

# The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo SJ (1676–1724?), Petitioner for the Indies: A Jesuit Seen through his *Litterae Indipetae* and the *Epistulae Generalium*

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In this article, we will analyse the vocation to the Indies of a Sicilian Jesuit, Ignazio Maria Romeo SJ (Palermo 1676-1724?),<sup>1</sup> through a number of sources preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI). One of these sources deservedly is well known to scholars, the *Litterae Indipetae*, or petitions for the Indies sent from Jesuits all over Europe to the Superior General in search of a missionary appointment. These petitions will be considered alongside source material that is relatively unknown in this area of research, the *Epistulae Generalium*. These registers of correspondence sent from the office of the Superior General in Rome, and still preserved there, in fact include the General's responses to numerous petitioners for the Indies, providing us with a valuable window onto the multiple perspectives and

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1 Little is known about the life of Ignazio Maria Romeo; however, ARSI does provide a considerable amount of information, as well as leaving some details blank. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1692 (Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, henceforth ARSI, *Sic.* 86, f. 127). He professed the three vows in 1700 (ARSI, *Sic.* 92, f. 107) and, unusually, proceeded to the solemn fourth vow in 1710 (ARSI, *Sic.* 98, f. 43). He studied Rhetoric and Theology and taught Grammar and Humanities for a few years. As this article shows, he secured a place among those chosen for the overseas missions, only to be thwarted in his vocation by the intervention of his family. Instead, he mostly operated as a missionary and preacher in Sicily (his name is registered in the *Catalogi Triennales* preserved in ARSI, *Sic.* 89, 92, 95, 98, 101, 104, 107). In addition to his predominantly missionary work in Sicily, he is listed in the 1720 Catalogue as having been Advisor to the Tribunal of the Holy Office for fourteen years (ARSI, *Sic.* 104, C. 103). This role is no longer mentioned in the Catalogue of 1723, which is the last Catalogue that includes Ignazio's name. In the following Catalogue of 1727, there is no mention of Ignazio, nor is he listed among the 'Dimissi' (dismissed) or 'Defuncti' (deceased) from these years.

processes involved in the selection of candidates for the overseas Jesuit missions.

In the case of Ignazio Maria Romeo, we discover a persistent petitioner for the Indies, whose responses from the Superior General, and even epistolary interventions from his family (remarkably still extant), spanned the first two decades of the eighteenth century. The documentary trail left behind in relation to this particular vocation story provides us with the opportunity to present the framework for understanding these sources in relation to each other; to explore the different viewpoints about the missionary appointment process afforded by these documents; to understand the potential impact on those concerned; and to apprehend the crisis of vocation that could take hold of petitioners when they failed in their objectives. More broadly, these documents allow us to investigate further many aspects of the missionary enterprise that usually remain obscure, despite the substantial interest in this subject in recent scholarship. In so doing, this essay seeks to shed new light on this important area of research in Jesuit history: the overseas missionary enterprise.

### ***Litterae Indipetae* and how Jesuit missionaries were selected**

As it has been observed in recent scholarship about Jesuit views of the 'Indies' within Europe, there was no shortage of missionary narratives or vocations in the early-modern Society of Jesus: «Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century was awash with accounts from the Jesuit missions in the 'Indies', while young Jesuits in colleges and novitiates eagerly sought a place on the missions, especially in the East». <sup>2</sup> The thousands of so called *Litterae Indipetae* (on account of the letters' authors – known nowadays as 'indipeti' – were 'Indiam petentes') currently are preserved in the *Fondo Gesuitico* (ARSI), and recently have generated considerable interest from scholars in many fields, including cultural studies, religious history, history of emotions, and psychology. <sup>3</sup> The process

2 Camilla RUSSELL, "Imagining the «Indies»: Italian Jesuit Petitions for the Overseas Missions at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century", in: Massimo DONATTINI, Giuseppe MARCOCCI, Stefania PASTORE (eds.), *L'Europa divisa e i nuovi mondi. Per Adriano Prosperi*, Vol. 2, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2011, pp. 179-89.

3 Lamalle was one of the first scholars who briefly wrote about 'litterae indipetae' in his article: Edmond LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso: l'Archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù", *Archiva Ecclesiae* 34-35, N. 1 (1981-82), pp. 89-120. For a table with their precise distribution in the Archive, see Aliocha MALDAVSKY, "Pedir las Indias. Las cartas 'indipetae' de lo jesuitas

of applying to be sent to the Indies through a specific petition addressed to the Superior General in Rome, already had become standard practice by the end of the sixteenth century: as Aliocha Maldavsky explained, the production of these petitions reflected the central role of the Society's most senior figure in appointments to the missions, for the Superior General was «an important piece of the cycle of selecting missionaries, even in the case of not-preserved *Litterae Indipetae*, because he regularly wrote to the Provincials about how to organize the expeditions».<sup>4</sup>

The precise steps in this selection process are not entirely clear, also because the possible paths to an appointment appear to have varied considerably; however, the General – and his secretaryship – had the last word. We must take into consideration, nevertheless, that each appointment also was influenced by political factors, the candidates' family circumstances, as well as the local superiors' opinions. In his classic study about the Jesuit «desire for the Indies», Gian Carlo Roscioni concludes that rarely is it possible to apprehend the precise reason for a missionary appointment, or why preference was shown towards one Jesuit instead of another. On the *verso* of some *indipetae*, short notes occasionally were recorded (*regestum* of the letter, and phrases such as «scritto al libro», «salutato», and «cavato»), whereas, as Roscioni observes, 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

européos, siglos XVI-XVII, ensayo historiográfico”, *Relaciones XXXIII*, N. 132 (2012), pp. 171-72, including an important review of recent studies on the subject (pp. 147-81). Concerning 'indipeti' of the Antica Compagnia, see, amongst others, Gian Carlo ROSCIONI, *Il desiderio delle Indie. Storie, sogni e fughe di giovani gesuiti italiani*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001; Adriano PROSPERI, *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996 (esp. pp. 549-684) and Alessandro GUERRA, “Per un'archeologia della strategia missionaria dei Gesuiti: le *indipetae* e il sacrificio nella 'vigna del Signore'”, *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 13 (2000), pp. 109-92. As for the “indipeti” of the Antica and Nova Compagnia, and further bibliographical data, see Emanuele Colombo, Marina Massimi, *In viaggio. Gesuiti italiani candidati alle missioni tra Antica e Nuova Compagnia*, Milano, Il Sole 24 ORE, 2014

4 «una pieza del circuito de elección, incluso quando no se conservan cartas *indipetae*, pues mantenía una correspondencia asidua con los provinciales acerca de la organización de las expediciones», MALDAVSKY, “Pedir las Indias”, p. 154. About the selection process see, by the same author, “Administrer les vocations missionnaires. Les *Indipetae* et l'organisation des expéditions de missionnaires aux Indes Occidentales au début du XVII e siècle”, in: Pierre-Antoine FABRE, Bernard VINCENT (eds.), *Missions religieuses Modernes. “Notre lieu est le monde”*, Roma, École française de Rome, 2007, pp. 45-70.

