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# POLITICAL LEGITIMISATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION BY ITALIAN COURTS THROUGH THE JOURNEY OF FOUR JAPANESE PRINCES, 1585

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**Abstract:** This article examines the relationship between the Japanese delegation sent by the Jesuit Valignano and rival courts in Italy, specifically Mantua and Venice, who competed to receive the four Christian princes of Japan. This case study underlines in particular the strong link between politics, religion and theatre. The Serenissima integrated the foreign delegation into its rites and ceremonies, going so far as to include its members in a theatrical performance. Mantua, thanks to its network of diplomats, later surpassed Venice with a splendid firework display and an interest in Japanese dietary habits. The letters written at the time testify that the Japanese were impressed, but this meeting was intercultural only by chance, as it served first and foremost the policy of prestige of each of the two courts.

**Keywords:** Japan, Tensho, Mantua, Venice, Gonzaga, Doge, food, theatre, wonder, rivalry, 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Titre :** Légitimation politique et construction identitaire des cours italiennes à travers le voyage de quatre princes japonais, 1585.

**Résumé** Le présent article étudie les rapports entre la délégation japonaise envoyée par le jésuite Valignano et les cours rivales d'Italie. Mantoue et Venise s'affrontent ainsi pour recevoir les quatre princes chrétiens du Japon. Cette étude de cas souligne la force du lien entre politique, religion et médium théâtral. La Sérénissime intègre la délégation étrangère dans ses rites et cérémonies, allant jusqu'à représenter ses membres dans une œuvre théâtrale. Grâce à son réseau de diplomates, Mantoue renchérit sur Venise par un splendide feu d'artifice et par son intérêt pour les mœurs alimentaires des Japonais. Les lettres écrites alors attestent que les Japonais furent impressionnés, mais cette rencontre ne fut interculturelle que par hasard, car elle servit d'abord la politique de prestige de chacune des deux cours.

**Mots-clés :** Japon, Tensho, Mantoue, Venise, Gonzague, Doge, nourriture, théâtre, merveille, rivalité, XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

**Título:** Legitimación política y construcción de la identidad de las cortes italianas a través del viaje de cuatro príncipes japoneses, 1585.

**Resumen:** El presente artículo estudia la relación entre la delegación japonesa enviada por el jesuita Valignano y las cortes rivales en Italia. Mantua y Venecia se enfrentaron para recibir a los cuatro príncipes cristianos de Japón. Este estudio subraya la fuerza del vínculo entre la política, la religión y el medio teatral. La Serenísima integra a la delegación extranjera en sus ritos y ceremonias, llegando incluso a representar a sus miembros en una obra teatral. Gracias a su red de diplomáticos, Mantua se suma a Venecia con un espléndido espectáculo de fuegos artificiales y un interés por los hábitos dietéticos japoneses. Las cartas escritas en aquella época atestiguan que los japoneses estuvieron impresionados, pero este encuentro solo fue intercultural por casualidad, ya que sirvió ante todo la política de prestigio de cada una de las dos cortes.

**Palabras claves:** Japón, Tensho, Mantua, Venecia, Gonzaga, Dux, comida, teatro, maravilla, rivalidad, siglo XVI

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## Introduction

These Indian Princes held their public consistory this morning in the Royal Hall in front of the people and the whole court in the manner of the King's ambassadors. There were three of them, while the fourth remained in his quarters because he was ill: one is a nephew of the King of Fiunga and is called Yto Don Mancio, the other is called Chiyva Don Miguel and is a nephew of the King of Arima and the King of Omura. The other two are noble lords of the kingdom of Figta in Japan, one named Nocauro Don Iulian, and the other Fara Don Martin. A Portuguese Jesuit spoke for them; they appeared in Indian dress; that is to say, in robes of multi-coloured silk with various birds painted on them and with gilt inserts. They wore extravagant scimitars on their hips and hats on their heads with white feathers as we are accustomed to wear<sup>1</sup>.

1. These words describe the audience between four princes from Japan, escorted by a group of Jesuit Fathers, and Pope Gregory XIII in March, 1585.

2. Reading the words of the anonymous author, one has the impression of being in front of a classic scene: the delegates, their exotic origins, their clothing, their wealth. However, a closer look reveals that the delegates, having arrived at

the beating heart of Catholicism, remained confined to a corner, while the centre of the scene was taken by the Jesuit father who delivered the oration. From this first description, the focus shifts away from the four princes, marginalising them and suggesting that the real meaning of this ceremonial journey – the real reason for its significance – is to be found in the propagandistic and ideological interests of the European world<sup>2</sup>.

