The Petitioners’ Network

3.1 Strategies to Be Chosen: Not Only *Indipetae*, but Also Hearings in Rome

Jesuits petitioning for missionary assignments abroad all had to navigate a vast network—one that extended throughout and even beyond the Society of Jesus—forcing them to manage a series of relationships and to employ different strategies in order to fulfill their desires. Many aspiring missionaries, in fact, readily adopted multiple strategies to promote their candidacies and to make their individual appeal emerge at least as equally strong as those of their “rivals.”

This chapter focuses on some of the ways available to Jesuits to render their request more visible and convincing for the general. First of all, some petitioners did not consider the written medium sufficiently effective to communicate their desire: they thought they would have been able to show him their motivation only in a face to face meeting. Secondly, many aspiring missionaries put their hopes—and, sometimes, their petitions—in the hands of the procurators of the Indies. Thirdly, the relationship with the general was a very close and intimate one: Jesuits had to try to act on their own initiative, sometimes directly reaching him without official permission to apply for the Indies, concealing their desire from the family or not telling their direct superiors about it. Since the general often gave feedback on applications for the Indies, turning directly to him and following his advice could increase their chances of being selected. Finally, the case-study of a Sicilian Jesuit will show how all of these factors were closely intertwined in an overseas missionary assignment—sometimes for decades and until death.

Based on archival evidence and local practices, writing a petition for the Indies was not the only way to undertake a missionary career. Charlotte de Castelnau L’Estoile highlights the very low number of Portuguese *litterae indipetae*.¹ This was a consequence of the fact that Portuguese candidates, rather than forwarding a written request to the general, preferred to speak

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directly with their local superiors. The latter then forwarded lists of names to Rome, providing the general with information on the candidates they found suitable for the overseas mission. Something similar happened in the Gallo-Belgian province at the turn of the seventeenth centuries. According to Annick Delfosse many indipetæ never reached their destination. It was normal for superiors to read their pupils’ letters before forwarding them to Rome, and Belgian superiors often decided not to proceed with the second step of the application.

Many petitioners proposed a personal visit with the general, to present their cause face-to-face. A plea in person seemed to some of them the only option, because of the obstacles they saw before them. This approach was common during the generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (in office 1581–1615) when, as Camilla Russell has noted, ninety-two Italian Jesuits were sent to the East Indies as missionaries even though only twenty-three indipetæ are preserved in ARSI. Such a meager number, however, can also be a result of the complex vicissitudes of the Jesuit archives, as synthesized by Lamalle.

In any case, indipetæ were not “the only means of securing a missionary appointment” and, for the Italian Jesuits, living close to Rome could provide an additional opportunity—which their “rivals” scattered across the peninsula and beyond did not have. The proximity to the father general and his secretariat could seem decisive, if only for the chance of a more effective self-presentation, but proximity did not always mean “having access” to him, as a disappointed Salvatore Saverio Marino learned. In just two years (1617–18), Marino wrote eleven requests from Frascati, near Rome, and in one of them

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he complained about “missing” the general, disappointingly noting: “when I arrived, I was not allowed to see you because you were not available.”

Another factor could complicate, postpone, or even jeopardize a successful outcome for an indipeta: a succession at the top of the Society of Jesus. A new general could not be aware of the petitions approved by his predecessor in face-to-face meetings. Let us look at the case of the Savoyard Filippo Felice Carrocio, who, after a dozen annual requests, saw his application accepted by general Giovanni Paolo Oliva (1600–81). After Oliva’s death, his successor González de Santalla (1624–1705) reassured Carrocio of his destiny, inviting him to write as soon as a procurator of China had begun recruiting missionaries. Carrocio left for East Asia, arriving in Canton in 1688 and working under the name of Lo Fei-li in several Chinese missions until his death.

Even if a petitioner was given the chance to directly interact with the general, this could be insufficient on its own to secure the office. Bartolomeo Cuccanti, for instance, saw general Tamburini in Rome “on several occasions,” and talked to him, constantly reminding him “of my old desire for the Missions to the Indies” and using these opportunities also to “beg for comfort.” Nonetheless, in 1713 Cuccanti thought it safer to put his request in writing at least once, first of all, because since their discussions he had “more maturely [...] considered” his vocation. Moreover, Cuccanti noted how he had recently felt “a deeper desire in my heart,” one that compelled him to entirely give himself “to God and to the deliverance of those souls, so much loved by my Apostle Saint Francis Xavier, who sent me this call to the Indies.”

Writing a petition was usually recognized in the Italian assistancy as an essential moment on the path to a missionary assignment. Saverio D’Amato’s case demonstrates this well. The Sicilian had recently moved to the Roman province where he met with Tamburini, to whom he expressed “only [...] orally my desires, thinking that this was enough.” He bitterly regretted not having also a document testifying his vocation and, since someone recently told him...
of the probative value of a written application, he was afraid that his naivety could have undermined any chance for his departure to the Indies.

3.1.1 Procurers of the East Indies

In 1722, Angelo Agostino Polleri revealed to the general the strategy he was employing “to more easily obtain the license” to serve as a missionary. As his spiritual father had recommended, he had to simultaneously write to the general and to the procurator (of Goa in his case). When a face-to-face meeting with the superior general in Rome was not possible, petitioners needed further allies: and they could find them—with no small amount of inspiration—in the procurators for the Indies.

The Society of Jesus was divided into assistancies which were themselves divided into provinces. There were different kinds of procurators in its organizational structure, among which were those elected to go to Europe. This kind of procurator is not explicitly mentioned in the *Constitutiones*, where only a few references about procurators of another sort (such as the procurator general, provincial procurator, and procurators of the colleges) can be found. The provincial procurators were responsible for the Society’s temporal affairs: they “oversaw the management of the material possessions of the province through a sophisticated accounting and reviewing process,” and, apart from these administrative tasks, “represented the Society’s corporate interests to the outside world.” These procurators were often temporal coadjutors and, once appointed, did not move from their residential community. This chapter focuses not on them, but on the procurators elected by their provincial congregation, the ones traveling to Europe to defend the interests of their province, who usually were fully professed (admitted to the profession of the four vows).

Procurers periodically left their missions from every part of the world to go back to Europe. One of the goals of their travels was to attract interest and

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10 “per più facilmente ottenerne la licenza,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 181 (Genoa, February 21, 1722).
funding for their mission from some of the continent’s most eminent people, both lay and religious. During the centuries considered in this book, fascination for Chinese culture was widespread in Europe: kings, princes, popes, women and scholars (especially philosophers and scientists), had a particular curiosity about it. Procurators from East Asia often took part in book projects to describe this culture to eager European audiences: Jesuits like Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), Álvaro Semedo (1585–1658), Martino Martini (1614–61), Philippe Couplet (1623–93) and others wrote, collected, curated and published material which became very popular in Europe. In terms of what they brought back to their missions, Jesuit procurators transported goods of all kinds. One of the most requested items, especially among the Chinese court, were European books. They transferred money, religious objects—such as crucifixes, wine for the Eucharist, engravings, and devotional pictures—not to mention the shipment of herbs, medicines, and handicrafts (clocks, hourglasses, and musical instruments).

Moreover, from Europe to their missions, procurators sought to move people, typically visiting Jesuit colleges and schools to find new recruits. They directly approached Jesuits involved in their religious formation and fascinated them with stories about their missions, making promises and establishing special relationships with them. After leaving the schools, the procurators tried to use this information about potential candidates for their missions to influence the general’s selection of the petitioners writing to him. To understand why Jesuits petitioned for overseas assignments, the influence of the procurator’s

12 Among others, the Spanish duchess of Aveiro, Christina queen of Sweden and Maria Theresia Fugger von Welleburg were interested in overseas missions and in close contact with Jesuit missionaries. On the subject see, respectively: Ernest J. Burrus, Kino escribe a la Duquesa: Correspondencia del p. Eusebio Francisco Kino con la Duquesa de Aveiro y otros documentos (Madrid: Ediciones Jose Porrua Turanzas, 1964); Susanna Åkerman, Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine (Leiden: Brill, 1991); and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, Noble Patronage and Jesuit Missions: Maria Theresia Von Fugger-Wellenburg (1690–1762) and Jesuit Missionaries in China and Vietnam (Augsburg: Wißner, 2015).

13 On the endeavor of translating Confucius for a European readership, see David E. Mungello, Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), esp. the chapter “Confucius Sinarum philosophus as a culmination of Ricci’s accommodation.”

propaganda about his missions is one of the factors to be considered. Aliocha Maldavsky and Annick Delfosse have studied the galvanizing effect that the tours of procurators of the vice-province of China had in the areas of current Belgium and Northwestern Italy.\textsuperscript{15}

*Litterae indippetae,* however, show not only the effect that procurators had on an Indian vocation, but also their importance for greasing the mechanisms of an overseas appointment. The superior general had, of course, no personal knowledge of most petitioners. He could have met several Jesuits during his daily life, especially those living in the Roman area, but usually he had to rely on other people’s accounts. The local superiors had the first intermediary role, but they often showed themselves more willing to keep their best members with them, instead of giving them permission to depart.\textsuperscript{16} The procurators, on the contrary, had it in their interests to involve many new Jesuits in their enterprises, returning to their missionary countries with all the qualified people they could. The experiences of procurators of the vice-province of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remain illustrative of these desires and how procurators sought to fulfill them. Trigault, one of the first procurators from China, sailed back to Europe after a few years in the Ming empire. He edited and published Matteo Ricci’s (1552–1610) treatise in 1615, contributing to its immediate success throughout Europe. Ricci never became a procurator nor went back to his assistance, but its message reached European Jesuits nonetheless, through Trigault’s mediation. Once in Europe, during the 1610s, Trigault traveled as a procurator throughout the Jesuits’ colleges and residences and, as Annick Delfosse demonstrated, led petitions for the Indies in the *Gallo-Belgica* province to peak because of it.\textsuperscript{17} The admiration for an exceptional person and the spirit of emulation he inspired upon his return


\textsuperscript{16} See Chapter 2 of this book.

\textsuperscript{17} See Delfosse, “Ecce ego mitte me” and Edmund Lamalle, “La propagande du P. Nicolas Trigault en faveur des missions de Chine (1616),” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 1X (1945): 49–120.
were enhanced by the fact that he had entered the Society of Jesus in that same province. During his visit, Trigault made a stop in Belgium, where his manners, clothes, and stories of the missions left many of those he met open-mouthed and amazed. This reaction was true not only for the many curious and Jesuit supporters but also for the students and the Jesuits of a certain age, who were already aware of the first reports of the Chinese mission thanks to the Society’s publications of missionary accounts from there.

Procurators consistently appear in *indipetae* letters of the early modern period, especially in the months following their visit to a certain Jesuit residency. The procurators had the power to ignite a desire for the Indies, most of all in students who had some knowledge of the missionaries’ accounts in the Indies but had never seen them in person. Some petitioners even attributed to procurators the merit of having convinced them to join the Society of Jesus and having instilled in them the desire to serve abroad. For instance, Domenico Mario recalled in 1722 that, one year before entering the order, two procurators headed to Rome passed through Nice, his fatherland. Young Mario had listened to the stories of those “great conversions that were made by ours, and our immense labors for God’s glory” in the missions. The procurators’ tales had filled him with such a “desire to go and serve those Fathers” that a year later he asked to join the Society.

