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Jesuits on Board
A Reasoned Bibliography on the Early Modern Jesuit Trans-Oceanic Sailing Experiences

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *State of Research*

As is well known, over the last thirty years scholarly research on the Jesuit role in the shaping of the early modern global world has been enormously successful. The bibliography on this vast topic has become a *Mare Magnum* in which sometimes it is not easy to orient. The presence of the Society of Jesus in various parts of the world following the commercial, territorial and political expansion of the Iberian monarchies of Portugal and Castile first, and later of the French one, has been approached from the most varied perspectives. In this regard, the point of view of the governing centres of imperial and missionary policies (Lisbon, Madrid, Rome, Paris) has been studied. The same thing happened with the point of view of the peripheries as autonomous decision-making and/or pressure centres (Goa, Macau, Manila, Lima, Mexico City) with respect to European capitals. In addition to these approaches, the great protagonists of the Jesuit missions, Matteo Ricci, Francis Xavier, Alonso Sanchez, Alessandro Valignano, just to name a few among the most important, have also been deeply studied (Po-Chia Hsia, 2010). Other studied aspects of the missionary activities of the Jesuits concern the intellectual and spiritual education of the Fathers before leaving for and after their arrival to the missions, and the foundation of new colleges within the missionary contexts. Nor have been neglected in this list of topics the interactions between the Society and the complex reality of the Catholic Reformation, both in Europe and in other continents. Important researches have been made about the Jesuit entanglements with the European monarchies, as also about the political and intellectual interaction with the ancient states and empires that the Society of Jesus found upon its arrival in Asia. Recently, one theme that has aroused great interest is that of the *Indipetae* letters, with which the aspiring missionaries applied to leave for the Indies. These studies have opened important insights into the history of emotions and psychology.

As we can grasp from these few lines, almost every aspect of the preparation, establishment, and execution of Jesuit missions in the four corners of the globe has been probed. Nonetheless, there is one aspect of the Jesuit role in the shaping of the early modern global world that struggles to find an independent role as an object of study. This aspect is the overall experience of the Jesuits on board ships that would take them to their destinations. Despite the existence of some important contributions (Plattner, 1952; Brockey, 2001, 2002, 2007; Tempère: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014) this moment of the Jesuit missionary experience has been often treated as an inevitable and fairly obvious detail. Among the few existing studies within this domain, however, we find Liam Brockey's in-depth research on the role of the Jesuits in the Portuguese *Carreira da India* and their presence in the Chinese Empire until the 18th century. Brockey's studies have opened interesting glimpses into the Fathers' ocean crossing experiences. For instance, Brockey studied the rules set out by the Society for the behaviour that the Fathers were supposed to observe during navigation. These rules covered every aspect of the missionaries' lives: spirituality, health, nutrition, interpersonal relationships (Brockey, 2007). Another aspect taken into account by Brockey relates to the material on-board life of the Jesuits sailing towards the East. The first important aspect of the sea voyage, indeed, concerned the pure

biological subsistence of the individual. Travelling for months across the ocean was potentially a very dangerous experience. The death rate among young missionaries embarked for Asia or the Americas was about 50% (Brockey, 2007). Travelling meant suffering. As other historians have pointed out, the threats during navigation could be of various kinds: meteorological disasters, epidemics, lack of supplies and conflicts with other ships, indigenous peoples or even within the crew were not uncommon (Bonnichon, 1999; Tempère, 2011). The consequences in emotional, psychological, and spiritual terms are evident if we consider the young age of many of those missionaries and the incomplete education they were given at the time of departure.

Another historian who has dealt with the Jesuit presence aboard ships is the French historian Delphine Tampère. In her studies, Tampère has stressed the standardized character of Jesuit written sources, a typical feature of the Ignatian Society (Tampère, 2012). This character can also be found in the reports of the missionaries on board ships bound for the Indies. A sacralization of the maritime space through pastoral and missionary action on the ship, as it has been observed, did not consider the sea, at least not immediately, as a natural element. Inside many sources reporting travel maritime experience the ocean remained a symbol of irrationality and chaos. The theological and moral reference was always the struggle between God and the Devil in which people on board (sailors, soldiers, servants, simple passengers, and the missionaries themselves) were involved (Pérez Mallaìna, 2005). These elements are also typical of the Jesuit rhetoric in letters of candidacy for the mission (before the voyage) and in letters from the mission (after the voyage).