3. The journey's architect was Alessandro Valignano, who had been active in Japan since 1579 as Visitor General of the Indies. His project had a Eurocentric, and more specifically Jesuit, objective. He aimed to provide the European world with an image of Japan in line with the descriptions found in the letters sent by the Fathers stationed there. It was likewise essential to show the great diversity of Japan compared to other missionary territories, thereby demonstrating that the distance from Rome and Europe was not simply geographical but primarily cultural<sup>3</sup>.

4. The idea of a ceremonial journey by a small group of young men from the Christianised nobility of Kyushu would have also made it possible to show Europe the great successes of the Society of Jesus in Japan. At the time, criticism from people within and without the order, who turned their noses up at the

<sup>1</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Urb. Lat. 1053, Rome, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1585, ff. 138-39. All translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> See Puini 1905, pp. 464-76.

<sup>3</sup> «Very Reverend Father in Christ, with this letter I will reply to some points concerning Japan, about which Your Excellency wrote to me in various letters. First of all, I will describe the honours and dignities in which our brothers seem to be placed here [...]; what happens in a land as distant as Japan is characterised by unknown and unusual circumstances, which are unclear and difficult to understand. Since this point is so important, I regret I am unable to clarify it and explain it»: Boscaro 2008, pp. 215-219.

controversial *adaptatio* practices of the Fathers, was becoming more and more frequent<sup>4</sup>.

5. The Society was by then moving away from the purely evangelising spirit of the earlier Xaverian years and had instead become a more complex organism, increasingly integrated and rooted in Japanese society.

6. It was therefore inevitable that similar needs and objectives would be reflected in the welcome offered to this delegation by the main Italian states of the time. In a cultural climate characterised by a profound religious renewal following the Council of Trent, any successful strategy would need to convey a message of strength and unity in the Catholic world. The arrival of the delegation from Japan provided the perfect pretext. Spectacle and theatre established the framework for the entire journey; *stupor* and *mirabilia* were the instruments through which this message was conveyed.

7. As we shall see below, even the science of the time was directed to this purpose, including acoustics, hydraulics, botany and astronomy. Everything became a vector for a wonder intended simultaneously to guarantee the spread of the Catholic faith and to serve as an instrument for the creation of a new cultural identity for the Italian world. Perfectly representative of these dynamics were the rivalling cities of Venice and Mantua, which in July 1585 competed in welcoming the young princes and their Jesuit entourage.

8. This essay aims to show the ways in which the varied interests of the European – and specifically Italian – world found their way into the delegation's journey. The embassy thus became more an instrument to satisfy the needs and requirements of the hosts rather than a moment of dialogue with Japan, continuously leaving the foreign country in the background and – just like the four princes themselves in the presence of Gregory XIII – voiceless.

## 1. From Japan to Italy

9. The delegation's journey had its origins in the complex historical moment of Japan in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

10. When the Jesuits reached the shores of the archipelago in 1549, they were welcomed with extraordinary interest by the local society, which had several reasons to view the newcomers favourably. While, on the one hand, Christianity's message of equality convinced the less well-off social classes, on the other, the Japanese political elite looked to the Europeans for economic and military advantages<sup>5</sup>.

11. It was on this basis that the Society of Jesus was able to establish itself during the first thirty years of its presence in Japan. Though begun with enthusiasm and optimism, as Francis Xavier himself pointed out in one of his letters<sup>6</sup>, the Jesuit mission in these first years was nevertheless characterised by a deep lack of uniformity and regulation.

12. The first three decades of the Jesuit mission in Japan were marked by a progressive awareness of the local culture and society by the Fathers. The emphasis initially placed on the barbarity of customs and traditions gave way to a more scientific curiosity about a millenary culture. Directly linked to this evolution was also the relationship with the practice of conversions to Christianity. Until the 1570s, the policy followed by the Fathers was a "quantitative" one: linked to the will of individual *daimyō* to become Christians, the adhesion of the population to the new faith was completely unspontaneous. It was only after Valignano's reforms that the emphasis was placed on the qualitative aspect of intimate adhesion to the new faith. The same problem concerned both the people and the *daimyōs*: learning to deal with them according to the canons of a *Cerimoniale* would have made it possible to preserve and increase their respect and consideration for Christianity and the Society. After having privileged the "heights" it

<sup>4</sup> Hesselink 2016; Elisonas 1991, pp. 301-72; Elisonas 2008, pp. 63-102; Lage Correia 2018, pp. 103-16; Lee 2008, pp. 345-380; Lison Tolosana 2005; Ramada Curto 2005, pp. 3-22; Pavone 2018b, pp. 165-88; Pavone 2018a, pp. 1-28.

<sup>5</sup> Tripepi 2021, pp. 116-136.