(with annotations, assessments?) the names of the candidates for the Indies». <sup>5</sup>

Despite these lacunae in the documentary path to a missionary appointment, several *Litterae Indipetae* provide some hints about it, including reference to the written 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 writing again, explaining that they were following directions in sending their petition once more to the General in Rome. Many *indipeti*, on the other hand, complained that they had received no reply to their previous petition; some of them suspected that the local superiors were not forwarding their request to Rome (which indeed happened), and tell of their determination to reach the Superior, via a new petition, or in person, with the aim of speaking to him directly.

We can find an example of such allusions in the petitions of Francesco Corsetti. This Jesuit sent his first requests in 1704 and 1705; then, after a ten-year break, another letter-writing phase started, from 1716 until 1718. In one of the final petitions he described the three key phases of his vocation to the Indies: the first one was when he was in Frascati, and the Superior General replied to him that «certainly I will not fail to console you at the appropriate time»; the second phase was when he was in Castel Gandolfo, when, once more, the General repeated his affirmative response, with a proviso, «yes, but after Theology»; and the last phase 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». <sup>6</sup>

5 «documenti che c'informino in proposito quasi non esistono, così come scomparsi sono, secondo ogni apparenza, i 'libri' o registri in cui venivano appuntati (con annotazioni, giudizi?) i nomi dei candidati alle Indie»: ROSCIONI, *Il desiderio delle Indie*, p. 169. Roscioni's conclusions remain valid (at least to date) for the *indipetae* written before the suppression (1773), but after the Restoration (1814) a recent (re) discovery could change this historical impasse. ARSI archivist, Mauro Brunello, recently located two nineteenth-century *Catalogi* (*Catalogus sociorum missiones postulantium ab anno 1829 ad annum 1853 inclusive*; *Catalogus sociorum missiones postulantium ab anno 1854 ad annum 1888*): these notebooks report some data concerning the Jesuits who asked for the Indies (names, destinations if specified), and several codes and signs yet to be deciphered. These documents no doubt will help us to understand better the criteria that guided the Roman Curia's missionary policy (Mauro BRUNELLO, "Nuova Compagnia di Gesù e vocazione missionaria: le *indipetae* dell'Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) e l'Archivio fotografico Acquaderni", *Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa*, forthcoming).

6 Corsetti recalls that the General wrote: «a tempo opportuno non lascerò certo di

We can find in these sentences a plausible synthesis of the Roman *modus operandi* in the replies to the *Litterae Indipetae*, which involved creating a delicate balance between the parties involved. These replies apparently sought to make it possible for a Jesuit not to lose hope, even if ten long years passed from the time of writing his first requests, while at the same time 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, and insist on obedience, it may be that in this way 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' for making missionary appointments. 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 'Provincia' – provide important evidence of this strategy, for it is here that we find records of the Generals' replies to the petitions. Despite the recent intense scholarly interest in the *Litterae Indipetae*, this particular document is not well known to historians, and very little utilised, especially in relation to the application process for the Indies. It is to this source that we turn in the next part of our analysis.

### **General framework of the *Epistulae Generalium***

The Society of Jesus produced a significant amount of documents, and none more so than from its Roman hub. Every day, hundreds of letters were sent out to all manner of addressees. Once an epistle was delivered, in most cases, the document did not come back to the Archivum Romanum; if they survived at all (and many did not), these documents were preserved in the location where they were sent. However, as Lamalle observed thirty years ago, there was a practice of conservation active in the Society, whereby «every time a Superior uses his authority to arrive at a decision, he must preserve a transcribed record of it in his letter-book».<sup>7</sup> This was even

consolarvi»; «sì, ma doppo la Teologia»; «le speranze, tante volte rafferimatele, vanno horamai accostandosi al bramato lor termine», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 459 (12 March 1717). The relevant records show no trace of Corsetti having reached the Indies, and the lists of deceased Jesuits from the period are silent as well, which may suggest that he left the Society altogether, although we cannot be certain about this.

7 «ogni Superiore che impegna la sua autorità in una decisione, deve conservarne

truer for the Superior General in Rome, whose documentary output was of the utmost importance for the Society's governance and its worldwide interests. His (synthesised) replies to correspondence sent to him from within the Society (and, on occasion, outside it) were copied in specific letter books, called *Epistulae Generalium*, ordered and preserved according to the Assistancy and Province of the letter's destination (that is, the groupings into which the governance and administration of the Society were organised according to geo-political considerations).<sup>8</sup>

The *Epistulae Generalium* unfortunately met with considerable misfortune over time, and many registers disappeared prior to the Suppression of the order.<sup>9</sup> Lamalle conjectured that they may have been destroyed by the Jesuits themselves, as a last «gesto eroico di amore filiale»,<sup>10</sup> in a bid to defend the Society's reputation against its critics in the dramatic final years leading up to the papal *Breve* of suppression in 1773. This would seem to be the reason why the Spanish and French letter books from the 1650s (and in some cases, even before) are no longer extant; in the case of the *Assistentia Italiae* and *Germaniae*, most of the pre-suppression letter books fortunately have survived.<sup>11</sup> The fate of the Far Eastern missions' registers was particularly cruel, however: they completely disappeared. This documentary silence in relation to the 'Indies' of the east, and the other notable *lacunae* in this valuable source, constitute a significant loss which can be compensated only very partially by the *Litterae Soli* (collections of letters reserved for the eyes of the General only).

Apart from the paucity of the documents themselves, especially

la trascrizione registrata nel suo copialettere», LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso", p. 113.

8 Non-Jesuit correspondents included laypeople, especially nobility and other high-ranking individuals, but also members of other religious orders, relatives of Jesuits, including sisters, brothers, fathers, and so on.

