Book Review Essay

The Outsider: A China Jesuit at the Intersection of Empires

Irene Gaddo, ed.

In barbaras gentilium terras: *Epistolario del gesuita Carlo Giovanni Turcotti (1643–1706)*. Testo spagnolo, latino e italiano. Collana del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università del Piemonte Orientale: “Mondi, storia, discorsi: Biblioteca di studi globali di storia moderna e contemporanea,” vol. 1. Vercelli: Gallo Editore, 2018. Pp. 492. Pb. € 38,00.

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Conflitti e controversie in terra di missione: Carlo Giovanni Turcotti in Cina tra Sei e Settecento. Collana del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università del Piemonte Orientale: “Mondi, storia, discorsi. Biblioteca di studi globali di storia moderna e contemporanea,” vol. 2. Vercelli: Gallo Editore, 2018. Pp. 84. Pb. € 18,00.

In the autumn of 1695, the Italian traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri (1648–1724), well-known for publishing in Naples in 1700 a six-volume account of his journey around the world—aptly titled *Giro del mondo*—reached the Qing imperial capital Beijing. He had done so simply out of “curiosity,” in what amounted to a bet against himself, after traversing the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires.

Since the early 1600s, the only Europeans allowed to easily travel and reside within the Chinese empire had been Catholic missionaries, and in particular the Jesuits, who under the Manchu-Qing dynasty became advisors to the emperor. When the Jesuits of the Portuguese mission in the imperial city met our intrepid traveler, as we hear from Gemelli Careri himself, they “could not but marvel about my arrival at the Court, saying they wondered *who* had

advised me to come to Peking, where no European can enter without a summon from the Emperor. I replied that I had come to Peking with the same freedom I enjoyed in visiting the courts of the Grand Lord [the Sultan of Turkey], the King of Persia, and the Great Mogul, as those monarchs are no less powerful and protective of their kingdoms than the Emperor of China." Gemelli Careri's braggadocio in fact belied the fact that he had indirectly received assistance to reach the capital from a Jesuit in Canton, Carlo Giovanni Turcotti:

Having resolved to go to Peking, I spoke to the Father Superior of the [Spanish Franciscan] Convent [of Canton], where I was staying, to provide me with some reliable fellow [as a guide]. Because of a sense of subordination to the Fathers of the Society [of Jesus], he secretly sent word to Father Turcotti, to hear his opinion. *Being a good Lombard, Turcotti told them to let me go, while if it had been a Portuguese, he would have definitely opposed the journey.* My determination, nevertheless, still made them suspicious, and they firmly believed that I was a Pontifical Commissar, here to *gather secret intelligence on the disorders of China*, since they saw I was going to the Court. I believe that this suspicion in fact facilitated my journey, which would have normally been very difficult (*Giro del mondo* [Naples, 1700], 4:97–98).

As this passage hints, the China Catholic mission was then experiencing a rather delicate moment. Rumors had been swirling for some time about a possible visit by a pontifical legate to the court of the Kangxi Emperor, to exert papal authority over the Jesuits and clarify doctrinal and ritual matters. The Society had been under attack in Europe for its accommodation to the so-called Chinese Rites to the ancestors and Confucius, that the Jesuits allowed local Christians to celebrate as purely civil ceremonies. Moreover, the Portuguese crown, protector of the Jesuit missions in China and Asia, would not tolerate any papal infringement over its rights of religious patronage (*padroado*), and opposed pontifical interference and any unauthorized missionaries who had not traveled to China via Lisbon. Nevertheless, in the 1680s, the papal Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Rome supported the establishment of an episcopal hierarchy in China, authorizing Italian and French clerics and other religious under Spanish patronage based in Manila to settle within the Qing empire and challenge Portuguese supremacy. The situation was further complicated by the appearance of a contingent of Jesuits sent by Louis XIV in 1685 as scientists to the Qing court. Its arrival led to struggles inside the Society of Jesus itself,

and the emergence of a bitter division between the Portuguese China vice-province and the new French Jesuit mission.