<sup>6</sup> In one of his letters, Francis Xavier described the Japanese as «the best people yet discovered»: Lach 1994, pp. 675-85.

was time to consolidate the “foundations” to guarantee a future for Japanese Christianity.

13. Precisely for this reason, the arrival of Alessandro Valignano in 1579 helped set in motion a process of systematisation, one which could even be described as revolutionary. If one were to draw a graph of the innovations in Jesuitical action in Japan between the 1570s and 1580s, one would see a constant and linear evolution, not a sudden one. Revolutionary, however, were the means and ways chosen by Valignano for his activity of practical and ideological restructuring of the Japanese Jesuit mission<sup>7</sup>.

14. The Jesuit mission in Japan was already experiencing a number of structural changes in those years. Valignano’s activity thus helped codify and regulate, including from an ideological and doctrinal point of view, an evolution that was already beginning to take shape<sup>8</sup>.

15. Within this new and rapidly changing reality, the Society soon shifted away from its original task of exclusive focus on the *salus animarum*. As a flexible institution able to adapt to new circumstances, the Jesuit mission in Japan had taken on more and more hybrid features. In 1580, the mission’s juridical definition underwent its most radical change: the *daimyō* Omura Sumitada ceded to the Society the management and control of the two cities of Nagasaki and Mogi. For the Jesuits this event

had many significant social and economic implications.

16. First of all, the management of justice was entrusted to the Society<sup>9</sup>; secondly, the Jesuits were responsible for guaranteeing a stable income for the city<sup>10</sup>; finally, and most importantly, they were also tasked with the military defence of the port and the bay<sup>11</sup>. With vice-provincial Gaspar Coelho’s purchase of a ship to patrol the bay, known as «Coelho’s *fusta*» and able to carry up to three hundred men, the Jesuits had taken the last step in their transformation. The Society was increasingly integrated into the fabric of Japanese society, much to the chagrin of those who perceived this as a dramatic departure from the evangelising aims of a religious order.

17. It was in this climate that Valignano had the idea of sending an embassy to Rome. In so doing, he would be able to show Europe the triumph of Jesuit activity in Japan, thereby providing the Fathers with an opportunity to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the Pope and all of Christendom. Far from being blameworthy, the Society’s policy of adaptation had produced an exceptional result, which had to be celebrated.

18. When the delegation arrived in Italy, the political and cultural milieu of the peninsula was just as singular and enigmatic as that of Japan. Throughout the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Italy appeared as a geographically united though politically lacerated territory: the ancient Italian

<sup>7</sup> Valignano’s main reforms included: the creation of schools, colleges and seminaries to educate an indigenous clergy made up of Japanese; dialogue with *daimyōs* tolerant of Christianity; and the publication of the *Cerimoniale* for his brothers in Japan. Ross 1999, pp. 336-351; Moran 1993, pp. 20-41, 51-78; Tamburello, Üçerler, Di Russo 2008, pp. 145-158, 217-246.

<sup>8</sup> Oda Nobunaga was the first to realise the importance of good relations with the Jesuits. Friendship with the Fathers provided this powerful general with a direct route to European firearms, which were indispensable for achieving victory over his enemies. In those same years, the Jesuits personally negotiated with the *daimyōs* for more independence, as shown in the case of Otomo Yoshishige’s marriage. *Avisi del Giappone de gli anni MDLXXXII, LXXXIII et LXXXIV. Con alcuni altri della Cina dell’LXXXIII e LXXXIV. Cauati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesù*, in Milano, appresso Pacifico Pontio,

MDLXXXVI, p. 54; Boscaro 2008, pp. 60-61; Wirbser 2017, pp. 252-84.

<sup>9</sup> Hesselink 2016, pp. 79-81.

<sup>10</sup> Valignano himself reported the inevitable evolution of the Society in Japan. The Fathers began to trade in Chinese silk, buying it in Macao and reselling it in Japan in order to support the mission and the city of Nagasaki: «The third danger for our mission concerns its economic maintenance, since the Society has no income in Japan. We are obliged to spend at least eight thousand *scudi* every year in the silk trade, and the profit is twelve thousand. Through this income we can support the mission; this is not only contrary to our rules, but subject to so many difficulties that both our mission and the Japanese Christianity are at risk». Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Jap. Sin. 9I, f. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Hesselink 2016, pp. 82-84.

states had lost their autonomy to the crown of Madrid, which had since acquired control over large parts of the peninsula<sup>12</sup>. Yet such progressive weakening on the political level had not been accompanied by a retreat on the cultural one. The Italian powers had been forced to reorganise themselves within this new Spanish domination, exploiting any and all residual spaces of autonomy – which on an intellectual and artistic level remained ample – to relaunch themselves and prevent the risk of atrophy<sup>13</sup>.