9 LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso", pp. 114-15.

10 LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso", p. 115.

11 «È proprio in materia di registri – *Epistulae Generalium* – che l'archivio ha subito le menomazioni le più gravi al tempo della soppressione della Compagnia. Normalmente le serie dei registri sono molto regolari, senza le lacune caratteristiche della serie dei cataloghi. Per l'insieme delle Province d'Italia e di Germania vanno fino alla vigilia degli avvenimenti tragici del 1773, ma per le cinque Province francesi cessano bruscamente prima del '700, per la Francia e l'Aquitania nel 1696, la Champagne nel 1692, Tolosa nel 1695 e Lione nel 1699. Per le quattro Province di Spagna, la situazione è più severa ancora: i registri cessano press'a poco nel 1637», LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso", p. 115.

for some areas, the scholarly attention paid to the *Epistulae Generalium* generally has been relatively poor. The collection awaits thorough exploration by historians, and are almost unknown in connection with the thousands of *Litterae Indipetae* sent from all over Europe and preserved at ARSI.<sup>12</sup> The complexity (and incompleteness) of the source, and the assumption, (indeed, misconception), that the General could not have had time to reply to such letters of ‘minor’ importance, probably kept scholars from investigating these registers, and from seeking out the clues that they in fact hold about how the Roman Curia dealt with this central task in the Society’s operations: appointing men to the overseas missions.

The research presented in this essay brings these sources together for the first time in relation to the well-documented Italian Assistency. The analysis is situated chronologically between 1687 and 1724 (thus corresponding to the Generalates of Thyrso González de Santalla SJ<sup>13</sup> and Michelangelo Tamburini SJ<sup>14</sup>), and focuses especially on the *Litterae Indipetae* from the ‘Provincia Siciliae’.<sup>15</sup> All materials pertaining to the Sicilian *Epistulae Generalium* for this period are extant and conserved at ARSI:<sup>16</sup> some of the registers have an alphabetical index, with the names of the addressees recorded; however, many of them have no index and the researcher must browse each document to discover the names of individual addressees. This process is rendered more difficult still, on account of the fact that names tended to be written in very small characters, in abbreviated form, and often in handwriting that is not very perspicuous. The month in which the letter was sent usually is

12 This topic has been studied recently in Chapter 6 – of Monika MIAZEK-MĘCZYŃSKA, *Indipetae Polonae – kołatanie do drzwi misji chińskiej*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2015, reviewed in this issue of AHSl, by Robert Danieluk SJ. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for this author to read the Polish-language monograph in the preparation of this essay.

13 Tirso González de Santalla, \* 18.I.1624 Arganza, SJ 3.II.1643 Oviedo, † 27.X.1705 Roma (*DHCJ* II, pp. 1644–50).

14 Michelangelo Tamburini, \* 6.12.1647 Montese, SJ 27.IX.1664 Novellara, † 28.II.1730 (*DHCJ* II, pp. 1650–54).

15 This work is still in progress but, according to the statistics compiled to date, the Fondo Gesuitico contains 1565 Italian letters written during the years 1687–1730: 38% of them were composed in the ‘Provincia Siciliae’, 27% in the ‘Neapolitana’, 25% in the ‘Mediolanensis’ and 11% in the ‘Romana’.

16 All of the registers have been consulted for ARSI, *Sic.* 36–37 (years 1694–97) and *Sic.* 55 (1732–33), focusing on the responses to dozen *indipeti* that constitute the larger doctoral study of which this article is a part.

recorded at the top of the page, followed by the precise date for a group of letters sent on the same day: the letters were addressed to a wide variety of people, especially fellow-Jesuits (Provincials, Rectors, local superiors), as well as to lay people (including, on occasion, women). The registers also note the place to which the letter was sent.

When considered specifically in relation to the *Litterae Indipetae*, the registers reveal that not all of the letters of petition have been preserved in the Archivum Romanum, and many more were written than those we have access to now. This fact emerges also from reading the petitions themselves: many candidates described letters they had written previously, of which we no longer have a trace. However, the *Epistulae Generalium* are useful in helping reconstruct the contents of these letters, revealing that *indipeti* not only wrote about their requests for the Indies, but included many other topics in their letters intended for the personal attention of the Superior General. Thus, in these registers we find, not only answers regarding the Indies, but congratulations, advice, consolations, and encouragements. From time to time, it seems, the *indipeti* found themselves writing to their General from a wide variety of roles – as missionaries, students of a certain college, teachers, domestic helpers – all turning to the Father General for suggestions, to seek comfort in trials, or to receive a solution for issues they could not discuss with anyone else. Most *indipeti* never became particularly ‘famous’: apart from their petitions, traceable in some cases exclusively through the Superior General’s replies, the only other evidence of many of their lives is to be found within the brief and schematic *Catalogi Triennales* (triennial personnel lists). This makes the *Epistulae Generalium* an even more important source to learn about the lives of individual Jesuits and, in particular, about the evolution of their ‘vocation’ to the Indies, in turn shedding light on the process by which a vocation was accepted or rejected through the appointment process whose outlines can be viewed in this valuable documentary record.<sup>17</sup>

17 For a recent publication about ‘vocations’ (not only to the Indies) see, Adriano PROSPERI, *La vocazione. Storie di gesuiti tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, Torino, Einaudi, 2016. About the same subject, for the Indies, see: Camilla RUSSELL, “Vocation to the East: Italian Candidates for the Jesuit China Mission at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century”, in: Machtelt ISRAËLS, Louis WALDMAN (eds.), *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, Florence, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2013, Vol. 2, pp. 313–27; Amélie VANTARD, “Les vocations missionnaires chez les Jésuites français aux XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles”, *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* Tom. 116, N. 3 (2009), pp. 9–22; Charlotte DE CASTELNAU L’ESTOILE, “Élection et vocation. Le choix de la mission dans la

### Typical replies to the *Litterae Indipetae*

The General usually replied to correspondence within a few weeks; in the case of the earliest *Litterae Indipetae*, his answers tended to include expressing thanks to the Jesuit petitioner, and the hope that the applicant might resemble Francis Xavier (role model *par excellence*), not only in his desire to go to the Indies, but more importantly in virtue as well.<sup>18</sup> As the day of the ‘Apostle of the Indies’ came to be marked with increasing permanence in the Society – and subsequently as a fixture in the ecclesiastical calendar, first through Xavier’s beatification (1619), and then through his canonisation (1622) – his feast day on 3 December (the day of his death) was the preferred time for many to write their request. Many sent a petition annually, declaring that they wrote as the result of a vow to Xavier to pursue their vocation to the Indies in imitation of the Society’s most famous missionary saint.<sup>19</sup>

If the applicant was still a *scholasticus*, the reply they received from the Roman Curia underscored the importance of achieving a good *curriculum studiorum* 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.<sup>20</sup> In the case of one petitioner, who distinguished himself for becoming particularly insistent and impatient, the General invited him to wait and persist in his vocation.<sup>21</sup>

If the Jesuit expressed his conviction, as sometimes occurred,

province jésuite du Portugal à la fin du XVIe siècle”, in: Pierre-Antoine FABRE, Bernard VINCENT (eds), *Missions Religieuses Modernes*, pp. 21–43; Miriam TURRINI, “La vita scelta? Appunti per una storia della vocazione in età moderna”, in: Gian Paolo BRIZZI e Giuseppe OLMI (eds), *Dai cantieri della storia. Liber amicorum per Paolo Prodi*, Bologna, CLUEB, 2007, pp. 145–59.