The procurators’ tours of Jesuit schools and houses throughout Europe provided also the ideal opportunities for the petitioners for the Indies to renew requests already made. A visit by a procurator—Jesuits knew—precisely marked a moment when new recruits would be needed for imminent voyages, and the chances to leave were higher than ever. In these cases, the aspirants who had always focused on just one destination, describing it as the only one they desired, came to understand that it was better for them to change their strategy and to be suddenly persuaded to serve at another place (the one mentioned in the procurator’s appeal), even if on the other side of their previous choice. The most insistent candidates even took advantage of the procurators’ tours to show the superior general how aware they were of the latest missionary expeditions, of the type of missionaries required, and of the operations’ logistical details. At times, writing a petition for the Indies was certainly a spontaneous initiative. Yet, many candidacies were born during or soon after the visits by the procurators (with many explicitly mentioning them). This circumstance confirms once again how external factors intervened in the *Indias*...
petendi process, factors that could encourage the drafting of a letter or constrain it.19

The Milanese Filippo Grimaldi (1638–1712) was the procurator of the Chinese province during the first years covered by this book: from 1686 to 1694.20 It was quite common for Jesuits coming from what is now Italy to serve in leadership roles during the last years of the Ming dynasty and under the first Qing emperors. After Matteo Ricci this happened in the case of the Tyrolean Martino Martini (in office 1650–59), the Sicilian Prospero Intorcetta (in office 1666–74), and Grimaldi. Grimaldi was born in Cuneo in 1638, and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of twenty.21 He left Lisbon for Macau in 1666, a particularly hard time for the Chinese mission: the Qing government had previously forbidden Christianity, a policy that remained until 1671. In that year, Grimaldi traveled to Beijing, where he collaborated with his confrere Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–88) in constructing scientific instruments. Because of these activities, Grimaldi gained the Kangxi (1654–1722) emperor’s favor and was appointed his ambassador for diplomatic missions to Moscow and Rome. Grimaldi arrived in 1689 in Rome, where important meetings and intellectual exchanges with the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) took place. Leibniz was an ardent sinophile, intrigued by all the extraordinary firsthand news that only the missionaries like Grimaldi could give him, both in person and via letters. Grimaldi also had the chance to visit the major continental courts (such as Paris, Munich, Krakow, and Vienna) and to meet with the most important personalities of the time, gathering support and funding for the China mission. After this extended European sojourn, Grimaldi returned to Beijing in 1694. Verbiest, though, had died six years earlier, and the emperor appointed Grimaldi to replace him as the president of his Mathematical Tribunal. Within the Society of Jesus, Grimaldi also rose quickly, becoming vice provincial in 1695 and serving as the

19 Delfosse, “Ecce ego mitte me,” passim.
21 See Grimaldi’s biographical profile in Ugo Baldini, “Engineering in the Missions and Missions as Engineering: Claudio Filippo Grimaldi until His Return to Beijing (1694),” in Tomás Pereira, s.f. (1646–1738). Life, Work and World, ed. Luís Filipe Barreto (Lisbon: CCCM, 2010), 75–184. In this article Baldini shows how hard it is to determine whether Grimaldi was a skilled mathematician and researcher, because of lack of contemporary sources confirming it—or the contrary. It is likely that Grimaldi was sent to China also thanks to his intellectual gifts and scientific studies; in conclusion “he was probably not very proficient in mathematics initially; he knew enough for routine work in Astronomy but was probably limited in the ‘pure’ and theoretical areas” (82, 84 and 87). See also Federico Masini, “Filippo Grimaldi,” in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani online, last modified 2002, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-grimaldi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.
rector of the College of Beijing from 1700 to 1701 and, finally, from 1703 to 1706, as the Visitor of the Japanese province and Chinese vice-province. Suspended by Charles Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710), who was trying to impose the last dictates of Rome in China, forbidding the Confucian rites for neo-Christians, Grimaldi died in Beijing in November 1712.

During Grimaldi’s presence in Europe between 1686 and 1690, there was a significant increase in interest among Jesuits for missionary assignments. Precisely in those years, litterae indipetae in the whole Italian assistancy rose dramatically, from forty-five in 1687 to seventy-one a year later to seventy-five the year after, and to ninety-five in 1691.22 His visit undoubtedly contributed to a general peak in the missionary requests and, even more, established a precedent for others in his position. Grimaldi’s European assignment was very complex and involved multiple tasks: on one side, the Kangxi emperor wanted him to “start a dialogue between the Chinese and the Russian Empires.”23 On the other hand, Verbiest entrusted him to support the Jesuit method in China, to obtain more autonomy for the Chinese vice-province, and to find new missionaries to bring back, especially “young Jesuits spurred by missionary zeal who also had scientific, technical or artistic skills.” The process of the missionary selection could work out smoothly or not, and Grimaldi’s case testifies how disappointment could have afflicted not only the procurators, but also the local Jesuits who wanted to set sail but were unable to. Grimaldi planned to bring back with him about forty new recruits, as he said to Leibniz; even if there is no unanimous source, in the end he could only add a few men to the Eastern mission.24

Grimaldi’s presence sparked the interests of many Jesuits, as in the case of Giovanni Andrea Ghersi, who showed himself well informed about the practical details of the coming expedition. Upon meeting Grimaldi, he renewed to the general his “more than ever fervent supplications for the long-awaited Missions of China.”25 To convince him, he explained that his father had recently died and his mother had decided to retire to a convent: it was for

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22 See Appendix. The preservation of litterae indipetae is not homogeneous and it depends on the assistancy where they were written. In the Italian case, it is quite regular from the end of the sixteenth century until 1729, when they suddenly disappear, only to reemerge after the restoration of the order.


25 “più che mai fervorose suppliche per le tante sospirate Missioni della Cina […] santo desiderio di staccarmi affatto dal mondo […] quel pocho che mio Padre lascia in beneficio del viaggio e della missione […] alcuni giovani […] a fine di dar principio con l’autorità Regia all’educazione della Gioventù Cinese […] nel medesimo tempo apprender la lingua,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 338 (Genoa, November 19, 1690).
him the ideal moment to fulfill his “holy desire to get away from the world.” In addition, Ghersi’s inheritance (“that little bit that my Father leaves”) could now be used “for the benefit of travel and mission.” Ghersi knew that Grimaldi was looking for “some young Jesuits [...] to start, under the imperial authority, a project of Chinese youth education,” and therefore applied for this assignment, proposing to teach to the Chinese and “at the same time, learning their language.” In another letter, he also showed awareness that the general had “benevolently granted to Grimaldi a young man,” who, however, had caused him “many difficulties.”26 He was probably referring to Pluro’s case, discussed below. This development was an opportunity for Ghersi, but even if he was aware of the latest news and did not lack initiative, he was not lucky enough to be called as Pluro’s substitute and never left Italy.

In 1690, the Italian Pantaleo Balbi updated the general on his availability to join Grimaldi in his journey back to China. Balbi’s spiritual father approved this idea, saying he only needed the general’s permission, thus Balbi propitiously wrote on the feast of the petitioners’ patron, Francis Xavier. Yet, he would be disappointed: despite the offer from Grimaldi, the general rejected his petition for unknown reasons and Balbi never left Italy, dying in Genoa forty years later.27

Federico di Massarano wrote four indipetæ, all of them dating during the years of Grimaldi’s European visit. In one of his later appeals to the general, Massarano pointed out that Grimaldi had promised to “willingly take me on his return to China, if I can get the general’s approval in time.”28 He pledged his will to “contribute as much as I can to the good of those [Chinese] missions, which I know are in need of temporal help.” Similarly to Ghersi’s case seen above, Massarano also offered financial assistance, as, over the years, he had saved some money received “as an annual pension from my parents.” Moreover, he proposed to bring with him “things that, according to the news received from Father Grimaldi, are much more useful to Missionaries in China than money.” These “useful” items mentioned in the letter were likely books, as can be deduced from other similar letters. The general, though, evidently did

26 “havae haivuta la bontà di concedergli un giovine per la Santa Missione della Cina [...] molte difficoltà,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 355 (Genoa, March 3, 1691).
27 Balbi died in Genoa in 1730 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 75).
28 “haverebbe volentieri condotto seco in questo suo ritorno dalla Cina, se havesse havuto tempo di procurarmene il beneplacito da Vostra Paternità [...] contribuire quanto posso al bene di quelle missioni [cinesi], che so essere bisognose d’aiuto temporale [...] una pensione annua da miei [...] cose che, conforme alla notizia havuta dal Padre Grimaldi, ho inteso essere nella Cina molto più utili a Missionarii di quel che sia il denaro,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 348 ([Milan, January 31, 1691]).
not grant Massarano’s request, as the young Jesuit wrote again a month later. Grimaldi’s return to Asia had been delayed, allowing Massarano the “opportunity to hope for the glory of going with him on his departure.” What happened to him remains unknown: most likely, he was able to leave for Asia as he never wrote another petition to the general.30

Even when procurators and generals perfectly coordinated to choose and approve a missionary, it might be the latter who would cause some difficulty—for instance, by his indecision. Procurators, moreover, could be disappointed because either they failed to persuade enough petitioners to join them, or they found those they convinced to be unqualified in the end: Grimaldi experienced both frustrations, as Carlo Giuseppe Pluro’s case shows. This Milanese Jesuit was informed about Grimaldi’s movements and, when the latter was about to leave Italy, he asked the general to finally receive “the grace, already granted me, to collaborate in the Chinese missions.” Pluro’s writing reflects his lack of education, making it quite hard to understand what he wanted to recount: apparently, in Genoa he met Grimaldi, who invited him to join the coming expedition. Pluro confirmed his availability but did not make a final commitment before Grimaldi left town. The procurator had at first shown interest in Pluro, likely for his practical skills as a cook and stone cutter, but he soon had to acknowledge that he lacked sufficient conviction. Grimaldi refused to bring him to China, and Pluro remained “behind, guilty of being late [...] deprived of this grace.” Pluro admitted that Grimaldi seemed to him “a little disgusted that I lost the courage to follow him by sea, especially because he already spent money for me, thinking that I am allowing myself to lose such an exceptional opportunity.” As a result, Pluro wrote to the general about his fears of always living “with constant scruple,” if he did not plead again. He proposed that he join the aforementioned Massarano: it is clear that the local “Indian” network worked very well, rapidly spreading information about life-changing events like imminent departures. Pluro wanted to

30 Dehergne believed “Masseranus” to be a candidate to the Chinese missions in 1690, however uncertain about his final destiny (Dehergne, Répertoire, 169). Massarano does not appear among the deceased nor the Jesuits who left with the Carreira da Índia ships.
31 “per tornare ad ottenere la gratia, già concessami, di potere andare a cooperare nelle Missione de Lacina [...] sono restato indietro né senza qualche scrupolo d’havere tardato, dal che venghi privato di questa gratia [...] un poco disgustato che mi perdessi d’animo di seguitarlo per mare, massime havendoli fatto far spese per terra, et in oltre pensando che mi lascio togliere una occasione di tanto merito [...] con continuo scrupolo [...] non [h]anno più speranza di cong[i]ongere li altri in Portugallo,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 465v (Milan, March 5, 1692).
serve Massarano in his already programmed journey “because for now there is no hope of joining the others in Portugal.” Plurò, whose many spelling errors indicate he was a temporal coadjutor (a domestic helper, and not an ordained priest), worked in the Milanese area.32 His final destiny remains unknown, and it is not unlikely that he left the Society of Jesus around 1700.33

Finally, a missionary selection could on the contrary be successful from the point of view of both the procurator and the petitioner. Thirty-year old Giovanni Paolo Gozano requested from Milan an assignment abroad. In 1689, he shared with General Thyrso González de Santalla (1624–1705) all the “consolation” he felt after Grimaldi had informed him that he had been elected to serve the procurator “in the Mission of China.”34 Departing Europe the next year (1690), Gozano reached the Chinese Empire four years later. He held several important positions, such as the Visitor of China and Japan and the Rector of the Jesuit College of Beijing. In 1724, he was exiled by the Emperor Yongzheng (r.1722–35) to Guangzhou and was later appointed vice-provincial of Japan, a position he held until he died in Macau in 1732.35 With Gozano, Grimaldi had chosen, on his own initiative, a capable person from Europe who successfully operated in such a different environment.