19. In reality, the Iberian world-system benefited the peninsula, since integration within Castilian trade routes favoured a first form of globalisation in which Italian territories played a leading role<sup>14</sup>. These were the years of Botero and Ramusio, not to forget Valignano himself, as well as other Jesuits active in the East (De Nobili in India and Ricci in China). Here was a whole generation able to read the possibilities of this new context in which the peninsula was involved and in which to find their own vocation: a renewed international propulsion, devoted to the discovery and integration of the «other» within the mental schemes of European man<sup>15</sup>.

20. Finally, the political authorities themselves, far from being passively absorbed into the Castilian milieu, managed to transform all their previous belletristic energy, which until the 1520s and 1530s had been confined to the battlefield, into a new and exquisitely cultural rivalry. The competition that ensued was specifically linked to the self-celebration that arose through hosting and glorifying illustrious guests.

21. This practice should not be considered a novelty *tout court*: what changed, as often happens, was the order of magnitude. Paying

homage to guests had always been customary; doing so in open rivalry to the other sovereigns involved in the welcome – and furthermore with the pomp and splendour shown by the late Renaissance Italian courts – was quite different.

22. Even before the delegation's voyage from Japan, the trip of Henry III of France in 1574 had already provoked similar dynamics among the central and northern Italian sovereigns<sup>16</sup>.

23. During their European journey, the four Japanese princes received great honours even before reaching Italy, both in Portugal and Spain. However, none of the local Iberian institutions were interested in competing with Lisbon or Madrid in welcoming the delegation. As we shall see, the courts of central and northern Italy instead wanted to use this chance to recreate their own political and cultural identity, which had been undermined by the upheavals of the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They thus engaged in a competition where the aim was to outdo the other sovereigns by glorifying their guests and relegating their rivals to second place.

## 2. Venice and Mantua: *Propaganda fide per scientiam* and the Emergence of an Information Network

24. If this were an essay on the history of emotions, one could say that the Italian sovereigns were pervaded by a feeling of pure selfishness when they welcomed the four Japanese princes. The authorities of the peninsula, as hosts to the delegation, were mainly focused on their own lustre and prestige, which had to be displayed at all costs. The young Japanese were the means through which these

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the Italian Wars, see Pellegrini 2009.

<sup>13</sup> See Di Stefano, Fasano Guarini, Martinengo (eds.) 2009, pp. 29-42, 179-199; Musi 1994, pp. 5-66, 115-146.

<sup>14</sup> In the last twenty years, Italian historians have reinterpreted Spanish domination of the peninsula from a more positive point of view. Starting from the well-established theories that a form of proto-globalisation was born in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they have demonstrated the high degree of integration of the peninsula within this new global system. The journey of the four Japanese princes can certainly be included in this context. Benzoni, Gonzales

Luna 2010; Benzoni 2006, pp. 41-107; Marcocci 2014, pp. 7-50; Marcocci 2015, pp. 45-70.

<sup>15</sup> Raviola 2015, pp. 450, pp. 727-28; Benzoni 2006, pp. 41-107.

<sup>16</sup> See the disruptive actions carried out by the Duke of Modena and the Duke of Savoia to the disadvantage of Venice's reception plans: Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe), Senato, dispacci, ambasciatori e residenti, Milano, fil. III, ff. 313-315v; Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), Mediceo del Principato, relazioni con stati italiani ed esteri, Venezia, Orazio Urbani, fil. 2983 (unnumbered leaves), 1574, July 21<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>; De Nolhac 1890, pp. 66-67.

rivals could challenge and outdo each other. The four princes were, as we have seen, silent actors in a script written by the Society of Jesus. Once they reached the peninsula, they played the same passive role for the political authorities. This state of affairs emerges with particular force and clarity in the cases of Venice and Mantua.

25. The four young princes, escorted by a host of Jesuits following Valignano's plan<sup>17</sup>, arrived in the city of Venice on June 26<sup>th</sup>, a week later than expected, as reported by a contemporary anonymous chronicle:

The following day, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, they left Chioggia after lunch and arrived in Santo Spirito, traveling in Venetian boats [...]. They went from San Giorgio to the square of San Marco, and from there they entered the San Trovaso canal; and then, crossing the channel of Giudecca, they arrived at our shore. When they disembarked, they were welcomed by the largest number of people the church could hold. Then they entered the church where singers for San Marco offered them the *Te Deum* prayer with voices, organs and other instruments<sup>18</sup>.

26. This delay in the delegation's arrival caused much inconvenience. The Serenissima, in a decision never taken before nor ever repeated since, decided to postpone the annual procession dedicated to St. Mark by a few days, making it coincide with the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29<sup>th</sup>). This decision to revolutionise, albeit only slightly, the calendar

of city celebrations was not to be taken lightly. In fact, contemporary documents report this unusual modification with extreme clarity<sup>19</sup>.