18 Amongst many references to the example of Xavier, see, for example: «il Santo Apostolo ... vi renda simile a sé nella virtù, sì come vi concede, che lo rassomigliaste nel desiderio delle Missioni dell’Indie», ARSI, *Sic.* 39, f. 63 (Palermo, 15 January 1703).

19 For example, Filippo Furnari was answered: «Ho letto questa vostra scritta nel giorno appunto di San Francesco Saverio con particolar sentimento di consolazione, mentre veggo il generoso desiderio, che vi dà il Signore di seguitare gli esempi di quel grande Apostolo», ARSI, *Sic.* 39, f. 1v (Palermo, 2 January 1702).

20 With expressions such as: «quando sia tempo, spero ve ne sarà aperto un gran campo», ARSI, *Sic.* 39, f. 88 (Palermo, 2 July 1703).

21 «Proseguite a pregarlo [il Signore], che a me manifesti la sua ~~santissima~~ divina volontà, e dia a voi forza per eseguirla», ARSI, *Sic.* 40, f. 3 (Messina, January 1704). The word «santissima» is crossed out in original document.

that only through an appointment to the Indies could he find the true fulfilment of his vocation and life in the Society – and that this would not be possible in his own Province – he was reminded how important it was to think about his present tasks and be ready to work anywhere.<sup>22</sup> From these petitions, it is evident that a number of Jesuits indeed were not satisfied with their daily lives and repeatedly complained about it: in reply, the General reprimanded them for their uneasiness. In one letter, he 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»; he advised that, «I rather think you should be happy with all of the responsibilities that keep you occupied where you are».<sup>23</sup>

As we can see, there is much information that we can deduce from the Roman answers to the petitions for the Indies, especially when combining this data with the *Litterae Indipetae* of the same period. In the next section of this analysis, we shall use this data in relation to a single Jesuit petitioner, to follow the fascinating story that emerges about him from the *Epistulae Generalium*, revealing a three-way exchange between a Jesuit, his father *secundum carnem*, and two Generals of the Society.

### **Ignazio Maria Romeo SJ in his own words**

Ignazio Maria Romeo was born in Palermo in 1676, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1692. As he specified in desperation on one occasion,<sup>24</sup> he sent more than thirty *Litterae Indipetae* in his lifetime, without ever managing to leave for the Indies. 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 we shall see in the discussion that follows. Thirteen of Ignazio's letters, written between 1702 and 1720, are extant in the *Fondo Gesuitico* across two separate boxes, 750 and 751;<sup>25</sup> thanks to the *Epistulae*

22 «esercitarvi non meno negli attuali ministerii ... in qualsivoglia luogo ... che ne' santi desiderii di maggiori fatiche in paesi fin rimoti, con piena indifferenza», ARSI, Sic. 40, f. 13 (Mazara, 28 January 1704).

23 «Desidero a Vostra Reverenza 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'ufficio ... Piuttosto parmi che abbia giusta occasione di più contentarsi nei ministerii, ne' quali viene costì occupato», ARSI, Sic. 40, f. 144v (Palermo, 3 November 1704).

24 Ignazio explicitly mentioned that he had written more than thirty *Litterae Indipetae* (ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 464, Palermo, 15 March 1717).

25 These boxes contain Italian petitions from 1696–1717 (750) and 1718–70 (751). For a table of all the pre-Suppression petitions available in ARSI, see MALDAVSKY, "Pedir las Indias", pp. 171–72.

*Generalium ad Provinciam Siculam*, it is possible to recover the Roman answers to the disappeared letters as well. Given the relatively extended period during which these petitions and replies were exchanged, no less than two Superiors General authored the replies sent from Rome: Thyrso González de Santalla and Michelangelo Tamburini (Generals 1687–1705 and 1706–1730 respectively). But more surprising is that the letter books reveal the existence of other documents related to this case:<sup>26</sup> they provide evidence that a further important protagonist in this ‘vocational story’ was played by Ignazio’s father, Ignazio Romeo, Marquis delli Magnisi.<sup>27</sup>

Of course the origins of this web of correspondence lie with Ignazio himself and his petitions for an appointment to the Indies.

26 The surviving documentation indicates that Ignazio’s father wrote to the Superior General many more times than the letters now preserved: most likely, only those documents were kept that were considered particularly relevant for the Society of Jesus. Only two of his letters survive: ARSI, *Sic.* 188, ff. 133–34 (Palermo, 4 March 1704); *Sic.* 185, ff. 282ab (Palermo, 14 July 1699). However, we have much better epistolary records of the replies sent from two Generals, González and Tamburini, who sent at least twelve letters to the marquis (ARSI, *Sic.* 38, f. 18v, Palermo (28 July 1698), f. 81r (Palermo, 10 August 1699), f. 122r (Palermo, 1 March 1700); ARSI, *Sic.* 40, f. 47 (Palermo, 31 March 1704); ARSI, *Sic.* 41 (Palermo, 12 July 1706), f. 193 (Palermo, 5 October 1706), f. 249 (Palermo, 20 December 1706), f. 339, (Adernò, 25 April 1707), f. 379 (Palermo, 20 June 1707), f. 438 (Palermo, n.d. August 1707); ARSI, *Sic.* 42, f. 4 (n.p., 9 January 1708), ff. 193–94 (Palermo, n.d. July 1708). These abbreviated answers (registered within the Sicilian *Epistulae Generalium*) thus are quite numerous, but they are not particularly valuable for this study because they contain mainly vague sentiments of gratitude (including for receipt of a letter) or congratulations, according to the occasion.

