiencing the heartbreak and physical pain of Tournon. He suffered a heart attack the evening of December 7, 1741, while he was touring for pleasure the center of Lodi in his carriage.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> See “Le memorie del fu monsignore Bartolomeo Menati,” Lodi, Biblioteca Comunale Laudense, Mss., XXIV.A.23; partly summarized in Di Fiore, “Mezzabarba, Carlo Ambrogio,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 74 (2010), online edition.