27. The procession itself was characterised by a high degree of rituality. The religiosity of the event dedicated to St. Mark merged with a secular liturgy: the four princes were therefore placed on a metaphorical stage.

28. Linked to the themes of spiritual conquest and the colonisation of the imagination, this display thus became the medium through which the scriptwriters (the Society of Jesus on one hand and the Venetian political authorities on the other) intended to consolidate and strengthen their cultural identity<sup>20</sup>.

29. In a Venice so festively decorated, the young princes were placed at the centre of the grandstands set up in San Marco square to be «enjoyed» and observed while they themselves watched the theatrical performance in progress. This sort of meta-theatricality found its climax in an allegorical float that re-staged the meeting that the Japanese had had a few weeks before with Pope Gregory XIII<sup>21</sup>.

30. It is this intricate interweaving of different levels that best reveals the importance attributed by the Venetians to the Japanese delegation. Here was an opportunity to reflect on themselves through an encounter with the «other», showing both the triumph of Christianity, able to conquer a secluded Japan – expressed through the four princes –, as well as the strength and splendour of the city through the pomp of their hospitality. Given that this procession was the most

<sup>17</sup> Valignano wrote several times to his brothers, even when forced to separate from his «creation» to take up the post of Provincial of the Indies in Goa. In his letters, sent every year to Europe, he urged his brothers to keep in mind the pedagogical aspect of the visit, asking them to always accompany the four princes, while also ensuring – as much as possible – that they were housed in the Society's facilities. ARSI, Jap. Sin. 22, ff. 51r-58v, without sheets number 57r and 58v. For a critical edition of the document, see *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*, Documenta Indica 1975, XIII, pp. 418-27; Abranches Pinto, Bernard 1943, 1, pp. 392-93.

<sup>18</sup> ARSI, Ital. 159, anonymous chronicle, ff. 61-61v.

<sup>19</sup> «The procession which should have been conducted on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Saint Mark's apparition day, was postponed until the 29<sup>th</sup>, the day of Saint Peter, so that the Princes could see

it, and it was celebrated all around the square. [The procession] was most solemn, and not only for the presence of the Six Schools, a large number of floats, relics, silver and other admirable objects, but also for the enormous attendance of people, who were so many as to fill up both the church of San Marco and the Palace Court, as well as the square and all the surrounding houses»: ASVE, Collegio, Cerimoniali, registro 1, ff. 104v-105v.

<sup>20</sup> See Gruzinski 1994; Broggio 2004, pp. 11-77; Cantù 2007, pp. 9-21, 207-288; Calpini 2014, pp. 139-230; Proserpi 2016.

<sup>21</sup> «Among these allegorical floats, there was one representing the meeting of these Japanese princes with the Pope. It was decided to show this scene since it seemed most appropriate to honour them»: ARSI, Ital. 159, anonymous chronicle, f. 62v-63.

important event in Venetian civic life during the year, the participation of the four princes became an instrument in the hands of the Serenissima, a moment for exhibiting power, strength and prestige by the whole community<sup>22</sup>.

31. Even when the delegation left the lagoon for the mainland, the Venetian magistracy continued to demonstrate a substantial amount of attention to displaying their own excellence. In order to excite the *stupor* of the young princes and reinforce the triumph of both Christianity and «Venetianism», it was decided that the same model of hospitality would be repeated in three other cities that would host the delegation: Padua, Vicenza and Verona. A sort of *fil rouge* thus linked the Venetian cities throughout the first days of July 1585.

32. Recent scholarship has begun to shed light on the phenomenon of *propaganda fide per scientiam*. This fertile branch of study has explored the European use of technological and scientific advances between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as a vector for expanding and strengthening the Catholic faith. It has also become clear that this adaptation of scientific progress for ideological purposes mostly occurred in mission territories. Especially in the East, it became one of the Jesuits' main prerogatives<sup>23</sup>.

33. During the journey of the four Japanese princes through the cities of Veneto, there emerges a constant focus on scientific subjects such as hydraulics, acoustics, botany and cosmology. These branches of scientific knowledge were used to increase the amazement of the four young princes, following an aesthetic and epistemological attitude that would soon come to dominate in Europe: that of science as wonder<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Muir 1984, pp. 263-64.

<sup>23</sup> Prieto 2011; Ziller Camenietzki 2003, pp. 249-70; Baldini 2000; Baldini 2008, pp. 33-79; Harris 2000, pp. 212-40.

<sup>24</sup> Beusterien 2020; Findlen 2002, pp. 225-84; Hanafi 2000; Pagani 2007, pp. 658-78.