The Italian lay traveler Gemelli Careri indeed arrived in the midst of multiple “disorders of China,” as he called them. His unusual and somewhat disorienting identity, mistakenly perceived as that of a pontifical spy, should have spelled the end of his journey in Canton, especially due to the opposition of the Portuguese to any possible intrusion in their patronage system. Yet, the “good Lombard Turcotti” allowed the traveler’s departure for the north of the empire. Why? Carlo Giovanni Turcotti (1643–1706; Chinese name Du Tianshou 杜(都)天受; also Du Jialu 杜加錄), superior of the Canton Jesuit mission, was a native of Varallo Sesia in the state of Milan, then under Spanish Habsburg rule. Like the Neapolitan Gemelli Careri, thus, Turcotti was by birth a subject of the crown of Spain (Naples was a Spanish viceroyalty at the time), and possibly for that reason more sympathetic to the Italian layman than a Portuguese superior would have been.

Turcotti had indeed traveled to Asia on Spanish vessels as member of the Jesuit province of the Philippines, and had initially worked as a missionary in Celebes (now Sulawesi, Indonesia) under the auspices of Spain’s *patronato real*. Gemelli Careri erroneously reports that Turcotti had operated in the Ternate mission (Moluccas). We know, in fact, that the Spanish had abandoned the Moluccas in 1663, and that Turcotti arrived in Manila only in 1671. He rather went in 1674 to the island of Siau, north of Celebes, a mission that the Jesuits lost three years later, when a Dutch fleet expelled the Spaniards. Turcotti and his Jesuit companions became then prisoners of war, and spent three years as captives in Batavia. Rather free in their movements and well-treated by the Dutch authorities, the detainees were finally allowed to embark on a vessel sailing to Macao in 1680, with the ultimate aim of returning to Manila. Once in the Portuguese entrepôt, however, Turcotti joined the Chinese vice-province at the request of the local superiors, submitted himself to Portuguese religious patronage, and was assigned to the mission of Canton (Guangzhou in Guangdong province), where he spent another twenty-five years, till his death. Starting in the mid-1690s, and with increased intensity in the period 1700–5, the “outsider” Turcotti—a Spanish subject, Italian by culture, and now under Portuguese religious authority—found himself at the center of a growing web of controversies and “disorders” that the General in Rome asked him to monitor and help resolve as visitor of the vice-province, a task that earned him the enmity of his Portuguese confrères. His position became even more untenable when the Holy See decided to name him titular bishop of Andravida (*Andrevillensis*) and vicar apostolic of the Qing province of Guizhou, a dignity

he strenuously tried to decline, in a remote region he never reached due to illness and his death.

Irene Gaddo, a researcher at the Università del Piemonte Orientale–UPO (Piedmont, Italy), has now offered us a documentary window into this sensitive context of religious controversy and geo-political rivalries in East Asia, through the publication of sixty-seven mostly unpublished letters and reports by Turcotti in Spanish, Latin and Italian preserved in three European repositories. Most of them (fifty) come from the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, *Japonica Sinica* and *Fondo gesuitico* sections; a few from the Biblioteca Fabroniana, Pistoia (four), and the Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, *Jesuitas na Ásia* section (twelve); only one letter, today in the Archivio di Stato di Torino, was already published in 1943. This corpus of epistles, entitled *In barbaras gentilium terras* (“In the barbarian lands of the pagans,” a citation from one of Turcotti’s reports) is the first volume in a new series published by UPO’s Department of Humanistic Studies, entitled “Worlds, History, Discourses. Library of Global Studies in Modern and Contemporary History.” Dr. Gaddo completed this project as part of a broader scheme coordinated by the Italian university research consortium “Translating Worlds: Towards a Global History of Italian Culture (1450–1914).” The second “companion volume” in the series is *Conflitti e controversie in terra di missione: Carlo Giovanni Turcotti in Cina tra Sei e Settecento* (Conflicts and controversies in the mission: Carlo Giovanni Turcotti in China, seventeenth–eighteenth centuries), where Gaddo offers an interpretive narrative of the Jesuit missionary’s life and the context in which he operated, in four concise chapters. My suggestion is to first read the slim *Conflitti e controversie* (vol. 2), and use it as a compass to proceed later to the reading of the actual letters in the thick volume *In barbaras gentilium terras* (vol. 1).