The influence of the procurators of the vice-province of China on the Italian Jesuits at the turn of the eighteenth century, however, was not constant. For instance, the next procurator Miguel do Amaral (1657–1730) toured Europe just four years after Grimaldi, between 1694 and 1699. His name was almost never mentioned in the Italian indipetae of the period, even if another peak in the documentation could be a direct effect of his promotion.36

The German Kaspar Kastner (1665–1709) was another procurator of the vice-province of China who visited the Italian assistancy; a few Italian indipetae mention his time in Europe (1702–07). Born in Munich, he embarked for Asia at the age of thirty-one and traveled extensively within the Chinese Empire until his appointment as procurator. Kastner held a number of other positions in China, such as serving as the emperor’s cartographer, president of the Mathematics council, and tutor of the prince. He died in Beijing, aged forty-four. In 1704, the Italian Ludovico Gonzaga asked the general’s “blessing for China” even though he admitted that, according to “what I really feel,”

33 His name does not appear on the Milanese Catalogi triennales from the year 1700 on (Arsi, Med. 60).
36 See Appendix.
he was destined to Japan as his first and greatest desire, “as soon as God will open it for the entrance of the Holy Gospel”—wishful thinking. Gonzaga explained that he did not want to lose such a “favorable opportunity to join Father Castner and many Companions” who were sailing to the East. In fact, he did that in 1706, and arrived in Goa at the end of the same year. Gonzaga soon left for Macau and then Beijing: from there, he gave in 1710 direct testimony of Kastner’s death, which happened a year earlier. In 1716 Gonzaga had to leave Beijing for health reasons; he moved finally to Macau, where he died the year after.

This procurator’s return to Europe was also referenced by another Jesuit from the Roman province, Agostino Cappelli, who wrote to the general “daring to beg the Goodness of Your Reverence to send me as Kastner’s companion in this journey.” Also Cappelli was destined to China. In general, however, the timespan corresponding to Kastner’s European tour was not characterized by an increased production of Italian litterae indipetae: they always ranged between twenty and forty each year. Either Kastner was not able to have a great effect on the Italian vocations, or this “indifference” was related to the problems that the China mission was experiencing at the time, which made not only the mission but the request to undertake it difficult even for the most stubborn dreamer. The main issue at the beginning of the eighteenth century was the so-called Rites controversy. Most of the Jesuits followed Ricci’s method (which pleased the Ming and Qing emperors) allowing the converts to perform the ceremonies in honor of Confucius and the ancestors, but there was no common policy among the different religious orders—not even within the Society of Jesus—on how deep the adaptation to local practices should and could be. Moreover, the “religious” issue was strictly intertwined with the political and nationalist interests of the missionaries operating in the Empire.

37 “La sua benedizione per la Cina […] secondo a quel che sento veramente […] come mio primo e gran desiderio, quando Iddio ne aprisse l’ingresso al Santo Evangelio […] opportunità si favorevole del Padre Castner e di tanti Compagni,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 193 (Rome, December 9, 1704).
39 ARSI, Japonica-Sinica 173, fol. 398–99 (Beijing, November 22, 1710).
40 Dehergne, Répertoire, 114.
41 “Ardito di supplicare la Bontà di Vostra Reverenza a volermi destinare suo compagno nel viaggio,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 194 (Rome, December 21, 1734). On Cappelli, see also chapter 4 of this book.
42 See Appendix.
43 On the Rites controversy see, for instance, David E. Mungello, The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning (Sankt Augustin–San Francisco: Steyler, 1994) and Nicolas
Beyond these cases related to the Chinese missions, it was quite common for Jesuits to request destinations previously unpopular, after their procurator’s passage.44 Such petitioners took advantage of the concrete opportunities offered by similar events, and they paid great attention to rumors about visits by procurators. Petitioners employed different strategies to secure an assignment: for instance, Stefano Serio first asked in 1698 for the generic “Indian Missions.”45 A few months later, however, the Sicilian indicated a more precise destination, the Philippines, explaining that he did so “after hearing that their procurator is in Rome now, looking for preachers and brothers for those places.”46 Serio was unsuccessful but undaunted: two years later, he asked to be sent to Chile because he knew that Domingo Marino, head of that province, was in need of new recruits.47 Serio’s preferences were based on available locations or those needing men—and he was not the only Jesuit reasoning this way. This approach shows a certain adaptability on one side and a readiness on the other, though unfortunately it did not result in leading Serio to any mission at all.

Finally, during the procurators’ promotional visits in Europe, many Jesuits wrote a single application. Often, these one-off requests were short and not very detailed; never followed by a second letter, these appeals were probably based on a short-lived enthusiasm, or on an unofficial obligation to apply and show a pious vocation—that was almost mandatory among Jesuits. These una tantiom petitions often moved numerically and geographically on the same trajectory as the procurators.48 Paolo Perremuto’s only petition (1705) requested the Chilean destination because its procurator visited him in Palermo. Perremuto never left Sicily, where he died many years later.49

This section has shown the strong influence procurators could have on Jesuits’ vocation for the Indies, in inspiring their missionary desire on one side and in determining the selections of the people involved on the other. Procurators

47 “haver udito trovarsi in Roma il Padre procuratore dell’Isole Filippine, il quale desía non meno predicatori che fratelli per quelle missioni,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 172 (Palermo, July 15, 1704).
48 ARSI, FG 750, fol. 232 (Palermo, March 22, 1706). Chile was born as vice-province of Paraguay in 1624, but from 1684 on became a province itself (Synopsis, column 665).
49 See Appendix.
50 ARSI, FG 750, fol. 217 (Palermo, July 19, 1705). Perremuto died in Sicily in 1734 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 110).
could interact with the candidates, verify their vocation, test their abilities, have epistolary relations with them, and make them half promises. In this pre-selection phase, probably, the procurators confronted local superiors and made preliminary agreements with them on which candidate should be considered or ignored. While a procurators’ recommendation seems to have been quite frequent, the general’s approval was nonetheless essential—otherwise a departure would have been impossible. From the requests of men selected by procurators, many were endorsed by the general who, with rare exceptions, had no reason to oppose a candidate he did not know personally and with whom often had never even come into epistolary contact before. Also emerging from the indipetae are those last-minute changes: defections, uncertain Jesuits, second thoughts of persons considered suitable who were not, ships that could not take off at the expected time, etc. Likely to be prepared for such inconveniences, the procurators were probably inclined to make promises and assurances to more Jesuits than they would have brought with them, meaning there would always be some Jesuits ready in the case of last moment’s problems. On this point, practically every petitioner declared a readiness to leave as soon as possible.\(^{50}\) The petitioner Francesco Corsetti, for instance, implored the general: “give me the order to leave immediately, barefoot, without any supplies for Germany, then in Muscovy, then in Batavia, then to China, or for any other part of the Eastern or Western Indies [Your Paternity] wants me to be, and you will see me execute Your orders.”\(^{51}\) Some of them saw in an already planned departure’s setback (storms or other accidents that caused some delay) the perfect chance, sent by God to give them more time and to help them join the other lucky companions already chosen.

As for the destinations, even in the general vagueness and indifference expressed by many candidates, there was a clear influence of the missions available at the time. The result was frequent and sudden changes among those who had asked for a place for years, as if it was the only one that really mattered. At the visit of a procurator looking for Jesuits to take with him to the other side of the world, these petitioners suddenly relocated their vocation and declared themselves ready to leave with him for a place never mentioned before, and with even greater enthusiasm. In fact, most of the aspiring missionaries preferred to have a safe and above all immediate destination, rather

\(^{50}\) With the exceptions of the several petitioners who asked the general for some time to wish farewell to their families, or to conclude personal business before leaving.

\(^{51}\) “mi comandi di partirmi subito a pie’ scalzi senz’alcun viatico per la Germania, indi in Moscovia, indi in Batavia, indi alla Cina; o per qualsivoglia altra parte dell’Indie, o orientali, o occidentali, che desideri, e subito mi udirà porre in esecuzione i suoi comandi,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 308 (Florence, March 9, 1715).
than an exhausting wait with an uncertain epilogue. In a case such as the vice-province of China, whose procurators were charismatic figures, good writers, well dressed, and often particularly brilliant individuals, candidates could easily be attracted by them. What Chinese procurators told about their missionary country, life at the Imperial court, the astronomic or diplomatic work (even if this was not what most of the Jesuits in China ever did)—everything could not but be exciting and extremely alluring for young Jesuits who had gotten used to studying, teaching, and preaching in small and “prosaic” towns.

3.2 The Generals and Their Replies

While the procurators did not play a fundamental role in the lives of every petitioner, many of them saw their fate strongly influenced and completely changed by these important figures who came from far away, and would return to those distant regions with their new recruits. The precise steps of the selection process for missionaries are not entirely clear, as they allowed both for the influence of a procurator and for different strategies on the part of the applicant. In short, the possible paths to an appointment varied considerably. Nevertheless, the general (and possibly his secretaries, who updated and informed him) had the last word on it.\textsuperscript{52} Each missionary assignment was also influenced by political factors, the candidates’ families, as well as the local superiors’ opinions. At the beginning of the 2000s Gian Carlo Roscioni concluded that it was almost impossible to apprehend the precise reason for an appointment, or why preference was shown towards one Jesuit instead of another. Roscioni argued that “further documents that tell us about this are almost non-existent; similarly, it appears that the ‘books’ or registers have disappeared, in which were noted the names (and notes, or judgments?) of the candidates for the Indies.”\textsuperscript{53} More recent archival studies by Mauro Brunello however show that \textit{ad hoc} registers were kept at least during the nineteenth century, and still survive in the Roman archives. These notebooks report some data concerning the Jesuits who asked for the Indies (names and destination if specified), and several codes and signs yet to be deciphered. They could allow


a better understanding of the criteria that guided the Roman Curia’s missionary policy.\footnote{The registers are preserved in ARSI, Secretariatus Missionum Societatis Iesu, Miscellanea 23. Catalogus sociorum missiones postulantium ab anno; see Mauro Brunello, “Nuova Compagnia di Gesù e vocazione missionaria: Le indentae dell’Archivium Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARS I) e l’archivio fotografico Acquararti,” Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa 45, no. 88 (2016): 21–44.}

Several litterae indipetae can provide some hints about this issue, including references to the replies of the generals in Rome. In such instances, the authors recalled how their previous requests were answered: they mention when they received the letter, and then how long they had waited before applying again, highlighting how they were following the given directions. Many others, on the contrary, complained that they never received any reply. Some, suspecting that the local superiors were not forwarding their requests to Rome, tried to reach the superior via a new petition or in person, with the aim of speaking to him directly.\footnote{As chapter 2 of this book shows.} The process of Jesuits applying and of the leadership selecting could follow a certain way of proceeding. A plausible synthesis of this modus operandi emerges from the correspondence, such as those concerning Francesco Corsetti. This Jesuit sent requests during two decades: 1704–05 and 1716–18. In one of his final letters, Corsetti described the three key phases of his vocation to the Indies: the first one was when he was in Frascati, and the superior general assured him that “certainly I will not fail to console you at the appropriate time.”\footnote{“a tempo opportuno non lascero certo di consolarvi […], si, ma doppo la Teologia […] le speranze, tante volte raffermatele, vanno horamai accostandosi al bramato lor termine,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 459 (Macerata, March 12, 1717).} The second one was with Corsetti in Castel Gandolfo when, once more, the general repeated his affirmative response: “yes, but after Theology.” The last stage was in 1715, when the general finally assured Corsetti that “the hopes that I reaffirmed so many times to you, now are approaching their desired conclusion.” Corsetti’s chronological survey indicates the delicate balance between the parties involved. The Jesuit received replies encouraging him not to lose hope, even if ten long years had passed from his first requests, while at the same enjoining obedience on the applicant to wait for the right moment for a possible appointment. With this subtle strategy intended to motivate Jesuit applicants to persist in their missionary vocation while at the same time exhorting them to obedience, it may be that the Society of Jesus deftly managed to keep many of its members within its ranks.