<sup>25</sup> Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn), Archivio Gonzaga (AG) 1515, fil. I, G. Calzoni, from Vicenza, 1585, July 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> «In Padua, His Excellency Sir Melchior Guilandino of Prussia, prefect of the *Orto de semplici* has given them four

34. Acoustics in particular was the focus of much attention. By a coincidence of history, the Teatro Olimpico was inaugurated in Vicenza in 1585. It was therefore the perfect opportunity to put the Japanese princes back on stage, this time literally, by showing them the artistic and technical excellence of Palladio's theatre through singing, mechanised sets and a refined musical show<sup>25</sup>.

35. With more sobriety, though with no less attention to detail, Padua and Verona later offered them a botanical garden, cosmological treatises, and rare and valuable instruments<sup>26</sup>.

36. In the meantime, during those hectic weeks, Duke Guglielmo II Gonzaga prepared to welcome the four young princes in Mantua. In fact, along the route taken by the delegation, the Duke's city was a natural stopping place once the journey through the Serenissima's dominion had come to an end. In order not to be caught unprepared, the Duke had charged certain trusted men with the task of informing him about the movements of the procession as early as March. The Duke, for his part, tried to extend his control over the other stages of the delegation's Italian journey in order to ensure timely information and to protect himself from any political surprises.

37. The Gonzaga network was so reliable that it was able to connect Mantua with Florence, Rome and Venice, the three main centres where the delegation stopped before reaching the Po valley. In the courts of the Medici, the Pope and the Doge, Mantuan diplomacy could boast of three respectable names: the Cavalier Vinta, Camillo Capilupi and Gabriele Calzoni. All three were part of a new form of diplomacy that originated in the 16th century.

beautiful books on cosmography, which could fetch the price of fifty *scudi*. In Verona they will be presented with four beautiful ivory crucifixes commissioned by the *Signoria*». ARSI, Ital. 159, Anonymous Chronicle, f. 63. «They saw the Colosseum [meaning the Arena], the relics and the beautiful studium of Count Bevilacqua in which there are statues, medals, portraits and other antiques of great value. Here, a musical concert with very rare instruments was organized»: ARSI, Ital. 159, f. 90, A. Leni, from Lodi, 1585, July 24<sup>th</sup>.

38. As historiographical research has shown, during this century permanent diplomatic contact was established between various courts, and the ambassador shifted from being a dangerous foreign spy to a fundamental instrument of contact and union between different national and international political entities<sup>27</sup>.

39. The presence of these permanent figures allowed the sovereign of Mantua to acquire all the information that would be essential to provide an adequate welcome to the delegation from Japan. The first to notify the Duke about the journey of the delegation was the Cavalier Vinta. From his privileged position at the Court of Florence, he was present during the reception organized by the Grand Duke, which he described in these terms:

When they arrived in Livorno, the Grand Duke sent one of his trusted men, an English gentleman, together with the cavalry of other gentlemen and a great number of his chariots, with the task of collecting them. From there they were accompanied to Pisa, where an accommodation had especially been prepared for them [...] The Grand Duke wanted to grant a court audience to them, so he sent a large number of chariots with many knights, gentlemen of his court and with a guard of halberdiers to retrieve them. When they arrived at the Grand Duke's palace, he went to the entrance door to welcome them<sup>28</sup>.

40. In the Mantuan ambassador's dispatch, the four princes themselves do not appear, remaining instead in the background of the main subject: an almost frenzied attention to the actions and behaviour of the Tuscan sovereign. The objective was thus to observe the Grand

Duke's actions, to take inspiration from them, and not to be found unprepared.

41. The system set up by Duke Guglielmo II can be defined as an information network, whose purpose was to keep the sovereign up to date on the movements of the delegation. One of the tasks of Gonzaga's men was also to «bend» the plans of the travel itinerary to the advantage of their sovereign. Mantua, in fact, was not originally included among the cities that the young princes were to pass through. It was therefore this long and complex game, carried out in the shadows by the network of ambassadors and informers, that guaranteed Gonzaga's success.

42. As a first move, Camillo Capilupi met the young princes and the Jesuits accompanying them several times during their time in Rome. He used these occasions to openly invite them to pass through Mantua<sup>29</sup>. The real obstacle, however, was Venice. The solution to this problem was a masterpiece of diplomacy. The Serenissima had already established the mission's itinerary after its departure from San Marco. As mentioned above, the princes were to pass through several cities on the mainland. In addition to Padua, Vicenza and Verona, the young Japanese should have also been taken to Brescia and then escorted to the river Adda, where the Venetian and Milanese states had their natural border<sup>30</sup>.