Conflitti e controversie offers both a biography of Turcotti and some general thematic discussions. Chapter 1 explores the early vocation of Turcotti and his experience in the Philippines and Indonesia. Chapter 2 focuses on issues of economic and disciplinary organization within the Society of Jesus through Turcotti’s eyes as Visitor of China between 1698 and 1701. Chapter 3 discusses Turcotti’s reports on the jurisdictional struggles between Portugal and the Holy See over the Asian missions, and about the tensions within the Society of Jesus in China (Portuguese vs. French missions). Finally, Chapter 4 explores the role of Turcotti in the Chinese Rites Controversy. References in footnotes to the epistolary corpus in volume 1 allow readers to cross-check the relevant primary sources in full. The notes also contain citations of the literature used; there is no final alphabetical bibliography, but only an index of personal names. The general aim of the volume is “to cast light on certain aspects of the composite missionary world of the late seventeenth century, its institutions, its actors, and their interactions” (Introduction, 9). The aspects highlighted are focused

only on what the surviving letters reveal in some detail: formation and vocation to the mission; economic issues; organization of novitiates and mission stations in Asia; jurisdictional conflicts both outside and within the Society; and the “politics” of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Gaddo is well aware that older historiography considered the missionary enterprise of the Jesuits as a “collective endeavor,” in a monolithic view of the Society of Jesus that today has left space to “the contours and the peculiarities of individual experiences” (9). Turcotti’s vicissitudes offer a specific piece of a complex global religious, economic and political puzzle, from the point of view of an individual actor, both an insider (as a Jesuit) and an outsider or “*straniero*” (a Spanish subject in a Portuguese mission).

The volume *In barbaras gentiliū terras* offers the primary materials sustaining Gaddo’s narrative. The corpus is organized in chronological order, containing transcriptions of letters in their original languages, written between 1672 and 1705 (that is, *after* Turcotti reached the Asian mission field), followed by an Italian translation when needed, and by essential notes. Publishing and translating sources are often seen in academic circles as thankless tasks, and yet they remain fundamental to advance scholarship. Scholars should be truly grateful to Gaddo for her patient labor, accomplished in a relatively short period (the bulk of the work seems to have been conducted in the years 2015–18). The translations are generally faithful and fluid, and obviously useful to readers of Italian, for whom the edition is conceived. Consulting the transcripts in original languages, however, remains essential to prevent possible misunderstandings, especially when Chinese personal, administrative and geographic names are involved, as I will explain. Most documents are administrative in nature, written by Turcotti in his capacity as Jesuit visitor or elected bishop and vicar apostolic, addressed to the Jesuit Generals Charles de Noyelle and Tirso González, the pope, the prefect of the Propaganda Fide Congregation, Jesuit superiors in China, Macao and Europe, vicars apostolic, the papal legate in China Charles Maillard de Tournon, and non-Jesuit missionaries. As Gaddo observes (36), these documents are “*frammenti di dialoghi di cui spesso è arduo seguire i fili*” (“fragments of dialogues often difficult to follow”), and only further research by specialists might clarify their full context and import. The curator is a historian of Europe rather than a sinologist, and with modesty and honesty she recognizes her linguistic limitations and the circumscribed nature of her research and archival reach. I will offer here some suggestions for further work in two areas: the sinological apparatus, and Turcotti’s manuscripts still awaiting discovery.