Letters such as those by Francesco Corsetti, with its hints of the superior general’s replies, prompt further investigation into the Roman “strategy” of a
missionary appointment. To this end, the letter-books of the replies sent by the superior general to members of the Society, and others—arranged and preserved according to each Province—provide important evidence of this strategy, namely the records of the generals’ replies to the petitions.\(^{57}\) Archival research demonstrates how the generals under consideration in this book, González de Santalla and Tamburini (in office 1687–1705 and 1706–1730) usually replied to received correspondence within a few weeks. Their answers tended to include a statement of gratitude to the petitioner and an expression of hope that he might resemble the role model *par excellence* Francis Xavier (1506–52), not only in his desire to go to the Indies but, more importantly, in virtue as well.\(^{58}\)

If the applicant was still a student, the Roman curia underscored the importance of achieving a good education within the Society of Jesus. In most cases these replies avoided providing explicit or specific promises, but rather simply expressed the wish that, in future, at the right time, a departure to the Indies might be possible.\(^{59}\) If petitioners distinguished themselves for becoming particularly insistent and impatient, the general invited them to wait and persist in their vocation.\(^{60}\) If a Jesuit expressed his conviction, as sometimes occurred, that only through an appointment to the Indies could he find the true fulfillment of his vocation and life in the Society—and that this would not be possible in his own province—he was reminded of the importance to


\(^{58}\) Especially after Xavier’s canonization (1622), his feast day on December 3 was a preferred time for many to write their request.

\(^{59}\) See for instance ARSI, *Sic.* 39, fol. 88r (Palermo, July 2, 1703).

\(^{60}\) As in ARSI, *Sic.* 40, fol. 3 (Messina, January s.d., 1704).
think about his present tasks and be ready to work anywhere.\footnote{As advised in ARSI, Sic. 40, fol. 13’ (Mazara, January 28, 1704).} A number of Jesuits evidently were not satisfied with their daily lives and repeatedly complained about it: in reply, the general reprimanded them for their uneasiness. In one letter, Santalla’s secretary wrote: “I wish for Your Reverence the utmost peace to your soul, and satisfaction: but be sure that this cannot depend on the change of place and role that you are seeking,” continuing to advise that, he should “rather be happy with all of the responsibilities that keep you occupied where you are.”\footnote{“ogni maggior quiete d’animo, e sodisfazione: ma sia pur certo, che questa non può dipendere dalla mutazione ch’ella designava di luogo, e d’officio […] Piuttosto parmi che abbia giusta occasione di più contentarsi nei ministerii, ne’ quali viene costi occupato,” ARSI, Sic. 40, fol. 144v (Palermo, November 3, 1704).} Therefore, the Roman answers to the petitions for the Indies reveal much about the petitions, their authors, and the larger contexts involved, especially when combining this information with the \textit{litterae indipetae} of the same period.

\subsection*{3.2.1 Ignazio Maria Romeo (1676–1724?)}

Ignazio Maria Romeo was born in Palermo in 1676, and entered the Society of Jesus when he was sixteen. As he specified in desperation on one occasion, in his lifetime he sent more than thirty \textit{litterae indipetae} without ever managing to leave for the Indies.\footnote{Romeo explicitly mentioned the number in ARSI, FG 750, fol. 464 (Palermo, March 15, 1717). His extant letters date 1702–20 and are preserved in FG 750 and 751.} This was despite the fact that Ignazio was one of the fortunate few applicants actually selected to leave, only to have his appointment rescinded, as this chapter will show. Thanks to the generals’ answers to the members of the Sicilian province, it is possible to recover the content of the disappeared letters as well. More significantly, the letter-books reveal the existence of other documents related to Romeo’s case, providing evidence that a further important protagonist in this “vocational story” was played by Ignazio’s father, Ignazio Romeo, marquis del Magnisi.\footnote{Ignazio’s father wrote to the superior general many more times than the letters now preserved, exchanging mainly vague sentiments of gratitude and congratulations (Free, “Many Faces,” 375 n26). For the potentially complicated relationship between Jesuits and their spiritual and natural fathers see Adriano Prosperi, “Il figlio, il padre, il gesuita: Un testo di Antonio Possevino,” \textit{Rinascimento}, 2014, 112–55 and \textit{La vocazione. Storie di gesuiti tra Cinquecento e Seicento} (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), esp. 170–87. See also Miriam Turrini, “La vita scelta?: Appunti per una storia della vocazione in età moderna,” in \textit{Dai cantieri della storia: Liber amicorum per Paolo Prodi} (Bologna: Clueb, 2007), 145–59. For a general overview of fathers and sons in the early modern period, see the now-classic (but also criticized and somewhat dated) Philippe Ariès, \textit{L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime} (Paris: Seuil, 1963).} Fathers (in most cases, but also
mothers and brothers/sisters) could become involved in supporting a petitioner's application or, more frequently, taking a position against it. There were many cases where families apparently tried to stand in the way of a departure to the Indies, and several letters in the *Epistulae generalium* were addressed to them, with the Roman curia trying to understand if there were specific reasons why the candidate should not depart (above all, on account of health issues, possibly unknown to the superiors).

Going back to Ignazio, his first extant request was sent in January 1702, although he recalls in this letter that in fact it was his second petition already (the general's registers confirm that a petition was sent in 1701). At this time, the Sicilian Jesuit was in his mid-twenties and enjoyed good health. He was teaching Grammar and Humanities at the College of Palermo, and had begun missionary and preaching activities within his province. In his fifth letter to the general (1702), Ignazio remarked on his physical well-being, which he described as "perfect:" in his view, it was a divine gift granted to him "for the good of the Indians" (for whose salvation he wished to work), and that before his cure "all the physicians were talking about my death as imminent, and thought a recovery to be impossible." Before receiving his hoped-for official permission to depart for the Indies, as with many of his companions, Ignazio doubted seriously that he would ever be sent. He wrote to the general at the end of 1703 that he especially did not trust his provincial: "he will try to obstruct my departure." Ignazio even hypothesized that "he will raise the scarcity of [manpower in] the Sicilian province, to which he will add the disapproval of my relatives, which in truth are neither well founded nor of real concern." Indeed, Ignazio eventually was stopped from leaving for the Indies on account of these very reasons, as we shall see.

Yet, in 1704, his prospects looked very bright for, in one way or another, Ignazio managed to convince superior general González with his requests, and he received the "license" for the Indies aged twenty-eight years. His ecstatic response to this news still can be read in one of his letters, signing his message

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65 This was actually his second *indipet a*, and the general's registers confirm that another petition was sent in 1701: ARSI, FG 750, fol. 104 (Palermo, January s.d., 1702).
66 ARSI, Sic. 95, fol. 100 (*Catalogus Triennalis, 1705*).
67 "salute [...] perfettissima miè stata concessa solo a bene dell'Indiani [...] si parlava di morte da tutti i Medici, e davano il mio riavimento per impossibile," ARSI, FG 750, fol. 117 (Palermo, October 17, 1702).
68 "Padre provinciale mi sarà di qualche impedimento [...] allegherà egli le scarsezze della Provincia, e l'accompagnerà co' dissapori de' miei Parenti, ma in verità non fondati né di sode conseguenze," ARSI, FG 750, fol. 151 (Palermo, December 21, 1703). Here and throughout, "parenti" has been translated as "relatives;" however, it could also have the more restrictive meaning of "parents."
of copious thanks to the general with a new name, “the Happiest Indian,” written “with my whole heart in this quill.” In his excitement, he wished to leave as soon as possible—also because he was aware that he was at risk of being prevented from doing it, and he invited the general to be cautious. In the Post Scriptum to this enthusiastic letter, Ignazio begged the general to call him “as soon as possible to the ship, otherwise these good Fathers will cause some substantial impediment.” It is not possible to establish with certainty the reasons why the Jesuits in Palermo apparently were trying to persuade Ignazio’s father, the marquis, that leaving for the Indies was too dangerous for his son. They may have been worried for Ignazio’s health (although it seemed to have improved at this time). They may have been fond of their companion and wished him to stay and work in their province (Ignazio was not the only Jesuit from Sicily, during these decades, to complain about what was seen as their superiors’ excessive attachment to keeping their young charges at home). They also may simply have been telling the marquis what he wanted (and asked) to hear. In this case, the only source is Ignazio’s impressions. Rather optimistically, however, he claimed in his letters to General González that his father ended up approving of the decision, even if he was becoming concerned on account of “some falsehoods spread by those good Jesuits against the Indies; I see him become alarmed, and I am unable to give him the required answers.” Ignazio nevertheless remained confident that his father would be convinced by his arguments, even if he warned the general not to waste precious time before sending him.

Some days after this letter (the last to carry an optimistic tone), Ignazio wrote again to Rome, this time stricken with panic. He described himself as “terribly needy and afflicted” and “imploring,” explained how, regarding his “Indian departure,” he had learned that it had been canceled because of his mother’s protests. He was desperate and turned to the superior general as if he were a judge in a court of law: “I appeal to the gracious and fatherly tribunal of Your Reverence [...] to your authority and holy Zeal, which burns in your chest.” The level of misery in which Ignazio found himself already can be discerned from the status of his mother and her connections—the marchioness

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69 “Felicissimo Indiano [...] con il cuore tutto sulla penna [...] prievo [...] a chiamarmi presto in Nave, altrimenti questi buoni Padri saran cagione di qualche sodo impedimento [...] dicerie somministrate da quei buoni Padri contro all’Indie, vedo turbarsi quello, e me impedito del dar le dovute risposte,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 157 (Palermo, January 24, 1704).

70 “bisognavolissimo ed afflittissimo [...] supplichevole [...] intorno alla mia partenza Indiana [...] Nel tribunale della corte, e paterna carità di Vostra Reverenza m’appello [...] alla sua autorità ed al santo Zelo, che l’arde in petto,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 162 (Palermo, March 6, 1704).
was godmother to the viceroy of Sicily, Francesco Del Giudice (1647–1725; in office from 1701), as Ignazio mentioned twice in his letters, and that the latter possibly intervened to stop him from departing.\footnote{In 1704, Ignazio complained about the marchioness’ intrusion in his cause (ARS\textsc{I}, \textit{FG} 750, fol. 162, Palermo, March 6, 1704) and, more than ten years later, he wrote that his departure had been previously canceled after the intervention of his parents and the viceroy (ARS\textsc{I}, \textit{FG} 751, fol. 464, Marsala, March 15, 1717). About the latter, at the time Francesco Del Giudice, see http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-del-giudice_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.}

Ignazio was indignant. He had been ordered by the provincial to prepare to leave for Cádiz or Genoa, and for this reason he began to bid farewell to his Jesuit brothers and family. But upon doing so, the provincial told him that he could not leave anymore because his mother, the marchioness, needed him. Ignazio expressed his disbelief that the Society of Jesus was unable to do something that appeared to him not only possible but also “simple”—to resist his mother’s “tearful assaults,” as he himself already had done.\footnote{“superar facilmente gl’assalti lagrismosi di mia Madre […] mi vedo preclusa quasi dell’in tutto la strada all’Indie bramate se il negozio debba dipendere dal sì di mia Madre […] labirinto […] di ciò son contento, e quando altro a Dio non possa sacrificare, gli sacrificerò l’allontanamento de’ parenti e della propria Provincia,” AR\textsc{I}, \textit{FG} 750, fol. 162 (Palermo, March 6, 1704).} The Jesuit was inconsolable, not only because his departure thus had been delayed, but also because he feared it would never take place: “the path to my longed-for Indies is almost entirely precluded to me, if the matter must depend on the ‘yes’ of my Mother.” This situation seemed to him like a “labyrinth,” but he remained hopeful that the general would release him from this \textit{impasse}.