In addition to the research conducted by Brockey and Tampère, there are few other studies that have dealt more specifically with the 'Jesuits on-board' topic. Among these it is worth noting the works concerning the presence on board of other religious orders and even nuns (Owens, 2017). Such perspective can be useful for a comparative approach. Other interesting aspects that have been recently explored relate to Jesuit theatre on the ships (Moura, 2017), and to the Mediterranean and Atlantic Jesuit geopolitical networks (Borja Medina, 1995; Martínez-Serna, 2009; Clines, 2016). However, broadly speaking, these contributions focus always on limited topics, or relate to specific time spans, or are subordinated to other broader research themes. This brings us to the next paragraph, where I will address the goal of this reasoned bibliography. My effort is oriented at producing a first general narrative of the transoceanic on-board experience of the Jesuits during the early modern age.

1.2 *Research Goals*

Despite the importance of the above-mentioned works in illuminating the Jesuit navigation experience, this topic struggles to find an autonomous dimension. In other words, the historical phenomenon of Jesuits' oceanic navigation experiences should be addressed not only as linked to the military, commercial and cultural expansion of single European powers (Portugal, Spain, France), geo-political areas (Iberian World, Catholic World), or directed towards specific areas of the world (Asia, Africa, North or South America), but as a global phenomenon, including every area of the world, spanning over a long period of time, at least from the 16th to the 18th century. The experience of ocean navigation during this period had a tremendous impact on world history (Elliott, 2006). In this story, the

Society of Jesus played a leading role thanks to its influence on the various fields of culture and politics. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Jesuit presence on board ships contributed decisively to the transformation of the Western conception of the oceans from mythical places (almost "non-places", to use a contemporary definition), into spaces of collective historical awareness and community. The Jesuits' own creation of long-distance networks (which ranged from the coasts of Europe to those of Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, both sides of Africa, India, the Philippines, China and Japan) came to influence the contents, the structures, as well as the educational and institutional models of knowledge (Harris, 1996).

The scientific field is important in this process, and the sources require careful analysis. For instance, despite the presence of some recurrent elements in the epistolary and narrative rhetoric of the missionaries engaged in oceanic journeys, the image of a standardised Jesuit literary production that has been stressed by some historians can be balanced by an evolution of the topics addressed by the Fathers in their writings. A particularly interesting category of Jesuit written works which saw the light in the second half of 17th century deals precisely with the sea as an object of study (Fournier, 1667; Ortiz, 1688). In these works, the inherited medieval perspective of the ocean as a symbol of chaos is merged with a new, more rational, and scientific approach. From these works it is clear how the process of rationalization of the oceans and their transformation from a symbol of chaos to a natural element passed during the 17th century through a moral and religious normalization. In such process the miraculous and providential actions of the Saints and the moralizing words of the missionary preachers functioned as a tool of pacification, order and rationality. Besides the emotional and religious aspect, in fact, the intellectual, scientific, and technological element must be considered as a decisive factor in influencing the human experience of the missionaries on board. The technology that ships carried on board represented the most advanced scientific and technical knowledge of their time, perhaps comparable today, as obvious as the comparison may seem, only to space exploration technologies. Between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, with the improvement of maritime technologies and the relatively greater safety of oceanic routes, the spiritual, moral, and emotional dimension partially gave way to scientific speculation. Since the 18th century, reports of scientific observations on the ocean as a natural element susceptible to rationalization became more frequent. The seas were no longer a mere symbol of irrationality but became a normal subject of scientific observation (McLellan-E. Regourd, 2011). This was a decisive moment in the intellectual history of the Western world. The contribution of the missionaries' experiences on board, Jesuits and other religious orders, became important for scientific progress in various disciplines: mathematics, astronomy, cartography, oceanography, medicine, botany, ethnography (Restif-Filliozat, 2019; McLellan-E. Regourd, 2011; Boistel, 2002).

Another important aspect of this global history of the seas lies in the attention that must be paid to lesser known but no less important narratives of the Jesuits' experience at sea. Historiography about the Jesuits and the sea has so far favoured the epic about the movement of the Society's members bound towards the Americas or to Asia. These are undoubtedly stories characterized by more emphatic tones related to discovery, conquest, and evangelization. However, there are also narratives of a different tone but no less significant for the purposes of this discourse. An important case is presented by the return

to Europe of the Jesuits expelled from the Bourbon monarchies and their colonial possessions in 1767, and after the suppression of the Society in 1773. During this veritable exodus, thousands of Jesuits embarked on ships that would take them back to the Old World by crossing the oceans. Their return to Europe, besides confirming many of the traditional elements of the history of ocean navigation, contributed decisively to the circulation of ideas, skills, and knowledge from one side of the ocean to the other (Piciulo, 2014). It can be said that the eighteenth-century Jesuit expulsion from the colonies of the Catholic states closed the circle of a process that had begun two centuries earlier. Although this mechanism is not exactly the one described by Steven Harris (1996, 2005) on the relationship between the so-called 'Long distance-networks' and the 'Organization of Jesuit Science', this movement was nonetheless part of it. These lesser-known stories of navigation, circulation and restructuring of knowledge are part of a single early modern global phenomenon of the world-wide reorganization of knowledge which was propelled by the ships of the Iberian monarchies.