27 Fathers (in most cases, but also mothers and brothers/sisters) could become involved in support of an indipeta’s decision, or more commonly take a position against it. This research has identified 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). For the potentially complicated relationship between Jesuits and their fathers (spiritual and *secundum carnem*), see Adriano PROSPERI, “Il figlio, il padre, il gesuita. Un testo di Antonio Possevino”, *Rinascimento* (2014), pp. 112–55; this theme concerning Jesuits in disagreement with their real fathers (specifically, the French René Ayrault, and his Italian counterpart, Luigi da Molin) is further developed in PROSPERI, *La vocazione*, pp. 170–87. See also, Miriam TURRINI, “La vita scelta?”, pp. 145–59, who underlines that «i conflitti tra padri e figli, tra famiglie, ordini regolari, istituzioni ecclesiastiche e statali attorno a scelte vocazionali sono uno dei luoghi nei quali cercare», to better investigate the topic of religious vocation (p. 159); Turrini wrote about conscience, confessions and young Jesuits in several other articles. For an earlier general study of fathers and sons in the early-modern period, see the now-classic (but also criticized and somewhat dated), Philippe ARIÈS, *L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime*, Parigi, Seuil, 1960.

The first request that still survives (constituting several lines written in Latin) was sent in January 1702, although Ignazio 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).<sup>28</sup> At this time, Ignazio was in his mid-twenties, and the 1705 Catalogues tell us that, after his profession of the three vows in 1700, he enjoyed good health, was teaching Grammar and Humanities at the College of Palermo, and had begun missionary and preaching activities within his Province.<sup>29</sup> In his fifth letter to the General (only the second petition now extant), dated 17 October 1702, Ignazio remarked on his good health, which he described as «perfect»: he wrote that this, in his view, 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».<sup>30</sup>

Before receiving his much 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 Father General at the end of 1703 that he especially did not trust his Provincial: «I am afraid he will try to obstruct my departure». Ignazio even hypothesized that: «he will mention 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».<sup>31</sup> 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 'licence' for the Indies, specifically to the "New World" of the Americans, although we have no further detail than this. He was twenty-eight years old. His

28 ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 104 (Palermo, January 1702).

29 ARSI, *Sic.* 95, f. 100 (*Catalogus Triennalis*, 1705).

30 The full quotation is as follows: «la salute, godo perfettissima m'è stata concessa solo a bene dell'Indiani in circostanze appunto, che si parlava di morte da tutti i Medici, e davano il mio riavimento per impossibile», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 117 (Palermo, 17 October 1702).

31 The full quotation reads: «L'esservi ... rimessa l'ultima determinazione ad elezzione del 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, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 151 (Palermo, 21 December 1703). Here and throughout, «Parenti» has been translated as «relatives»; however, it could also have the more restrictive meaning of «parents».

ecstatic response to this news still can be read in one of his letters, signing his message of copious thanks to the General with a new name, «the Happiest Indian», written «with my whole heart in this quill». <sup>32</sup> In his excitement, he wished to leave immediately: he felt «tanto Paradiso vicinior, quanto Panormo longius me abire video». <sup>33</sup>

Ignazio nevertheless was aware that he was at risk of being prevented from leaving, and he invited the Superior General to be cautious. In the Post Script to his letter on 24 January 1704, Ignazio begged the General, «to call me as soon as possible to the ship, otherwise these good Fathers will cause some substantial impediment» to the departure. <sup>34</sup> 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 well being (although his health seemed to have improved at this time); they may have been fond of their pupil and wished him to stay in Sicily to work for the Province (Ignazio was not the only Jesuit from this Province, or this period, to complain about what was seen as their Superiors' excessive attachment to keeping their young charges at home); or they simply may have been telling the Marquis what he wanted, and asked, to hear. It is important to note, however, that in this case we are obliged to rely on Ignazio alone for these impressions.

Rather optimistically, however, he claimed in his letters to General González that his father approved of the decision, but that 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». <sup>35</sup> Ignazio

32 «Felicissimo Indiano ... con il cuore tutto sulla penna», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 157 (Palermo, 24 January 1704).

33 Ignazio ascribed these words to «our» Marcello Mastrilli SJ (1603–37), another inspiration for aspiring missionaries: on this fascinating Jesuit missionary and martyr (in Japan), see Ines G. ŽUPANOV, «Passage to India: Jesuit spiritual economy between martyrdom and profit in the Seventeenth Century», *The Journal of Early Modern History* 16 (2012), pp. 121–59. As to Ignazio's 'quotation' of Mastrilli, it has not been possible (to date) to find other examples of this phrase in connection with Mastrilli.

34 «priego ... a chiamarmi presto in Nave, altrimenti questi buoni Padri saran cagione di qualche sodo impedimento», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 157 (Palermo, 24 January 1704).

35 «dicerie somministrate da quei buoni Padri contro all'Indie, vedo turbarsi quello, e me impedito del dar le dovute risposte», *ibid.*

nevertheless remained confident that his father would be convinced by his son's arguments, but he warned the Superior General not to waste precious time before sending him.

Some days after he wrote this letter, which was to be 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»; he explained how, «regarding Indian departure», he had learned that it had been cancelled because of his mother's protests, and he was desperate.<sup>36</sup> He 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 breast».<sup>37</sup> The level of difficulty in which Ignazio found himself already can be discerned from the status of his mother and her connections – apparently the Marchioness was godmother to the viceroy of Sicily, Francesco Del Giudice (1647–1725; viceroy from 1701), as Ignazio mentioned twice in his letters, and it appears that the viceroy himself also intervened to stop Ignazio from departing.<sup>38</sup>

Ignazio was indignant. He recounts in his letter to the General how 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 simple, and which «seems to me [possible,] to resist easily my mother's tearful assaults»,<sup>39</sup> as he himself already had done. The Jesuit was inconsolable, not only because his departure thus had been delayed, but also because he felt sure that in the future his mother would have seen to it that his departure would not take place at all: «I see that

36 «bisognevollissimo ed afflittissimo ... supplichevole ... intorno alla mia partenza Indiana», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 162 (Palermo, 6 March 1704).

37 Romeo wrote: «Nel tribunale della cortese, e paterna carità di Vostra Reverenza m'appello ... alla sua autorità ed al santo Zelo, che l'arde in petto», *ibid.*

38 In 1704 the Jesuit complained about the Marchioness' intrusion in his candidacy (ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 162, Palermo, 6 March 1704) and, more than ten years later, he wrote that his departure had been previously cancelled because of his parents' and the viceroy's intervention (ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 464, Marsala, 15 March 1717). About the viceroy Francesco Del Giudice see [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-del-giudice\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-del-giudice_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

39 «parendo a me di superar facilmente gl'assalti lagrimosi di mia Madre», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 162.

the path to my longed-for Indies is almost entirely precluded to me, if the matter must depend on the ‘yes’ of Mother». <sup>40</sup> This situation seemed to him like a «labyrinth»; but, he wrote, he remained hopeful that the Superior General would release him from this impasse. <sup>41</sup>

In his letter of protest at what for him was a most cruel outcome, Ignazio (correctly) supposed that his father was involved in the matter. He then carefully set about listing the reasons why he should not remain in Sicily. First, he outlined his suspicion that his father feared that Ignazio never would have left Europe, and that his son simply would have remained in Spain, apparently an unnecessary sacrifice of separation from his family, given that it did not include the evangelization of the Indies. He wrote: «and I reply to this, that 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». <sup>42</sup> We will see, however, that curiously this was the only concern that the Marquis did not mention at all in his letter to the Superior General.