Ignazio correctly supposed that his father was involved in the matter as well. He then carefully set about listing the reasons why he should not remain in Sicily. First, his father probably feared that Ignazio never would leave Europe, simply remaining stuck in Spain. The separation from his family would have been an unnecessary offering, given that it did not include the evangelization of the Indies. If this was the case, he did not care: “I am glad of it, for when it is not possible to sacrifice something else to God, I will sacrifice to him my departure from my relatives and my province.” Curiously, however, this was the only concern that the marquis did not mention at all in his letter to the superior general.

Second, Ignazio assumed—very correctly this time—that his father wanted him to be (at least, partially) responsible for the Magnisi household. One of the marquis’s reasons for wishing to keep his eldest son in Sicily was that his second son would not be able to manage everything in his absence. Like every Jesuit, Ignazio had left his family already when he joined the order, but it was
felt that he would have been available nevertheless to assist his family from Sicily or nearby. Even the geographically closer Tunisia was, for instance, a destination that his parents would have accepted more peacefully, but Ignazio had quite openly refused it before. In the Western or Eastern Indies, instead, his family knew that it was unlikely that he would ever return and that, from the moment of his departure, he would no longer be able to assist his young siblings and sick mother, while his father feared that he or his second son could die suddenly and leave the Magnisi family in difficulty. As a Jesuit priest, Ignazio would not have been able to inherit the title of marquis delli Magnisi. By being based in Sicily, however, with his father too old and his brothers too young, the eldest son at least could maintain some role of oversight within his family. Given the elevated status of the family, such decisions about who would head the family, and who was permitted to leave it, carried consequences that went beyond it, and likely impacted on the socio-political fabric in which the Jesuits were operating in Sicily, making difficult for poor Ignazio to overcome his family’s determination. The young Jesuit did not conceal his anger or, even more, his refusal to comply, indicating that the expectation of help from him on the part of his father was only a “chimera,” and that he would have helped his house “solely with my prayers.” He concluded his letter, nevertheless, on an optimistic note, observing that his mother’s emotionally-charged protest was almost over, and that she seemed “now […] quite pacified.” However, like many of his fellow-petitioners, Ignazio was too prone to see the bright side, and he ignored other more concrete signs.

After some time, the beleaguered Ignazio returned to the subject in yet another letter to the general, underlining all the months (five!) that had passed since their last correspondence. He was unable to “find the Indies in Sicily; I am waiting to be consoled by the Real Indies.” Since their last communication, Ignazio remained “silent, directing all possible energies towards calming my relatives (who oppose my Indian move).” This is what the general had enjoined

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73 Ignazio wrote one year before that the provincial superior wanted to send him as a missionary to Tunis, but he refused this destination because Sicily and North Africa were not distant enough, and his parents would have called him back every time they wanted to (arsi, FG 750, fol. 135, Sciacca, April 26, 1703).

74 “chimera, aiuterò sol la sua casa colle sole orazioni […] hor […] quasi placate,” arsi, FG 750, fol. 135.

75 “ritrovar l’Indie in Sicilia, aspetto d’esser consolato coll’Indie Reali […] sto in silenzio, e pongo tutte le possibili industrie per acquetare i miei Parenti (contrarii alla mia mossaa Indiana) […] ìo che mai ostinati […] Gesuiti Santi, Dotti, e Prudenti […] sicuri del non contravvenire al divino volere impedendo la mia partenza […] pronto a partenza furtiva, e ad ogn’altro, fosse necessario per assecondare alle divine chiamate,” arsi, FG 750, fol. 170 (Palermo, July 12, 1704).
him to do, but, he wrote, they seemed “more stubborn than ever.” As to why they refused to change their minds, Ignazio explained that this was because the spiritual care of his parents was in the hands of the same Jesuits who were stopping him from leaving. These priests, described as “holy, learned and cautious,” were constantly reassuring his parents they were “not contravening the divine will by wishing to prevent my departure.” Ignazio felt trapped as the result of a conspiratorial alliance between his parents, possibly the viceroy, and his Sicilian superiors. But he remained firm in his determination to leave, and he even seemed to calculate that he could count on the general’s support, when he confided that he was “ready for a stealthy departure, and for anything else necessary to support my divine callings.”

Ignazio, however, continued to be obliged to wait, although, remarkably, he remained hopeful about his future in the Indies. He wrote regular letters to Rome, on some occasions waiting for more time than usual, to demonstrate his “obedient” respect for the general’s will. For his part, the latter replied with the same regularity, always repeating how Ignazio’s departure was in the hands of God. Ignazio’s penultimate petition was written in 1717. In many respects this was a different era from the one in which he first wrote of his missionary vocation: thirteen years had passed since he received his unrealised “license;” by now, his correspondent was General Tamburini (in office 1706–30), and Ignazio himself was forty-one years old. He recalled in his letter: “I have not written for two-and-a-half years, and I will not repeat here my well-known requests for the Missions of the Indies, because I remained hopeful, in accord with your paternal letters, that if an opening were to occur [in the missions], you would have satisfied me.”

The next sections will show that the general was not as forthcoming in encouraging Ignazio’s hope as would appear here, even though Ignazio gives the impression in his letters that Tamburini repeatedly fueled his expectations of an imminent departure.

By 1717, then, and despite the objectively reduced likelihood of ever realizing his aim, Ignazio was no less motivated than before, except that this time he included an admission of envy—a “holy envy” of course. He saw many of his province leaving for the Indies and after a novena to Xavier, he felt “inspired” to

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76 “Sono due anni e mezzo, che non scrivo a Vostra Paternità, e non le replico le mie ben consapute istanze delle Missioni dell’Indie, perché stavo coerentemente alle paterne sue lettere sulla speranza, che nell’apertura se l’incontrarebbero, m’avesse esaudito [...] santa invidia [...] or veggo esauditi [...] molti di questa Provincia, e fatta la Novena a San Francesco Saverio [...] mi sento ispirato a ricordare a Vostra Paternità le mie brame con tutta la caldezza possibile, le accompare colla dovuta indifferenza [...] non sono si avanzato nell’età, che è sol di quarant’anni, che non possa cimentarmi a viaggi lunghi, ed a qualunque fatiga,” ARSI, FG 759, fol. 464 (Palermo, March 15, 1717).
remind the general of his “yearnings, with all possible warmth and accompanying them with the required indifference.” All things considered, he optimistically added: “I am not so advanced in years, for I am only 41, not so old that I am unable to endure long journeys and every possible hardship.” He reminded his correspondent of how long his desire had persisted: “from the time of my entry to the Society of Jesus.” He also indicated where the new general could find the written evidence of his vocation, in the Roman Archives: “if you conduct a search from the year 1702, it is possible to find there more than thirty of my letters, in part addressed to Your Paternity, in part to your predecessor [...], who appointed me [to the New World missions] in 1704, and as I was preparing to leave, everything was thrown into confusion by my domestic enemies.”

About the latter, he specified how “they are all dead now, and cannot stop me anymore.”

Ignazio’s last letter to the general (1720) makes no mention of the Indian missions, but only of the Sicilian ones, whose situation was a great concern to him. They seemed to him to have become “too disgraced and despised by ‘ours’ [Sicilian Jesuits].” After failing in his aim and even after his relatives’ death, Ignazio seems to have found a different but equally satisfactory meaning to his Jesuit vocation in the local missions. Yet, a number of other documentary testimonies hint at a different outcome. For example, unusually, Ignazio’s name is not included on the list of the deceased Jesuits and, in browsing the copies of the letters sent by the generals to the Sicilians, it would seem possible to rewrite Ignazio’s story and find unexpected developments along the way. At the same time, answers can be found in these sources to some unresolved questions about the appointment process to the Indies, and the role in this process played by the intensely personal and long-standing correspondence exchanged between a number of Jesuits (and on occasion their families, as in this case) and the general of the Society of Jesus.

The Sicilian letter-books reveal a different face of Ignazio. Even before his first petitions, his name was mentioned for the first time in a reply to his father, from general González in 1698. The latter was keen to reassure the marquis that Ignazio, who as we know had some health problems, was well taken care

77 “fin dall’ingresso nella Compagnia [...] se farà ricercare fin dal 1702, troverà in cotesto Archivio più di trenta mie lettere parte indirizzate a Vostra Paternità, e parte all’Antecessore [...] il quale nel 1704 mi ci disegnò, ed intrapresi la partenza, e dai miei nimici domestici [...] (li quali tutti son morti, e non possono più impedire) mi fu frastornata,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 464.

78 “troppo dicaduto, e vilipeso da nostri in questa Provincia,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 80 (Agrigento, January 19, 1720). Even if this letter is preserved among the indipetae, it cannot be considered a petition for the Indies.
of in the Society. He declared: “Never shall the Society of Jesus nor I fail to keep a watchful eye of Charity upon Your Most Illustrious Lord’s firstborn, and our brother Romeo.”\textsuperscript{79} He reassured the marquis that he, as father, had charge over the medical care of his son, according to his wish. In the same register, there are at least two further letters to Ignazio’s father (in 1699 and 17\textsuperscript{th} century), containing thanks and congratulations.\textsuperscript{80} The relationship between the Magnisi family and the Jesuit leadership in Rome (and probably Sicily) was quite close. In the same letter-book, the general answered a lost letter written by Ignazio, advising him to keep his hope alive and to get better as soon as possible, in order to ensure his speedy departure for the Indies: “If your spiritual fervor were to correspond to your physical health, I would not be reluctant to satisfy your request [...] But for now it is advisable for you to recover completely from your illness, and to contain your apostolic desire within this college.”\textsuperscript{81}

Ignazio indeed mentions this illness (in his first surviving petition from 17\textsuperscript{th} century), from which he claims to be healed. How can we confirm whether his health condition was improving? One of the most important sources to access this kind of information on “unknown” Jesuits are the Triennial Catalogs (compiled approximately every three years), which registered the main data about every single Jesuit in the world.\textsuperscript{82} The First Catalog reported name and origins, ...

\textsuperscript{79} “Non mai né la Compagnia, né io lasceremo di riguardare con occhio di attentissima Carità il primogenito di Vostra Signoria Illustissima e nostro fratello Romeo,” ARSI, Sic. 38, fol. 18\textsuperscript{v} (Palermo, July 28, 1698).

\textsuperscript{80} ARSI, Sic. 38, fol. 8\textsuperscript{r} (Palermo, August 10, 1699) and fol. 122\textsuperscript{r} (Palermo, March s.d., 17\textsuperscript{th} century).

\textsuperscript{81} “Se al fervore dello spirito corrispondesse in voi il vigore del corpo, non sarei alieno dall'esaudire le vostre istanze [...] Ma per ora conviene, che attendiate a risanare dalle vostre indisposizioni, e a contenere dentro i termini di cotesto Collegio i vostri apostolici desiderii,” ARSI, Sic. 38, fol. 224\textsuperscript{r} (Palermo, August 29, 1701).

time in the Society, accomplished studies and grades, and performed tasks. The Second Catalog—complimentary but “secret”—contained deeper considerations about every Jesuit and his personal attitudes, virtues, defects, and intelligence. It also tried a “psychological” profiling of his person and talents, in order to spend every human resource in the best way for the Society. As for Ignazio, in 1693 the Jesuit catalogs described him as healthy; three years later, he was reported as ill, but then again fit by 1700. It seems that Ignazio’s strength was the object of different interpretations: in 1701, for instance, the general still referred to this as a reason to leave him in Sicily. In his native island he certainly would have not had “all the hardships of the Missions in the Indies,” but his merits would have “undoubtedly compensated for them.”