43. Things did not go according to plan thanks to the figure of Gabriele Calzoni, Mantuan ambassador to Venice, who played a prominent role in the delegation's stay in the lagoon. He took care to keep Duke Guglielmo informed of every event, from the princes' meeting with the Doge to the procession held in San Marco<sup>31</sup>. Calzoni's abilities as a negotiator

<sup>27</sup> Lazzarini 2014, pp. 385-400; Lazzarini 2015; Azzolini, Lazzarini 2017.

<sup>28</sup> This information appears in another dispatch written by L. Olivo during the organization of the welcome for the four princes: «Cavalier Vinta wrote about the Japanese in a letter I've found today and which was dated the last day of the last month» ASMn, AG 2630, f. 108.

<sup>29</sup> «I saw the Japanese princes and I exhorted them to pass through Mantua to pay homage to H. M., and they gladly

accepted to go there and kiss your hand» ASMn, AG 937, f. 305.

<sup>30</sup> Tripepi 2020, pp. 72-73.

<sup>31</sup> «This morning, by order of the *Signoria*, it was decided to pay homage to these princes with the most beautiful and richest procession ever seen in this city [...] All the allegorical floats paraded in the established order, one for each School. It is estimated that the participation of the people was so great that over forty thousand people were

emerged in all their brilliance once the delegation had left Venice for the mainland. The further the delegation moved away from the lagoon, the less control the Serenissima was able to exert. Once they reached Desenzano, on Lake Garda, Calzoni managed to «snatch» the delegation and convince them to move southwards towards Mantua<sup>32</sup>.

44. By the time the delegation reached the banks of the Mincio, Duke Guglielmo had thus already been preparing to welcome the young Japanese princes for several months. As a result of this extensive preparation, several novelties emerged during the Mantuan stage of this ongoing spectacle, in particular the considerable attention paid to the so-called material dimension.

45. Apart from gathering information about the decorations and furnishings of the rooms where the delegation had been hosted, the Duke had a noteworthy desire to learn more about the four princes' diet. Once again, Calzoni was able to fulfil this need. With a few instructive and precise words, he painted an extremely detailed picture of Japanese eating habits:

They profess not to eat the meat of quadruped animals, and yet they ate a veal *pastiera* which the Nuncio told me they deeply savoured, although they did not know what kind of meat it was. They cannot eat cheese, neither in tarts nor in soups, but they liked sweet cakes, tartlets and other similar desserts. They profess not to eat dairy products but the Nuncio told me they ate a lot of a white dish, of which they could not have enough; but what they most like are fruits like melons, which are very beautiful here, pears and other similar fruits on which they fed a lot, tasting very little meat<sup>33</sup>.

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present in San Marco Square»: ASMn, AG 1515, fil. I, f. 202.

<sup>32</sup> «As for the journey of the Japanese Princes, they will no longer take the route of Revere, but will pass through Villafranca and Goito. There His Highness will offer them a banquet and that same evening they will enter Marmirolo; I will write about this in further dispatches»: ASMn, AG 1515, fil. IV, f. 560-61, F. Cattaneo, from Desenzano, 1585, July 9<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> ASMn, AG 1515, fil. I, ff. 211-13, G. Calzoni, from Venice, 1585, July 5<sup>th</sup>.

46. This information was undoubtedly valuable to Duke Guglielmo, who was able to offer his guests meals in line with their customs, thereby gratifying and honouring them even further. In contrast to the Venetian attention to a public, ritualistic and liturgical wonder, Gonzaga instead acted within a more private dimension of self-exhibition. The main event in the city organized for the four princes also retained a sort of intimacy due to the context in which it took place.

47. This event consisted of a fireworks display, accompanied by the burning of a display placed in the middle of the lake formed by the Mincio river near the city<sup>34</sup>. Once again, in addition to the *stupor* that the event was certainly intended to convey, there was also the appeal to technical excellence.

48. Italian fireworks were the highest manifestation of pyrotechnic science and were widespread in Europe since the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were of such high quality that the King of France, Henry III, upon being honoured with the same spectacle while passing through the peninsula in 1574, even ordered them be brought north to be reproduced<sup>35</sup>.

49. Just as in Venice, so too in Mantua cultural grandeur and doctrinal fortification went hand in hand, conveyed through the skilful use of technical and scientific expertise.

## Conclusions

50. The conclusion of the delegation's Italian journey, which continued from Mantua to Milan, Genoa and Lisbon before returning home, requires some final thoughts. What did this journey mean for the different political and organizational entities that were involved?

<sup>34</sup> «When they arrived near the castle, they saw two boats in the middle of the river, on which two artificial mountains were created with the motto *plus ultra*. Here they saw fire beams in the sky and simultaneously the artillery started to clamour and then those mountains were set on fire, to the great pleasure of the Japanese princes»: ASMn, AG 389, ff. 386-86v.