Second, Ignazio assumed – very precisely this time – that his father wanted him to be (at least, partially) responsible for the Magnisi household: in fact, 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. <sup>43</sup> Ignazio had left his family already when he joined the Society of Jesus, but it was felt that he would have been available nevertheless to assist his family from Sicily or nearby. Even the geographically closer Tunisia, for instance, was a destination that his parents would have accepted more peacefully, but Ignazio quite openly had refused it before. <sup>44</sup> In the Western or

40 «mi vedo preclusa quasi dell’in tutto la strada all’Indie bramate se il negozio debba dipendere dal sì di mia Madre», *ibid.*

41 The whole phrase reads: «spero però dalla mano potente di Vostra Reverenza esser tolto da sì fatto labirinto», *ibid.*

42 «a questo rispondo, che di ciò son contento, e quando altro a Dio non possa sacrificare, gli sacrificherò l’allontanamento de’ parenti e della propria Provincia», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 162.

43 «sua famiglia a cui non sarà sollievo il secondogenito mio successore, e potrei io colla mia direzione in caso di sua morte aiutarla», *ibid.*

44 Ignazio wrote one year before that the Provincial superior wanted to send him as a missionary to Tunisi, but he refused this destination, because – amongst other reasons – North Africa was not distant enough from Sicily and his parents would have called him back every time they wished («Padre Provinciale ... parmi divenuto contraddittore di mia Vocazione Indiana, vuol egli destinar mi all’Africa per la Missione di Tunesi ... una tal Missione non esser stata mia vocazione ...

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. Even if, as a Jesuit priest, Ignazio would not have been able to inherit the title of Marquis delli Magnisi, by being based in Sicily, (and with his father too old and his brothers too young to guarantee good guidance of the family's affairs,) 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 the local Jesuit determination to work with the family to keep Ignazio at home all the more potent, and clearly difficult for poor Ignazio to overcome. Yet, on this point, the young Jesuit did not conceal his anger and refusal to comply, indicating that the expectation of help from him on the part of his father was only a chimera, and that «I will only help his house solely with my prayers».<sup>45</sup> He concluded his letter, nevertheless, on an optimistic note, observing that his mother's emotionally-charged protest («schiamazzar», literally, 'squalling') was almost over, and that she seemed to him «now ... quite pacified».<sup>46</sup> However, like many of his fellow-*indipeti*, Ignazio was too prone to see the bright side, and ignored other more concrete signs.

After some time, the beleaguered Ignazio returned to the subject in yet another letter to the Superior General, underlining all the months (five!) that had passed since their last correspondence. He wrote «I am waiting to be consoled by the Real Indies».<sup>47</sup> Since

impedisce Tunesi quell'Olocausto totale ... ed ammette facilissimo il ritorno per ogni accidente in Sicilia ... i miei Parenti ad ogni capriccio d'affetto» (ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 135, Sciacca, 26 April 1703).

45 The complete phrase is: «lo sperare da me un sì fatto aiuto è una chimera, aiuterò sol la sua casa colle sole orazioni», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 135. It would be interesting to conduct further research into the Magnisi family (as well as other elite families whose members became Jesuits), but such an investigation is not within the scope of this essay. Further research could help us understand the precise relationship between these elites and the Society of Jesus in this period, for instance, in the political landscape.

46 «hor ... quasi placata», *ibid.*

47 «... aspetto d'esser consolato coll'Indie Reali», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 170 (Palermo, 12 July 1704).

their last communication, Ignazio relayed that «I remain silent, and direct all possible energy towards calming my relatives (who oppose my Indian move)». <sup>48</sup> This is what the General had enjoined him to do, but, he wrote, they seemed «more stubborn than ever». <sup>49</sup> 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 Jesuits, the very same who were stopping him from leaving: «their consciences are in the hands of the Jesuits, who are holy, learned and cautious, and these same reassure them that they are not contravening the divine will by wishing to prevent my departure». <sup>50</sup> Ignazio thus felt himself to be in something of a trap, which he believed had been devised as the result of a conspiratorial alliance between his parents, possibly the viceroy, and his Sicilian confreres. But Ignazio remained firm in his determination to leave, and he even seemed to calculate that he could count on the Superior General's support, when he confided that he was «ready for a stealthy departure, and for anything else necessary to support his divine callings». <sup>51</sup>

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 Superior General replied with the same regularity, always underlining 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 licence to leave for the Indies; by now, his correspondent was General Tamburini (General from 1706), and Ignazio himself was forty-one years old. He recalled in his letter: «I have not written to Your Paternity for two-and-a-half years, and I will not repeat to you 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

48 «sto in silenzio, e pongo tutte le possibili industrie per acquetare i miei Parenti (contrarii alla mia mossa Indiana)», *ibid.*

49 «più che mai ostinati», *ibid.*

50 «la loro coscienza sta in mano di Gesuiti Santi, Dotti, e Prudenti, e questi li rendono sicuri del non contravenire al divino volere impedendo la mia partenza», *ibid.*

51 «pronto a partenza furtiva, e ad ogn'altro, fosse necessario per assecondare alle divine chiamate», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 170.

missions], you would have satisfied me».<sup>52</sup> We will see 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 fuelled his expectations of an imminent departure.

By 1717, then, and despite the objectively reduced likelihood of ever realising his aim, Ignazio was no less motivated than before, except that this time he included an admission of envy – a «holy envy» of course.<sup>53</sup> He wrote: «I see many from this Province ... satisfied [in their desire to depart for the Indies] and, having prayed a Novena to St Francis Xavier, ... I feel inspired to remind Your Paternity about my yearnings with all possible warmth, and accompanying them with the required indifference».<sup>54</sup> All things considered, he 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».<sup>55</sup> He concluded his letter by reminding his correspondent how long his desire had persisted, «from the time of my entry to the Society of Jesus»; he also indicated where the General could find the evidence of his vocation, among the correspondence of the Generals, in the Archive of the Curia: «if a search is conducted from the year 1702, it is possible to find in the Archive more than thirty of my letters, in part addressed to Your Paternity, in part to your predecessor, Our Father General Tirso, who appointed me [to the overseas missions ] in 1704, and as I was preparing to leave, everything was thrown into confusion by my domestic enemies ... (who are all dead, and they cannot stop me any more)».<sup>56</sup>

52 «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'aperture se l'incontrarebbero, m'avesse esaudito», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 464 (Palermo, 15 March 1717).