This, however, was not a definitive outcome, because in the subsequent epistolary exchanges, Ignazio managed to convince the general that he would be a perfect missionary for the “real” Indies. At the beginning of 1704, Ignazio received a letter “with the longed-for notification to set forth.” The provincial was appointed to take care of the “details of the arrangement [...] concerning the circumstances pertaining to departure and navigation.” The general wished him the best: “I hope that the Lord with brotherly spirit will keep alight always the holy fire of zeal for his divine glory, and for the health of souls; and that he keeps you long in bodily strength for this heavenly undertaking.” This was the typical tone of this kind of letter, which finally confirmed to a Jesuit the “license” to leave for the Indies as a missionary.

After some days of joy, Ignazio was sorely disappointed. The Epistulae generalium clarify the reasons: it was an immediate reaction to Ignazio’s family, who protested vociferously against his appointment in a letter signed by the marquis himself. He recounted to the general how his son visited him at home “with the objective of receiving ‘license’ to leave for the Indies, where he says...
that God is calling him.” The marquis was actually not convinced it was God who called Ignazio, but it seemed to him more like a juvenile whim. This sentence also suggests that, in the case of appointments to the Indies, “license” could sometimes, in a way, be sought also from the family of the candidate. This news came to him completely out of the blue: Ignazio never mentioned this strange idea, “even if his mother did have some knowledge of his vocation.” The marquis proceeds to place the responsibility for the ensuing drama squarely on his wife, who he described as not being psychologically prepared for a farewell. Facing the prospect of “such a sudden departure, becoming overwhelmed by the violence of an intolerable grief, she cried to such an extent as to seem almost in danger of dying.”

The marquis immediately turned to the provincial for help, adding that “I would not have left my place at his feet, if he had not granted me so much time as he was able to do previously.” In writing to the general now, he wished to set out “sincere and truthful information about the state of my House (family affairs),” and the reasons why Ignazio should not leave. First of all, his son’s health was not as good as Ignazio claimed: no miracle managed to cure him completely, and from the time of his entry to the Society of Jesus, he had been ill often. Second, the Magnisi couple had borne twenty children, but “God [...] called to Himself half of them, granting them in advance the possession of that glory for which we were created;” Ignazio now was the firstborn among them. All the others were young or very young: “three of them are spinsters not yet ‘placed’ [in marriage or convents]; of the other five, the eldest is not yet fourteen, and the last two are not yet weaned.” As for the marquis, he was advanced in years (for the period), at forty-eight, and depicted himself too old to have enough strength to take care of all of them. Further, he had no one to rely on: “I have neither father nor mother, nor brothers or sisters.” The same happened for his wife, whom he described as not even able to look after herself. The marchioness was forty-four years old, “ailing, devastated by twenty

86 “a fin di prender licenza per andarsene all’Indie, ove egli dice che Dio lo chiamà [...] ancorché avesse avuto sua madre qualche notizia della sua vocazione [...] si affrettata l’esecuzione della partenza, che soprafatta da violenza di cordoglio intollerabile, l’ha pianto in pericolo quasi evidente di morire,” ARSI, Sic. 188, fol. 133 (Palermo, 4 March 1704).

87 “non mi sarei mosso da suoi piedi, se prima non mi avesse conceduto tanto di tempo quanto si potesse [...] una sincera e veridica informazione dello stato presente della mia Casa [...] Dio [...] la metà l’ha chiamato a sé, antecipandole il possesso di quella gloria, per cui fummo creati [...] tre son Zitelle non ancora collocate, dell’altri cinque il più grande non ha 14 anni, e l’ultimi due sono ancora lattanti [...] non ho Padre né madre, né fratelli né sorelle [...] di poca salute, e disfatta da 20 parti, oltre l’abordi framezzati, quando uno, e quando due da un parto all’altro, patisce d’un flato ippocondriaco, che la rende talvolta quasi fuor di se stessa,” ARSI, Sic. 188, fol. 133.
deliveries, in addition to the many miscarriages that she suffered (often one or two) between one childbirth and another; she suffers a condition founded in hypochondria, that causes her on occasion almost to go out of her mind."

According to the marquis, Ignazio was the last hope for his family: “the only child, from whom we may gain some benefit from having had him, if for nothing else, at least to assist in closing our eyes [after death].”\textsuperscript{88} If he were to leave them for the Indies, the physicians who took care of the marchioness were afraid that “either she would go completely mad, or that she would die of an apoplectic fit.” If this were to take place, as the doctors considered likely, the marquis reminded the superior general that he would have no son, no wife, and his remaining children to take care of. He pointed out to the general, finally, the biblical duty to assist one’s parents: “divine and human laws prescribe every assistance from sons and daughters.” He placed all these reflections, requests, and details about his family’s circumstances, within a tone of formal humility and submission: “like a child to his father.” In these epistolary exchanges, the general not only was the spiritual father of Ignazio, but of Ignazio’s natural father too, who was begging/demanding him not to let his son go. This submission was, in fact, a rhetorical strategy as well, and the marquis knew he had some potential sway over the superior general, on account of his elevated social position and the apparent material support he had given to the Society. From this correspondence sent from Sicily, he thus sought to enlist these advantages to attempt to persuade the general of the Society of Jesus in Rome to do as he wished.

The contrasting letters sent to Rome about this case—from the Sicilian marquis closely connected to the Society of Jesus, and from his son with a burning vocation to depart for the Indies—reveal the difficult position created for the general to produce replies to both of them. In the first place, in late-March 1704 general González sent reassurances to the marquis about his concerns for his son: “the obligation to you, and your Lady Consort, shall not be overlooked, in resolving the departure of Father Romeo, your son.”\textsuperscript{89} Indeed he had warned the provincial about the importance of the peace of the Magnisi family, which was held “very close to my heart.” Then, a few days later, González wrote to Ignazio with a brief note of praise about the “holy

\textsuperscript{88} “l’unico figlio, di cui potessimo far capitale d’averlo, se non per altro, almeno assistente al capezzale per serrarci l’occhi […] o che sia per uscire affatto di cervello, o che sia per restar morta di colpo apopletico […] le leggi Divine et humane prescrivono da figli ogni soccorso […] come figlio a Padre,” ARSI, Sic. 188, fol. 133.

\textsuperscript{89} “non si mancherà dei dovuti riguardi verso la persona, e della sua Signora Consorte, nel risolvere la partenza del Padre Romeo loro figlio […] sommamente a cuore,” ARSI, Sic. 40, fol. 47” (Palermo, March 31, 1704).
At the same time, he suggested he re-discuss his vocation with them, unmoved about the importance of securing their approval along with his: “before leaving these shores, it is advisable to calm your Lord Father and Lady Mother, somehow.” From the surviving documentation on the matter, however, it was unlikely that the marquis and the marchioness would change their mind: on the contrary, the head of the family made himself very clear in his letter to the general about his decision not to let Ignazio go, and apparently the Society in this case was committed to following the wishes of this well-connected family. The Roman curia probably was well aware that the Jesuit had little chance of leaving while his parents were alive. However, Ignazio was not discouraged definitively (also because this situation may well have changed at any moment), and instead recommended that he continue with his petitions, and with trying to convince his parents about his vocation.

Throughout the rest of that same year (1704), the general received further requests from Ignazio, without, however, renewing his “licence” for departure to the Indies. He tried to console him instead and, while perhaps not believing in what he was promising (or at least keeping in mind that the situation could change if his parents were to pass away), he wrote: “I do not doubt that, little by little, with the help of time, Your Reverence will be able to efficaciously, as well as gently, conquer your relatives' souls,” in such a way that they would not suffer excessively on account of the separation. General González would have been praying to the Lord for this, but only “if this is God’s will [...] without offense to people [...] on every account they deserve the most particular respect, from you and from me.” The Sicilian Epistulae generalium contain many replies to letters sent from Ignazio over the following years that are no longer preserved. Ignazio knew that his father and probably his superiors continued to divert the course of his destiny away from the overseas missions. Like every other Jesuit, however, Ignazio could directly turn to the general via letters soli, i.e. destined for his eyes only (with no intermediation of superiors). He may have received constant replies because of his elevated social status, but very probably it was because of it that he never departed. The sway of his family in Sicilian life and

90 “santa alienazione da’ Parenti che Vostra Reverenza esprime [...] ma prima di partir di costà conviene che in qualche modo acquieti i suoi Signori Padre e Madre,” ARSI, Sic. 40, fol. 50 (Palermo, April s.d., 1704).

91 “Non diffido, che a poco a poco, e coll’aiuto del tempo Vostra Paternità non possa efficacemente insieme e soavemente espugnar l’animo de’ suoi congiunti [...] se questa è Sua volontà [...] senza offesa di persone [...] per ogni motivo meritano da lei, e da me un particularissimo rispetto,” ARSI, Sic. 40, fol. 109r (Palermo, August 11, 1704).
their close ties to the Jesuits, apparently were such that his parents' wishes overrode the general's decision to send him overseas.

Ignazio nevertheless remained hopeful that he might yet leave for good. It was during this time that there were many changes in Ignazio's environment: general González died in 1705, Tamburini took his place in 1706, and both of Ignazio's parents passed away. Tamburini's first reply to thirty-five-years old Ignazio reveals an increasing exasperation, apparently reprimanding him for failing to understand that it was no longer possible for him to be sent overseas. In response to several years of Ignazio's stubbornness in failing to apprehend this point, he delivered (what should have been) a definitive reply to his petitions: "Your Reverence must be satisfied with the merit that the Lord will grant you for your good and holy desires: since at this stage your age is quite advanced; the difficulty that you would encounter in learning a new language (not only foreign, but difficult in itself); the time you would spend on the long journey; and the many things that you would leave undone here [in Sicily], where you are working so well for the glory of the Lord—render the fulfillment of your desires, not only difficult, but also impossible. Therefore, content yourself in this way, to exercise your zeal for the benefit of Souls, and besides that believe that the Lord wants nothing further from you."  

While Ignazio may have experienced some shock in reading these quite strong and unambiguous words from the general, he did not seem particularly discouraged. He stayed in touch with Tamburini, although his focus did appear to include matters not exclusively oriented to his vocation to the Indies: he wrote about the Sicilian missions, asked to have companions join him, judging and promoting some of them, and finally tried to solve internal disorders.

Even in these “obedient” letters, however, glimpses emerge that Ignazio did not surrender his desire for the Indies: in 1713, the general had to remind him to be content with his current circumstances. His age and labors already expended

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92 See a reference to memorial masses for Ignazio's father: ARSI, Sic. 43, fols. 36–37 (Palermo, March 4, 1709). Ignazio's mother died after 1707 (year in which she protested her son's departure) and before 1717, when Ignazio mentioned that his relatives were deceased: ARSI, FG 750, fol. 464 (Marsala, March 15, 1717).

93 “bisogna […] che Vostra Reverenza si contenti di quel merito che il Signore le darà per i suoi buoni e santi desideri, poiché la sua età oramai alquanto avanzata, la difficoltà che per essa provarebbe di imparare un linguaggio non solo straniero, ma per se stesso difficile, il tempo che spenderebbe nella lunga navigazione, et il molto che lascerebbe di fare costi dove opera si bene in gloria del Signore non solo difficoltano, ma impossibilitano l'adempimento delle sue brame. Ella perciò si contenti di esercitare così il suo zelo a beneficio delle Anime, e creda pure che il Signore non vuol altro da lei,” ARSI, Sic. 44, fol. 139r (Palermo, September 14, 1711).

94 ARSI, Sic. 44, fol. 149r (Palermo, October 20, 1711) and fol. 74r (Palermo, August 8, 1712).
for the Society, the general told him, no longer permitted him to face the trials of the journey. His desire for the Indies was proportional to the spiritual benefits he would receive, just the same as if he had actually gone there: “Enlist your Apostolic fervour for the missions in these our Parts, while your desire for the more distant missions of the Indies will itself attract a reward, because your age and the hardships that you have endured are not equal to such a long and arduous voyage.”