The aim of this continually updated bibliography, therefore, is to collect all the modern and ancient titles relating to the on-board oceanic travel experiences of Jesuit missionaries, but not to them only. Another ongoing attempt here is to collect the same kind of material on the oceanic travels of other religious missionary orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians) to be compared with the Jesuits for a more detailed and comprehensive overview of such phenomenon. This bibliography will serve as a basis for articles, an edition of sources, and finally a book that will allow us to take stock of a decisive moment in the scientific, intellectual and social history not only of the Society of Jesus, but of the entire world.

1.3 *Description of the Material*

Let us now briefly see the collected material. I have tried to gather here the bibliography, both ancient and modern, related to the transoceanic navigation experience of the Jesuits on their way to Asia, Africa, and the Americas. I have tried, as much as possible, to distinguish this type of experience from the more general one of the missions. The task was not made easier by the fact that the ocean crossing was indeed a part of the overall mission. The first aspect to be stressed is that within the historical bibliography (16th-18th c.) there are no reports that speak univocally of the on-board experience of the missionaries. The narrative relating to this part of the journey is always part of a comprehensive account that often has as its main object the experience on land, in particular the people who were the object of the evangelizing zeal of the missionaries who were actually producing the sources. The first difficulty that historians encounter in this type of research lies in identifying the part of the story related to the voyage on board ship and in isolating it from the rest of the account. In this sense an edition of excerpts from the voyage reports related to the oceanic travels is required. A second feature to be considered concerns the historical evolution of the sources. Over time, in fact, we see how the contents within the same types of sources evolves to express new concepts and new perspectives in accordance with the changing sensitivity of the authors. We also see how over time new types of serial sources arise in response to new religious and cultural needs.

From the second half of the 16th until the 18th century, we can find different types of serial sources that had great importance both as a pedagogical and a propaganda tool for the Society of Jesus. We are in the presence mainly of collections of letters, accounts, and reports from the places of the missions. In addition to this, sources were sometimes selected, edited and republished for other types of audience. The Society's decision to publish these sources in serial and continuous format is rooted in the enormous success of the letters sent by the first Jesuit missionary in Asia: Francis Xavier. His letters, almost like true adventure stories, were able to set on fire the missionary passion of generations of young Jesuits. As Markus Friedrich explains, we can find two main genres among these sources: one for internal reading and one for a wider audience. In the first category we find the Letters (*Litterae Annuae* or *Annuae Litterae, Litterae Quadrimestres*), which are reports sent to Rome through the Provincial Father of the missions, in the form of historical summaries of the activities carried out during the year. The circulation of letters among the Jesuits' internal audience was also structured between a general circuit and a more local one, based on the province and language of use. The second type was intended for external reading in a true propaganda function; this genre can be put under the generic label of Relations (*Relationi*, *Avvisi*). As demonstrated by several studies, however, it can be hard to distinguish firmly the two categories of sources on the base of their contents. Both types, indeed, deal extensively with the deeds of individual Jesuits, with practical, daily facts instead of theoretical issues, and both pursue strong edifying purposes. However, there are important distinguishing factors. The language: Letters are in Latin while the Relations are in vernacular. Length: Letters are shorter than Relations. Content: Relations often include ethnographic information which is absent from the letters. In this aspect, it was observed that Relations share structural aspects with contemporary travel literature, which does not apply to the Letters. Another important type of serial sources is represented by the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, published between the 17th and the 18th centuries. The *Lettres édifiantes* were selections of facts thought to be of interest for the wider non-Jesuit audience. This simple schematization, as we shall see in a moment, has a purely heuristic value, since the structure of the Jesuit serial sources from the missions can be extremely complex and the differences in content just as subtle. In the following lines I will therefore limit myself to showing the essential distinctive traits, while for further details the readers are referred to the bibliography that follows (Friedrich, 2008).

From a chronological perspective, the history of circulation and structuring of these sources is articulated. A first standardization in the production of letters took place as early as 1547, at the behest of Juan de Polanco, secretary of Ignatius of Loyola. If a certain regularity in the publications began to be evident from 1573, it was only from 1581, with the election as general provost of Claudio Acquaviva that the corpus of Jesuit correspondence began to have a strongly standardized connotation. In general, however, it can be said that new projects of reorganization in the collection and publication of the Letters took place at the concurrence of the various Generalates of the Society until the second half of the 17th century. In addition to this, all these series of sources were subject to geographical categorization. In relation to the missions in South East Asia, Goa is the first designation from which the *Litterae* arrived. However, within a short time we find Letters arriving from Malacca, Malabar (which was later subdivided in the 'Cochim region' and 'Tuticorim region') and from Lahore. Regarding China and Japan, on the other hand,