53 «santa invidia», *ibid.*

54 «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 accompagno colla dovuta indifferenza», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 464.

55 «non sono sì avanzato nell'età, che è sol di quarant'un anno, che non possa cimentarmi a viaggi lunghi, ed a qualunque fatica», *ibid.*

56 «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 Padre Nostro Generale Tirso, 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», *ibid.*

Ignazio's last letter to the General, written in 1720, makes no mention of the Indies. Because of its date, this letter is preserved in a different box from his previous petitions, but is still among the *Indipetae*, in *Fondo Gesuitico* 751. The Jesuit mentioned only the Sicilian missions, whose situation was a great concern to him, because «the holy ministry of those Missions» had become «too disgraced and despised by 'ours' [Sicilian Jesuits] in this Province». <sup>57</sup> If we consider this letter – filed as it was with his other petitions for the Indies – to constitute Ignazio's last *indipeta*, we might construct a 'romantic' and positive image of this Jesuit: even after the principle obstacle in going to the Indies had been removed through the death of his parents, he had still tried to renew his requests for the Indies, but after failing in this aim, he apparently ended his quest by peacefully surrendering, and devoting himself completely to the Sicilian missions, finding a different but equally satisfactory meaning to his Jesuit vocation.

This indeed may appear to be the case, especially if we limit our investigation to the *Litterae Indipetae*. 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 *Defuncti Societatis*, which occurred in cases where Jesuits had left the Society. More generally, and in browsing the *Epistulae Generalium ad Provinciam Siculam*, it would seem that we may yet have the opportunity to rewrite Ignazio's story and find unexpected developments along the way. At the same time, we may find answers 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 Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

### **Ignazio Maria Romeo as seen through the *Epistulae Generalium***

The Sicilian *Epistulae Generalium* reveal a different face of Ignazio. Even before his first *littera indipeta*, we find Ignazio's name for (probably) the first time in a reply to his father, from General González in 1698. The Superior General was keen to reassure the Marquis that Ignazio, who as we know had some health problems, was well taken care of in the Society. He wrote: «Never shall the Society of Jesus nor I fail to keep a watchful eye of Charity upon

57 «il sacro Ministero delle dette Missioni ... troppo dicaduto, e vilipeso da nostri in questa Provincia», ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 751, f. 80 (Agrigento, 19 January 1720).

Your Most Illustrious Lord's firstborn, and our brother Romeo».<sup>58</sup> He reassured the Marquis that he, as father, had charge over the medical care of his son, according to his wish.<sup>59</sup> The Sicilian Provincial, meanwhile, had been informed that the Marquis must be properly «served in such a minor issue»,<sup>60</sup> that is, in a matter concerning bodily health that did not interfere with his spiritual life, and in which his family thus might have oversight.

In the same register, we find at least two further letters to Ignazio's father, one dated 1699,<sup>61</sup> and the other from 1700.<sup>62</sup> The first letter thanks the Marquis for his kindness towards the Society of Jesus (clearly he was a benefactor), and the second one congratulates him for Ignazio's profession of the three vows made in 1700.<sup>63</sup> We can assume from these letters that the relationship between the Magnisi family and the Jesuit leadership in Rome (and probably Sicily) was quite close.

In the same letter book, we find an answer to a letter written by Ignazio that is not preserved in ARSI. In replying to this (for us) lost letter on 29 August 1701, the General remarked how it was impossible for him to send Ignazio to the Indies for the moment. The Sicilian Jesuit was advised instead 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 fervour 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 to within this college».<sup>64</sup>

58 «Non mai né la Compagnia, né io lasceremo di riguardare con occhio di attentissima Carità il primogenito di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima e nostro fratello Romeo», ARSI, *Sic.* 38, f.18v (Palermo, 28 July 1698).

59 «Ella è padrona di farlo curare dal medico, che più la aggrada», *ibid.*

60 The General wrote «che Vostra Signoria Illustrissima rimanga servita in cosa sì piccola», *ibid.*

61 ARSI, *Sic.* 38, f. 81 (Palermo, 10 August 1699).

62 ARSI, *Sic.* 38, f. 122 (Palermo, March 1700).

63 From the catalogue, "Gesuiti dell'Antica Compagnia secondo i gradi", (electronically consultable at ARSI,) we learn that Ignazio professed his fourth vow on 15 August 1710 (see also, ARSI, *Ital.* 22, ff. 357–58).

64 The General wrote: «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, f. 224 (Palermo, 29 August 1701).

Ignazio indeed mentions this illness, in his first surviving petition from 1702, from which he claims to be healed. In the *Catalogi Triennales* for 1692, (another precious source, and not very much used by historians)<sup>65</sup> one year after Ignazio's entry to the Society, we see that he was described as «sanus»,<sup>66</sup> while in the next *Catalogus Primus* (written in 1696), he seems to have become «infirmus» instead.<sup>67</sup> In the following years (from 1700), he seems to have recovered, as he is registered from that time as «sanus» once again. It is true that the *Catalogi Primi* and, even more so, the *Secundi*, are not completely reliable, because they were not drawn up with our modern criteria and sometimes their writer was in a hurry and did not spend too much time on establishing the accuracy of his information. Nevertheless, a simple description like the one regarding health was not such a difficult detail to be inserted correctly, since the Jesuit (and his health) probably was known to the author. The General, however, still referred to Ignazio's poor health in 1701. Whether for this or other reasons that we shall continue to explore, the *Epistulae Generalium* reveal