From Ignazio’s only partially extant letters, he did not give up and in 1717, after a break of two-and-a-half years in writing, he reminded the general that there was nothing to stop his departure by then: his “domestic enemies” who had brought about such “confusion” in his affairs had now died. Nevertheless, at some point, Ignazio seems to have accepted his fate to remain in the “Indie di qua:” in 1717 Tamburini acknowledged his work and wrote very warmly to him about his victory over this very persistent cause for suffering pain in his vocation. It gave Tamburini “no small consolation” to learn that “after diligent reflection Your Reverence acknowledges the ministry of the missions to be commendable.” The general promised that for Ignazio “in no other place, as much as in this very Kingdom, may be found those Indies to which you aspire. Attend to sanctify these people with untiring zeal and, in time, you will receive from the eternal Remunerator that same crown, which others will win through their hardships among the Barbarians of Asia and America.”

Further replies to Ignazio exist from 1718, when the general indicated his appreciation in learning about the “reports [...] concerning the establishment of these missions, and of the various incidents relating to them,” the details about which Ignazio had informed him. Tamburini wished for Ignazio to “enjoy the peace of these months of rest, without being troubled by anyone who may happen to be unhappy with your stay in this College.” In the same

95 “Impieghi Vostra Reverenza il suo fervore Apostolico nelle missioni di queste nostre Parti, et abbia il merito del desiderio che ha delle missioni più lontane delle Indie, poiché la sua età e le fatiche che ha fatto, non le proporzionano un viaggio si lungo, e si arduo,” ARSI, Sic. 45, fol. 220r (Palermo, August 8, 1713).

96 “non ordinaria consolazione l’avviso che Vostra Reverenza mi porge di essersi dopo diligente desaminazione riconosciuto per commendabile il ministero delle missioni [...] non altrove che in cotesto Regno le costituisco quelle Indie alle quali aspira. Attenda a santificare cotesti popoli con zelo indefesso e riceverà a suo tempo dall’eterno Rimuneratore quella stessa corona, che altri vi conquisteranno faticando tra’ Barbari dell’Asia e dell’America,” ARSI, Sic. 47, fol. 352v (Palermo, December 13, 1717).

97 “relazione [...] della fondazione di coteste missioni e delle varie vicende alle quali è stata sottoposta [...] si goda in pace questi mesi di riposo senza prendersi alcun travaglio di chi per avventura si adombrasse del suo soggiorno in cotesto Collegio,” ARSI, Sic. 48, fol. 61r (Palermo, May 18, 1718).
year, the general thanked him for other “news [...] about the various responsibilities of our houses and colleges in relation to the missions,”98 for his commitment to promote them,99 and assuring him that “at the opportune time, all of these matters would be settled as necessary.”100 A few years later, Ignazio had further roles and responsibilities, along with his missionary work, including tasks at the tribunal of the Holy Office. His letters from the general reflect these positions: he was praised for his zeal and warmly thanked for his donations.101 Tamburini also congratulated Ignazio for his “great efforts, travels, and diligence in working to maintain the good name of the Society,” for the sake of the Sicilian missions.102

At the end of 1720, Ignazio apparently wrote a letter filled with “many difficult points,” and had to wait until February 1721 before he received the general’s detailed reply, who appears to have been acting once more as a mediating figure, this time with the provincial.103 General Tamburini assured him that he would raise all of these topics with the provincial, but directed Ignazio to be satisfied with what could be done realistically, without demanding too much: “use every diligence to do the best you can; if it is not possible to do everything, then do what is necessary.” In the meantime, Ignazio had written to Rome again, and within days was sent assurance once more that his advice about the missions had been communicated to the provincial, who was trying to put them into practice.104 After some months, Ignazio was praised because he helped in another delicate matter he “concluded with such satisfaction [...] with such honour for the Society,” thanks to his “good heart and competence.”105 In the same letter, Ignazio once more was assured of the importance of the Sicilian mission: “I will take to my heart the care of these Missions, and the Missionary

98 “notizie [...] intorno a vari obblighi delle nostre case e collegi in favore delle missioni,” ARSI, Sic. 48, fol. 93r (Palermo, August 1, 1718).
99 ARSI, Sic. 48, fol. 123r (Palermo, October 24, 1718).
100 “per ordinare a tempo congruo, che si dia loro quel provvedimento che sarà necessario,” Sic. 48, fol. 132r (Palermo, November 14, 1718).
101 ARSI, Sic. 49, fol. 10r (n.p., March 25, 1720) and fol. 68r (Palermo, November 4, 1720).
102 “grandi fatiche, viaggi e diligenze impiegate per mantenere il buon nome della Compagnia nella causa del Padre Urso,” ARSI, Sic. 49, fol. 22r (n.p., May 13, 1720).
103 “punti molto difficili [...] si usi ogni diligenza per fare quel che si può, se non può farsi tutto quel che si deve,” ARSI, Sic. 49, fol. 87r (Palermo, February 3, 1721).
104 ARSI, Sic. 49, fol. 93r (Palermo, February 17, 1721).
105 “per l’esito felice che ha procurato all’affare [...] terminato con tanta soddisfattione dell’afflitto Padre, e con tanto decoro della Compagnia mercé del buon cuore, e della destrezza con cui Vostra Reverenza ha maneggiato [...] Mi prenderò a cuore la causa di coteste Missioni, e de’ Padri Missionarii [...] un ministero sì proprio della Compagnia,” ARSI, Sic. 49, fol. 124r (Palermo, June 9, 1721).
Fathers [...] a ministry that indeed belongs to the Society.” Nevertheless, Ignazio was in a phase of almost bombarding the superior general with letters, since he soon had to write to him again about the same topic. At the beginning of the following year, Ignazio still seemed to be completely immersed in promoting the Sicilian missions. The pace and intensity of his work and communication was frenetic in this period: by now he was in his late-forties, relatively senior, and certainly a long-standing member of the Society.

Ignazio, however, seemed increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated in the Society, and in 1722 the superior general had to advise and comfort him about his crisis. He wrote that it was not easy to work together with other Jesuits for the kinds of tasks he had been asked to attend to, but Ignazio should be realistic and reasonable: “I too feel the affliction that has been brought about by the difficulties that Your Reverence faces in implementing the Rules that have been established concerning the Missions.” Tamburini had to insist on how “obedience” was requested even “if these rules are not well justified,” because “action must not triumph over reason.” Tamburini advised him that he could not control everything and be everywhere: it was hard for just one person to carry out all his tasks. The general seems to be showing the first signs of disappointment about Ignazio’s excessive commitment to everything he cared for: the Indian missions before, and the Sicilian ones after. Ignazio proposed a solution to his problems, requesting two companions to help him: “one [...] in the city, and another to whom the affairs of the Countryside might be entrusted.” Tamburini saw an incompatibility between all of these tasks and did not agree. He closed his letter communicating to Ignazio that he would be substituted: theoretically not to punish him, but on the contrary to keep every “occasion of bitterness” away from him. The general in any case had already charged the provincial to find “someone who was competent, and less busy” than Ignazio.

A month later, the Epistulae generalium contain a quite unexpected letter from Tamburini to Ignazio concerning the possible exit of Ignazio from the Society of Jesus. For the general, the news came as “absolutely unexpected,”
and he was even more shocked to learn that Ignazio claimed that he conceived and matured this decision for at least twenty years. Tamburini wrote, dumbfounded, “how much you always appreciated your Vocation, the zeal you used to propagate it [...] the satisfaction you had in meeting its duties, never made me dread such inconstancy after so many years of religious life.” Indeed, Tamburini felt sure that a mere “temporary excitement” had prompted Ignazio to write his letter. In the meantime, he hoped for him that he would have “come to your senses and returned to a greater loyalty to that Lord, to whom so many times in the past you swore your allegiance.” This plan could be approved “neither by God nor the World, neither by you nor your prominent relatives, whose honor you take so much to heart.” The general was ready to leave behind this “volubility” before it was too late, since he wanted to believe that Ignazio’s mind had changed in the meantime. This mistake would have been “forever canceled” from his memory, where only Ignazio’s “virtues and merits within the Society of Jesus” would have remained alive.

Tamburini understood that the probable reason for this crisis of vocation was Ignazio’s frustration, and the fact that he did not feel appreciated for all he had done for the Sicilian missions, which were not even his first choice. The general explained his previous decisions as just ordinary administration: “as for your tasks up to this point, the idea of entrusting them to another person who is less occupied than you should not seem strange to you, given that the fact and taking of offices is nothing new to the Society, according to what is considered to be the most suited to the Service and glory of God.”

He concluded by enjoining Ignazio to serve God as best he can, and in peace, in the knowledge that there are many ways yet to serve him, and in the certainty that God will appreciate his “humble and steady resignation to his divine will.”

During the following months, several letters from Rome were sent in an effort to persuade the Sicilian Jesuit to wait and think about his decision. The
general was hoping that Ignazio by then would have “recognized the enemy’s deceit; under the false pretenses of a larger good, [the Devil] wants to lead you to lose your faith in God, whom instead you may serve in all fullness in the very ministries of the Society.” The general reminded Ignazio that staying within the order could help him gain “that level of perfection” that God required of him. The reasons to leave the Society for another order that Ignazio mentioned (in a not preserved letter) were not sufficient, because “as I wrote to you many times before, inside the Society of Jesus and by the grace of God, you will be able to put into practice your zeal.” Ignazio should be acquiescent “towards every tribulation that you may meet, even when Your Reverence has no occasion to exercise any other virtue than that of obedience,” for submission of one’s own will to the Divine one was a true and valuable sacrifice to God. Evidence of these repeated attempts to keep Ignazio inside the Society of Jesus exist only in the general’s registers of letters to the Sicilian province. Without these testimonies, he would have seemed a “normal” Jesuit, who overcame his missionary vocation without particular problems—although clearly, he had a particular penchant for sending a steady stream of requests to Rome.

Several months later, Tamburini still was not surrendering, even if he understood how serious the situation was, and sent to Ignazio all his “esteem and affection.” He suffered for his decision and felt “anguish” seeing him “engaged in a decision that would bring little honor to yourself, and to the Society of Jesus.” Ignazio’s virtues, merits and intentions certainly could be more useful within his own order, in which he could find a “very big field that opens out before you, perhaps more than in any other.” He made an offer: if Ignazio was

112 “L’averò conosciuto l’inganno del nemico, il quale sotto apparenze di maggior bene vorrebbe indurlo a mancar di fede a Dio, a cui ella potrà servire con tutta l’ampiezza ne’ ministeri proprii della Compagnia,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 149 (Palermo, November 16, 1722).

113 “quel grado di perfettione che Dio esige da lei,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 158 (Palermo, December 21, 1722).

114 “come più volte le ho scritto, nella Compagnia e per grazia del Signore non le potranno mai mancar campo di esercitar il suo zelo [...] a qualunque contrarietà ella potrà incontrare: anzi quando anche Vostra Reverenza non avesse luogo di esercitare altra virtù, che quella dell’ubbidienza,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 175 (Palermo, January 25, 1723).

115 “la stima, e l’affetto [...] il rammarico di vederla impegnata in una risoluzione, che ridonderebbe in poco decoro suo, e della Compagnia [...] vastissimo campo, che le si apre nella Compagnia, forse più che in altre Religioni [...] Non mancherà poi a’ superiori l’attenzione di assegnarle qualche impiego, che riesca di sua piena sodisfazione, al che io contribuirono di buon grado le mie più efficaci premure [...] non si metta a rischio di perdere in un momento tutto il Capitale di stima, e credito, che in tanti anni di vita religiosa tra noi ha acquistato presso gli Uomini, e forse anche il gran cumulo di meriti guadagnati finora presso Dio [...] non di rado l’Angelo delle tenebre si trasfigura in Angelo di Luce,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 192 (Palermo, March 8, 1723).
not pleased with his Jesuit path, the general could find a way to give him more suitable roles of his choosing: “Your superiors will not fail to pay particular attention to assigning you a role that would meet your satisfaction completely, towards which matter I will contribute willingly with the utmost care.” Finally, Ignazio was not to “risk losing in one moment all the Capital of esteem and credit that, in the course of many years of religious life among us, you have acquired in the presence of Men, and perhaps also the great accumulation of merits earned from God up to this point.” He should have been aware of the fact that the “Angel of Darkness often transfigures himself into the Angel of Light.”