Turcotti’s letters contain several Chinese words in early missionary Romanizations, especially Chinese personal, administrative and geographic names. Gaddo tried to identify their meaning, although she often preferred to simply

note she could not do so. Perhaps the help of a sinologist could have immediately solved some of the easier cases (such as the transcription error in letter no. 1, where the word for tea, *cha* 茶 in Chinese, is copied as *ciù* rather than *cià*). Linguistic assistance would have also enabled the curator to uniformly render all terms in current pinyin Romanization, rather than leaving them in note in their original form or in outdated and variable Romanizations. For example, “Focheu” in Turcotti’s originals is rendered in note (e.g. 33n4) as “Focheu fu, Fuchou, Foochow, Fou-tcheou,” all old forms, rather than with the modern pinyin rendering “Fuzhou” (福州), the provincial capital of Fujian province. A more serious issue is the misidentification of Chinese administrative terms. Relying on the standard *Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* by Charles Hucker (1985), Gaddo occasionally misinterprets some terms. For example, she renders *Fu yuen* (府院) as a position at the level of the prefecture (*fu* 府), while in fact the term is an informal reference to the much more important office of provincial governor (*fuyuan* 撫院, lit. “office of the governor” in reference to the standard title for governor, *xunfu* 巡撫). Again, *Cum tò* (49n36) is explained as “district or county magistrate” while in fact it refers to the Qing highest provincial office of Governor General (*zongdu* 總督). Obviously, these misidentifications may lead to underestimate the kind of official networks Turcotti cultivated. The Jesuit, for instance, refers to the Governor General of Guangdong-Guangxi in relation to the gift of an ivory clock to ingratiate him. Finally, several place names remained unidentified, but consulting the old articles on Chinese missionary geography by Joseph Dehergne, S.J. in *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* could easily supply an answer. Unfortunately, the lack of a comprehensive index (the one offered only contains personal names) hinders a more effective parsing of the text and focused searches for specific topics, passages and terms.

In regard to Turcotti’s epistolary corpus, Gaddo shows awareness that other documents either exist or are bound to be discovered. She mentions for example the six *litterae indipetae* (letters of petition to go the Indies) submitted by Turcotti to the General in ARSI’s *Fondo gesuitico*, not included in the volume, but studied by Guido Mongini in a separate article cited in note (cf. also *Conflitti e controversie*, 16). The obvious part of ARSI still remaining to explore, besides *Japonica Sinica* and *Fondo gesuitico*, is the section on the Philippine province (*Philippinarum*), where Turcotti’s detailed curriculum exists in at least two copies (ARSI *Phil.*, vols. 2/I and 2/II), as mentioned by Joseph Sebes in “Philippine Jesuits in the Middle Kingdom in the 17th Century,” *Philippine Studies* 26, no. 1/2 (1978): 205. The Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome also preserve some autographs by Turcotti, in the series *Scritture Originali della Congregazione particolare dell’Indie Orientali e Cina* (SOCP, vol. 24,

1707–9); *Scritture riferite nei Congressi, Indie Orientali e Cina* (sc, Indie Or. e Cina, vol. 7, 1698–1700), *Informazioni* (“Informationum liber pro missione Sinensi,” vol. 3, 1701 and vol. 6, 1707), and possibly elsewhere. The Archives of the Missions Étrangères de Paris also contain at least 17 letters by Turcotti to members of that congregation (AMEP, vols. 411, 412, 413; see Adrien Launay, *Histoire des Missions de Chine. Kouy-Tcheou*, [Paris, Société des Missions-Étrangères, 1907], 1:9n3). Two 1681 letters from Macao are described and amply summarized in the catalogue by the antiquarian bookseller Maggs Brothers, *Bibliotheca Asiatica Part 2* [London, 1924], 109–10 and 128. In sum, more is out there, and hopefully the meritorious work by Gaddo will encourage others to continue digging (unless she decides to do it herself and compile another volume).

In conclusion, these two companion volumes, available for purchase directly from the publisher, are to be commended as a first step in rediscovering the figure of Carlo Giovanni Turcotti (who hopefully will get an entry in one of the last volumes of the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*), and offer us more materials to uncover yet another facet of early modern “globalization.”

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