

Introduction

Since its foundation in 1540, the Society of Jesus has been famous among Catholic religious orders for its devotion to its apostolic ministries, and especially to its missionary work. From the beginning, the Society's leaders carefully promoted the missionary enterprises, publishing letters and books that offered Europeans, often for the first time, information and curiosities about the new lands Jesuits encountered. Students in the Jesuit schools in Europe became intrigued by the narratives of missionaries sent from the Indies; these stories were very different from those they could expect for themselves if they remained in their own countries. More than twenty-four thousand *litterae indipetae* (so named because the authors were *Indias petentes*, persons asking to be sent to the Indies) are preserved in the *Fondo Gesuitico*, located in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. These personal letters have generated considerable interest from scholars in many fields, including cultural studies, religious history, the history of emotions, and psychology. These sources, when considered together with the replies issued from Rome, demonstrate how Jesuits were subjected to complex negotiations—both within and outside their religious order—that determined whether they would serve as missionaries.

The numerous petitioners for the overseas missions, recalling how they had joined the Society specifically because of its apostolic vocation, faced fierce competition for assignments abroad. Jesuit ministries needed members not only in the “Indies”—a term that described both the western (America) and eastern Indies (Asia)—but also in their native countries. The Jesuits were renowned for their schools. Colleges and *seminaria nobilium* began flourishing all over Europe soon after the order's founding, and these schools required personnel. The Roman leadership, therefore, coordinated thousands of Jesuits, choosing the ministries for which each was most talented. By way of influencing this process, nearly every Jesuit, at least once in his life, wrote to Rome to request a missionary assignment.

It was difficult to write a “successful” application for the missions because the selection process was complex and involved many elements.¹ The superior

1 For an overview of the ever-growing bibliography on the *indipetae*, see Elisa Frei, *Early Modern Litterae Indipetae for the East Indies* (Leiden: Brill, 2023); and Christoph Nebgen, *Missionarsberufungen nach Übersee in drei Deutschen Provinzen der Gesellschaft Jesu im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2007). For the most recent bibliographical review, see Emanuele Colombo and Aliocha Maldavsky, “Studi e ricerche sulle *Litterae indipetae*,” in *Cinque secoli di Litterae indipetae: Il desiderio delle missioni nella Compagnia di Gesù*, ed. Guido Mongini, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Girolamo Imbruglia (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2022), 43–81.

general had the last word on the issue, yet, because he could not be personally acquainted with every Jesuit in Europe, he relied on what others said about a petitioner. The local superiors could support a candidacy and include their own letter with the one written by the aspiring missionary; the parents of a Jesuit could play an important role as well. Both the candidates' natural and spiritual families could also warn the general not to accept a Jesuit, while trying to convince the latter to change his mind about his desire.

Within the superior general's consulting network, a vital role was also played by the procurators, who were responsible for the order's economic, administrative, and legal affairs. During periodic trips from their overseas assignments to Europe, procurators for the missions sought out new Jesuits to bring back with them. They traveled and spoke with many Jesuits at different stages of their studies in order to test their skills and vocation. Procurators provided the names of suitable candidates to the general and encouraged them to write directly to him.

The Society of Jesus did not organize a specific or institutionalized internal training program aimed at the formation of its future missionaries. Documents concerned with such training therefore constitute a fascinating exception to this lacuna. They show how the Society was trying to "professionally" evaluate its missionary vocations while developing a system to choose among the thousands of applications coming every year from all over Europe.

The first section of this introduction analyzes two collections of German writings. The first is a short collection of missionary and ascetic paragraphs written by the Jesuit Franz Xaver Amrhyn (1655–1731).² This text dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century, consists of fifteen sheets of paper, and contains advice that the author titled *Pro Candidatis ad Missiones Indicas* (For the candidates to the Indian missions).³ The second collection is preserved at the library of the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and is divided into six chapters. Previously held in the College of Ingolstadt, this booklet also shares suggestions for missionaries and is titled *Pro missionariis Indiarum et Americae* (For the missionaries in the Indies and in the Americas).⁴ These collections are relevant from both a spiritual and practical point of view.

The second part of the introduction analyzes a handbook for missionaries that no missionary ever read. The Italian Jesuit Girolamo Pallas (1594–1670) was sent as a missionary to the Peruvian territories of the Society of Jesus at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As soon as he arrived there, he began composing a treatise giving very thorough and concrete advice on how to submit

2 Cf. *DHCJ*, s.v. "Amrhyn, Franz Xaver," by Franz Strobel, 1:156.

3 The text is edited in Johannes Beckmann, "Missionsaszetische Anweisungen aus dem 17. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik* 13, no. 3 (1938): 202–15.

4 Munich, LMU University Library (UBM): 4 Cod. Ms. 118 (digitized and available on the Internet at: [urn:nbn:de:bvb:19-epub-15025-9](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:19-epub-15025-9)).

an effective petition to the superior general. Pallas gave the manuscript the title *Mission to the Indies, with Advice for the European Religious People Who Wish to Undertake It*; he intended it as an account of the Peruvian situation but most of all as a vade mecum for future missionaries.⁵ The work was not printed in the following four centuries, for reasons that this essay will address. Even if no petitioner for the Indies was thus able to access it, the manual is no less important, because it shows the point of view of a real missionary who is instructing his confreres about the best ways to follow his path.

5 Gerónimo Pallas, *Misión a las Indias: De Roma a Lima; La Misión a las Indias, 1619 (Razón y visión de una peregrinación sin retorno)*, ed. José Jesús Hernández Palomo (Sevilla: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia; Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 2006). In the editor's words, this is more a "literal transcription" (37) than a critical edition; there is an introduction, but no footnotes are appended to the text.

Interview with the Missionary: Frequently Asked Questions for Jesuit Petitioners for the Indies
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