<sup>35</sup> For a brief history of fireworks in the Italian Renaissance, see Botto 1972, pp. 280-84; De Nolhac 1890, p. 177.

51. For the Society of Jesus it meant the triumph of its model of diffusion, adaptation and negotiation in Japanese territory over a very short period. The Jesuits found the justification and legitimacy they were looking for and for which this embassy had been created. After the unexpected evolution of their role in the Japanese society, the road to an unstoppable advance of Christianity in the Archipelago was apparently open. In fact, while the delegation was travelling in Europe, the new arbiter of the Japanese political scene, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, established an alliance with the Society. As some Jesuit letters testify, he had come to grant further and unexpected spaces of freedom to the Jesuit Fathers<sup>36</sup>.

52. A few months later, however, Hideyoshi launched the Kyushu campaign, aimed at reconquering the recalcitrant and independent lands of the south. In the battle that ensued, the Jesuits chose the «wrong» side, which would later be defeated by the triumphant advance of Hideyoshi's troops<sup>37</sup>. Considered accomplices of the southern *daimyō*, the Jesuits were thus caught in the violent repression that Hideyoshi ordered in 1587.

53. For the European world, the journey of the four Japanese princes instead represented an exceptional opportunity for celebration. To quote the words of Angelantonio Spagnoletti, the arrival of the delegation was accompanied by «a phenomenon of collective hysteria that involved the Iberian and Italian courts<sup>38</sup>». It is therefore unsurprising that Jesuit interests would align with those of the European sovereigns.

54. On the one hand, the Jesuits wanted to show the Old Continent a precise idea of Japan: the Jesuit Japan,

a country described for decades in the letters sent by the Fathers to Europe and which was now tangible, within reach. On the other hand, the European courts, especially in Italy, considered the journey of the four princes as an opportunity to build a political and cultural identity after decades of crisis and weakness. From their first moment in the peninsula, the four princes were thus placed on the stage as actors to be observed, emblems by which the European world could achieve satisfaction at the sight of an emotionally and spiritually conquered Japan.

55. Such was the purpose behind the numerous processions that involved the delegation during its Italian journey. Not only Venice, as we have already seen, but also Rome, Bologna, Milan and other cities, transformed the four princes into an attraction through which to display the triumph of faith and shape a secular civic identity<sup>39</sup>.

56. It was no coincidence that the young Japanese paraded through the streets of Rome dressed in their traditional clothes. The aim was to emphasise and exaggerate the distance between the European spectators and the Japanese world. In fact, shortly after their audience with Gregory XIII, the delegates were honoured with a chest of Italian clothes, which they immediately began to wear<sup>40</sup>. While seemingly aesthetic in nature, this gesture also suggested a greater Catholic triumph, an outward subjugation which corresponded to a more internal one, and which symbolically represented the expectation of the Cross's success over the Katana.

<sup>36</sup> «He discussed with us the current situation of Japan. He said he wanted nothing more than to stop wars and rebellions; after that he said he desired to conquer China. It was with this aim in mind that he ordered the collection of enough wood to build two thousand vessels. He summoned us to demand two Portuguese ships ready for the battle. He was not only ready to pay for them, but also prepared to encourage the building of churches in his domains and the conversion of his subjects»: ARSI, Jap. Sin. 10 II, ff. 173v-174v.

<sup>37</sup> Berry 1982; Lage Correia 2018, pp. 110-111.

<sup>38</sup> Spagnoletti 2018, pp. 225-226.

<sup>39</sup> Following the early modern period, the European world would begin to emphasize cultural differences with other «worlds» through public parades. The aim was to build a cultural identity through the encounter/clash with the

«different». See Blanchard, Bancel, Boëtsch, Deroo and Lemaire 2008, pp. 1-51; Zemon Davis 2008, pp. 65-66.

<sup>40</sup> The long list of clothes in the chest can also be found in ARSI, Jap. Sin. 33, f. 35. The Venetian ambassador in Rome, Lorenzo Priuli, gave an account of the change of clothes by the four young princes: «The Pope has sent them silk cloths and one thousand golden *scudi*. They are now dressed in long Roman robes decorated everywhere with gold, and now they look like Bolognese doctors [...] Rome, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1585» ASVe, Senato, dispaçi, ambasciatori, Roma ordinaria, fil. XIX, f. 79. However Urbano Monte's watercolour painting best illustrates the colonising effect of this change of clothes. See *Compendio delle cose più notabili successe alla città di Milano e particolarmente alla famiglia dei Monti, dal 1585 al 1587*, quarta parte, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana (VBA), P 251 sup. ff. 88-89v.

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