After some months, however, Ignazio’s decision seemed irrevocable and the general thought it was time to capitulate. He wrote him a short and terse answer in which, since Ignazio’s “fantasies” continued to “keep” him “busy” in his determination to leave the Society, he asked the name of a religious order willing to accept him.116 After two months, Ignazio was given “official license” to leave the Society of Jesus in a letter in which the general appointed the provincial with “all the necessary authority,” which he indicated to Ignazio, would allow him the “hoped-for passage to another Religion [religious order],” advising him to deal directly with him about it.117 Tamburini closed the letter with a warning: “I pray that the Lord bless you in this resolution of yours, in such a way that there will be no cause to regret it, while for my part, I will always have the consolation of having used all necessary means to keep you in the Society.”

This may well have been the end of the story, but Ignazio’s name returned in the letter-books of subsequent months too, and it seems that at the end of 1723 he still had not left the Society. Instead, he wrote again to the general requesting to go to Rome to personally talk with him; he was answered with a rather detached and laconic prohibition to do “such a long and uncomfortable journey in these dangerous times.”118 He assured Ignazio that they could more easily communicate via letters, and promised him all his “attention and assurance.” Less than two months later, Tamburini replied to Ignazio again,


117 “tutte le necessarie facoltà per accordare a Vostra Reverenza il sospirato passaggio ad altra Religione; onde di questo punto ella ne tratti con esso lui [...] prego il Signore a benedire cotesta sua risoluzione in modo, che non se ne abbia a pentire, mentre a me rimarrà sempre la consolazione di aver usati tutti i mezzi per ritenerla nella Compagnia,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 228 (Palermo, July 28, 1723).

118 “Non posso permettere che Vostra Reverenza in tempi si pericolosi si cimenti ad un viaggio si lungo, et incomodo [...] le offerisco perciò tutto l’udito, e la confidenza,” ARSI, Sic. 51, fol. 22 (Palermo, December 20, 1723).
apparently not enthusiastic about the resumption of this epistolary contact. He reminded him how, if he had shown “that religious submission” he so much wanted for his own good, he would not have been complaining about not receiving quicker answers. The general for his part was sure that all of these complaints and apparent indecision were the consequence of Ignazio’s wrong choices and, probably quite annoyed, begged him not to trouble himself “with vain suspicions.” Instead, since God’s mercy was always with him, Ignazio had to “reflect seriously on your situation, in order to avoid finding yourself without remedy to the regret of having fallen.” Unfortunately, this is the last archival record for this story. From then on, Ignazio disappears from the letter-books, and indeed, from all other relevant archival documents, and so it remains a mystery whether he remained a Jesuit or left the Society.

Ignazio’s story is fascinating, but not unique in the Indias petentes community. Other case-studies may confirm the importance of the Epistulae generalium, because not a few Jesuits dealt with the same problems. In the same Sicilian context and time span there were at least two other Jesuits whose departure the parents tried to obstruct. The first one is Giovanni Battista Federici, born in Palermo in 1693 and son of a marquis, as was Ignazio Maria Romeo. He became a Jesuit in 1709 and applied for the Indies thirteen times (1716–21), also sponsored by his spiritual father Girolamo Maria Pisano. The latter recommended Federici to the general as a very deserving subject—his parents may have raised some issues, but “not too difficult to overcome.” The Federici marquises had in fact already told Pisano that they would have done “as much as possible” to prevent their son’s departure; at the same time, they declared themselves ready to do God’s will. Giovanni Battista was the firstborn,

119 *religiosa sommissione [...] vani sospetti [...] riflettere seriamente al suo stato, per non aver poi senza rimedio a pentirsi di esser caduto,* ARSI, Sic. 51, fol. 40 (Palermo, February 13, 1724).

120 The Jesuit Catalogs list his name for the last time in 1723: he is identified as living in the College of Palermo, and in good health. The Catalogi Trienales of 1727 includes no mention of Ignazio Maria Romeo anymore. Quite oddly, in the Catalogus Primus of the year 1717, his name appeared in the initial “index alphabeticus” together with a cross written with a pencil (was it a modern, archival hand?), though he surely survived beyond this date because of his correspondence, analyzed above. Nevertheless, his name is absent from the list of the “Defuncti” of the years after 1724, which would suggest ordinarily that he died outside the Society; however, if this were the case, his name would have appeared a few pages later, with the names of those sent from the Society, including Jesuits who had been given permission to leave, the “Dimissi.”

121 ARSI, Sic. 98, fol. 56 for the Primus and Sic. 99, fol. 56 for the Secundus.

122 “qualche difficoltà i signori suoi genitori [...] non [...] molto difficile superarla [...] il possibile per impedirlo,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 378 (Palermo, August 6, 1716). Pisano died in Palermo in 1723 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 139).
but they had other six male sons, aged between nineteen and twenty-five: unlike the Magnisi family (where Ignazio was the oldest and only adult member), the Federicis could more easily “survive” his departure. Pisano also added in his letter to the general that the Federici couple would have used their son’s health as a deterrent. Quite unusually—and probably also thanks to Pisano’s powerful recommendation—Federici was almost immediately awarded with the missionary assignment he longed for. After several years of delays, Federici left in 1722 from Lisbon for Mysore (India), where he died a few months later due to an illness that he had caught shortly after his arrival.123 His parents may not have been wrong about his feeble health.

The other Jesuit with family issues was Filippo Maria Furnari, born in Messina. After entering the Society of Jesus in Palermo at the age of sixteen,124 he sent his first indipeta to Rome when he was twenty-one, and it took him sixteen years to receive permission to leave. At least he was assigned to the country he had mentioned in his requests, the Philippines—influenced by the European tour of their procurator.125 Three months later, however, there arose the threat of Furnari’s mother’s opposition to this expedition. In mid-March, the Jesuit was still in Sicily, ready to leave.126 At the end of the month, the Epistulae generalium included a note later covered with vertical lines—to highlight or erase it?127 It said that Furnari’s family protested against his departure: his “relatives” had made known that they had welcomed with “grave grief” the news that their son would leave. It is hard to determine the recipient of this complaint: the general in person or a local superior? The main motivation they alleged were “his many illnesses, that make him unfit for such an effort.” His fragility could be true, but describing an aspiring missionary as an almost dying man could also seem a winning strategy to discourage the general. In this case, however, the latter must not have been particularly convinced of the sincerity of the family and ordered for someone to “check if his [Furnari’s] health is sufficient for the missionary way of living;” if not, he designed another Sicilian Jesuit to replace him. Perhaps this mother did not

123 On Federici’s pious example, see Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani, Menologio di pie memorie d’alcuni Religiosi della Compagnia di Gesù raccolte dal padre Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani della medesima Compagnia, e distribuite per quei giorni dell’anno, ne’ quali morirono. Dall’anno 1538 sino all’anno 1728 (Venice: Niccolò Pezzana, 1730), 124–25.
124 ARSI, Sic. 92, fol. 110 for the Primus and Sic. 93, fol. 110 for the Secundus. The surname has many documentary variations (Fornari, Forneri, Fornarius), but in the Schedario unificato available at ARSI the Jesuit is listed as “Furnari.”
125 ARSI, Sic. 47, fol. 157 (Mazara, February 1, 1717).
126 ARSI, FG 750, fol. 468 (Palermo, March 19, 1717).
127 “grave cordoglio […] molte malattie che lo rendono inabile a si gran fatica […] esami ne la sanità è veramente da non poter reggere,” ARSI, Sic. 47, fol. 196v (n.p., March 29, 1717).
have a role and power comparable to the Magnisi marchioness, who was godmother of the viceroy of Sicily, or perhaps Furnari convinced her to withdraw her complaints. In any case, Furnari in 1718 left for the Philippines. During his life in Asia, the Jesuit taught grammar, humanities, and philosophy, until he was appointed provincial of the Mariana Islands in 1625. He then moved to Rota Island, where he spent the rest of his quite long and healthy life and died at the age of sixty-six years.\textsuperscript{128}

The importance of the \textit{Epistulae generalium} emerges clearly from the examples of this trio of Sicilian Jesuits at the turn of the eighteenth century. Not only can they corroborate or contradict the content of \textit{litterae indipetae}, but they can also open up further research paths because of the variety of topics covered in the superior general’s correspondence. As for the \textit{historia indipetarum}, thanks to the letter-books it is possible to trace the content of documents which never reached Rome for different reasons: because they were dispersed or “intercepted” by local superiors or parents, or simply because they were lost. As a counterpart to the \textit{indipetae}, other kinds of documents intended for the exclusive attention of the generals (which mostly are not available in ARSI, but whose contents can be reconstructed from the Roman answers) help to build an overall picture that is comprehensive and less biased or idealized.

Every year, the Roman Jesuit curia received hundreds of documents from all over the world. Among them, \textit{indipetae}: and it was probably impossible, from a logistic point of view, to answer all of them. It is likely that the general’s secretariat favored applications sent more times by the same person. This section focused on a limited number of insistent and very motivated Sicilian Jesuits: it is not certain whether they received a personal reply because in a certain sense they “deserved it,” or because the general and his team invested substantial time and resources with every petitioner, even with those who applied just once. Moreover, the Roman answers were usually balanced and relatively standardized but also significantly personalized. In general, it seems that (except for a few cases) they contained no peremptory or definitive statements. Too much negativity could have discouraged a petitioner’s enthusiasm, possibly causing his exit from the order. The tendency was rather to invite to perseverance, submission, and patience while giving more or less vague hopes to everyone. When the general explicitly “promised” a missionary assignment, this usually happened. On the contrary, there was no reason for the general to promise something that would have never taken place. When the Roman answers contained no hope at all, research shows that it was because the

\textsuperscript{128} Basic information about his destiny in the Philippines can be found at ARSI, in the \textit{Schedario unificato, sub nomine}.
petitioners expressed conflicting feelings, insisted almost maniacally but for no apparent reason on one destination, did not show enough “indifference,” and conducted a life full of suspicious behavior and disagreements with their confreres and superiors. The generals were not favorable also in the case of Jesuits who did not seem not able to make a great contribution to the missions, or who were of too advanced an age. This limit, however, seems a very subjective and variable element, because it was not rare for Jesuits over thirty to be sent to the most distant destinations. Elderly missionaries could actually be more reliable and mature than their teenage confreres.

As these case-studies demonstrate, finally, the *Epistulae generalium* put to test the “credibility” of *indipetae*. There were many—more or less voluntary—misunderstandings when it came to “interpret” the general’s answers, often because of their vagueness. In the eyes of a hopeful petitioner, the Roman attempt to take time or dissuade someone from an ill-timed desire could easily become the announcement of an imminent departure. Like many other documents preserved in ARSI, the letter-books help to connect the dots between periphery and center of the missionary appointment, this way also reconstructing the relationship between the general and his subordinates. This hierarchical pyramid descended from the provincials down to the local superiors, intersected with parents, brothers, and uncles, and progressively reached the last brick: the humble petitioners. These trails are tortuous—sometimes impossible—to follow, because this correspondence has significant lacunae. Every interaction with the general was copied in the Roman letter-books, but many registers disappeared. In the *Epistulae generalium* it is possible to find proof of any interferences of the Jesuits’ families, who tried to hijack, delay, or cancel this definitive separation. The data emerging from the letter-books are often unique, sometimes the only way to trace back the “domestic enemies” of many petitioners. Thanks to this source, as precious as it is fragmentary and difficult to read, the *modus operandi* of the general and his office becomes more comprehensible and shows itself in all its global complexity.