given the importance of the mission, a separate geographical designation was issued soon afterwards. From what has been said, it is possible to observe within the Jesuit sources an early pre-eminence of the Asian world: India, China, and Japan. The reason for this is the cultural importance of the evangelization of these ancient civilizations in the imagination of the missionaries (Correia-Afonso, 1955; D'Intino, 1989; Ponce Alcocer, 2007; Brockey, 2007; Restif-Filliozat, 2019). This is confirmed by the candidatures for the missions, most of which had the East as their preferred destination (Colombo-Massimi, 2014). Close to Asia, on the shores of the Indian Ocean, a geographical area which had soon gained an autonomous designation in Jesuit Letters and Relations was eastern Africa. Ethiopia and Mozambique (Monomotampa), indeed, were to be gathered in a specific "African province". Nonetheless the Letters from Goa continued to occasionally maintain information concerning these places, especially when matters were deemed to be of some urgency. The main difficulty for the shipping by sea of Letters and Reports concerned the presence or absence of favourable winds: once missed, for whatever reason, the season for navigation, it was often quite complex to get the information in time for the departure to Rome, especially from remote areas. However, there is no lack of reports from the West Indies, i.e. the Americas, in particular Brazil (Leite, 1956; Laborie, 1998). Moreover, a not negligible role is played by French Canada, the object of intense missionary zeal from the end of the 17th century onwards (Thwaites, 1896-1901; True, 2012, 2019; McShea, 2019). From 1632 until 1673, indeed, the *Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France* were published. These chronicles were descriptions of the experiences of the French Jesuits in America to raise funds and for the accession of new missionaries. Despite the edited nature of these documents, first by the Jesuit overseer in New France and then by the Jesuit governing body in France, these sources prove to be very important for our understanding of the Jesuit scientific and maritime experience.

During the 17th century, alongside these types of sources, other narratives begin to be structured in more organic ways inside overall accounts made by individual missionaries (Pallas, 1619; Tachard, 1689, 1693). Another interesting feature is that during the 18th century, when the psychosis of Catholic subversion in England subsided and with the gradual affirmation of English naval and colonial hegemony (*hydrarchy*), collections of Jesuit missionary journeys started to be published in London. These publications were often translations made from French or Italian and collected stories of Jesuit journeys to the four corners of the globe. (Du Perier, 1708; Telles, 1710; Lockman, 1762, 1767).

From a linguistic point of view, we are in presence of a complex issue. The single epistolary and narrative sources, in fact, were written in the native language of the missionaries, very often Spanish and Portuguese but also Italian and French. The editions of these sources collected in books, however, were often subject to multiple translation processes, from Italian, Portuguese or Spanish to French, and from French to English. We also find often several editions of the same work in different places and languages. Helpfully for us, however, thematic bibliographies have been published. They include all the early modern publications about trans-oceanic explorations and religious missions (Maggs, 1921) sometimes concerning specific areas such as Japan (Oliveira-Costa, 2007).

A further aspect to pay attention to when looking at these sources, as mentioned, is their strong rhetorical standardization. The traditional topics linked to the spirituality of religious orders had a strong impact in determining the categories according to which the

surrounding reality was read and interpreted. The conceptualization of space, the perception of natural phenomena and new environmental elements were all influenced by a mix of religious anthropology and desire for new knowledge (Vissière, 1979; Colombo-Massimi, 2014). In this sense, it is necessary to grasp the changes in the structures of the sources over the centuries.

Another aspect that I want to stress in this bibliography is the not exclusively Jesuit-centric character. Although the modern and ancient bibliography on the travel experiences of missionaries belonging to other religious orders is less rich than that concerning the Jesuits, I have tried to integrate the same type of material relating to the mendicant orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians). A comparative study of Jesuit sea voyages with the mendicant orders, in fact, can help build a more comprehensive and organic vision of the ocean-crossing missionary experience (Friedrich-Schunka, 2017). The caution in the analysis and the difficulties in interpreting the travel reports of the mendicant orders are the same listed so far for the Jesuits. However, the attempt at a comparative study between the Jesuits and the mendicant orders at sea will not affect the pre-eminence of the Jesuits' role in this research. First, because of the greater historical importance of the Jesuit role in the processes of early modern globalization (Cole, 2015). Second, because of the much greater and better organized existing Jesuit documentary material (Wicki, 1948-1988). Third, because of the well-established historiographical tradition of Jesuit studies, which has provided us with important interpretative tools. Finally, I also wanted to include in the bibliography some of the most famous travel reports written by non-religious people, because of the external perspective they can offer on the role of religious on board ships during trans-oceanic voyages.

2. Selected Literature on Jesuit Missions and Travels

2.1 *Jesuits at Sea*

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