65 The *Catalogi Triennales* were compiled (approximately) every three years, and registered important data about every member of the Society according to all of the Jesuit houses throughout the world. The *Catalogus Primus (sive publicus)* provided general information, which, with little variation among them, listed: «Nomen et cognomen», «Patria», «Aetas», «Vires», «Tempus Societatis», «Tempus Studiorum», «Ministeria quae exercuit», «Gradus in Litteris», «Gradus in Societate». Using not the complete names but only a number («Numerus respondens nomini», known to the Superiors only), the *Catalogus Secundus (sive secretus)* analysed these Jesuits' characteristics even more deeply, recording their 'psychologies', personal attitudes and talents: «Ingenium», «Prudentia», «Experientia Rerum», «Profectus in Litteris», «Naturalis complexio», «Ad quo ministeria Societatis habet talentum». The *Catalogus Tertius (sive rerum)* registered practical information concerning every Jesuit house. About this source, see Cristiano CASALINI, "Discerning Skills: Psychological Insight at the Core of Jesuit Identity", in: Robert Aleksander MARYKS (ed.), *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ways of Proceeding within the Society of Jesus*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2016, pp. 189–211; Kateřina BOBKOVÁ-VALENTOVÁ, "Come elaborare la biografia di un gesuita? Rassegna delle fonti di registro dell'ordine, loro conservazione, accessibilità e valore documentario nella prospettiva di una sistematica elaborazione di un database biografico", *Bollettino dell'Istituto Storico Ceco di Roma* 9 (2014), pp. 111–45; José Manuel DÍAZ BLANCO, "Un sistema de información en la Europa del siglo XVII, los catálogos trienales de la Compañía de Jesús", *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 23 (2014), pp. 341–69; Marina MASSIMI, "Engenho e temperamentos nos catálogos e no pensamento da Companhia de Jesus nos séculos XVII e XVIII", *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicopatología Fundamental* 11, N. 4 (2008), pp. 675–87.

66 The first time we found the name of Ignazio Maria Romeo in the *Catalogi Triennales* of the 'Provincia Siciliae' is in 1693 (ARSI, *Sic.* 86, f. 127).

67 ARSI, *Sic.* 89, f. 111.

that Ignazio was told in 1701 that his missionary calling may well be exercised in Sicily and not the Indies, where: «certainly you will not have the hardships of the Missions in the Indies, but your merits undoubtedly could compensate for them».<sup>68</sup>

This, however, was not a definitive outcome, because, as we have seen already, in the subsequent epistolary exchanges, Ignazio managed to convince the General that he would be a perfect missionary for the distant Indies. Once again, it is the *Epistulae Generalium* that reveal how, at the beginning of 1704, Ignazio received a letter from the Provincial «with the longed-for notification to set forth, to obey the divine calls to the apostolic undertaking of the Missions in the Indies».<sup>69</sup> The Provincial was appointed to take care of the «details of the arrangement ... concerning the circumstances pertaining to departure and navigation».<sup>70</sup> The Superior General wished him the best: «I hope that the Lord with brother 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».<sup>71</sup> This was the typical tone of this kind of letter, which confirmed finally to a Jesuit the 'licence' to leave for the Indies as a missionary.

### The Marquis's letter to Rome

After some days of joy, we know that Ignazio was sorely disappointed. The *Epistulae Generalium* again provide the essential information about what happened, outlining how Ignazio's father's intervention decided the fate of his son not to travel to the Indies after all. We gather from this source that Ignazio's family protested vociferously against his appointment, and articulated its displeasure in a letter written by the Marquis himself, whose answer is preserved within the *Epistulae Generalium*. The original letter, sent from Palermo on 4 March 1704, very fortunately has survived, and is now available in a collection of documents sent from the 'Provincia Siciliae'.

68 «non haverete certamente i travagli delle Missioni dell'Indie, ma potrete senza dubbio compensarne i meriti», ARSI, *Sic.* 38, f. 224 (Palermo, 29 August 1701).

69 «coll'avviso desiderato di mettersi in viaggio, per ubbidire alle divine chiamate nell'apostolico impiego delle Missioni dell'Indie», ARSI, *Sic.* 40, f. 9 (Palermo, 22 January 1704).

70 «particolari determinazioni ... intorno alle circostanze della partenza, e della navigazione», *ibid.*

71 «Prego il Signore con fratello spirito, che le mantenga sempre acceso nel cuore il santo fuoco del zelo della sua divina gloria, e della salute delle anime; e che le conservi anche lungamente le forze corporali per quest'impiego celeste», *ibid.*

The Marquis delli Magnisi recounted how his son visited him at home «with the objective of receiving ‘licence’ to leave for the Indies, where he says that God is calling him».<sup>72</sup> We understand from this sentence that the Marquis was not convinced it was God who called Ignazio, but it seemed to him more like a juvenile whim; the letter also suggests that, in the case of appointments to the Indies, ‘licence’ was sought (required?), not just from the Superior General, but also from the family of the candidate. The Marquis wrote that this news from Ignazio came completely out of the blue, and that he never mentioned this strange idea, «even if his mother did have some knowledge of his vocation».<sup>73</sup> He proceeds to place the responsibility for the ensuing drama squarely on his wife, who he describes as not being psychologically prepared for such a final goodbye: facing the prospect of «such a sudden departure, that becoming overwhelmed by the violence of an intolerable grief, she cried to such an extent as to seem almost in danger of dying».<sup>74</sup>

The Marquis continued his account by describing how he immediately went to the Provincial for help, «telling him all of this, 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».<sup>75</sup> In writing to the Superior General now, he wrote, he wished to set out «sincere and truthful information about the state of my House (family affairs)»,<sup>76</sup> and the reasons why Ignazio should not leave. First of all, the Marquis indicated that his son’s health was not as good as Ignazio claimed, that 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, he informed the General that 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»;<sup>77</sup> Ignazio now was the firstborn among them. Aside from

72 «a fin di prender licenza per andarsene all’Indie, ove egli dice che Dio lo chiama», ARSI, *Sic.* 188, f. 133 (Palermo, 4 March 1704).

73 «ancorché avesse avuto sua madre qualche notizia della sua vocazione», *ibid.*

74 «sì affrettata l’esecuzione della partenza, che sopraffatta da violenza di cordoglio intollerabile, l’ha pianto in pericolo quasi evidente di morire», *ibid.*

75 «rappresentandogli tutto questo, soggiogendogli che non mi sarei mosso da suoi piedi, se prima non mi avesse concesso tanto di tempo quanto si potesse», *ibid.*

76 «una sincera e veridica informazione dello stato presente della mia Casa», *ibid.*, f. 133v.

77 «Dio ... la metà l’ha chiamato a sé, anticipandole il possesso di quella gloria, per cui fummo creati», *ibid.*

Ignazio, 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».<sup>78</sup> As for the Marquis, he was advanced in years (for the period), at forty-eight, and 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 nor sisters».<sup>79</sup> This was the same situation 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 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».<sup>80</sup>

According to the Marquis, Ignazio was the last hope for the Magnisi 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]».<sup>81</sup> If he were to leave them for the Indies, he wrote, 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».<sup>82</sup> 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».<sup>83</sup> He placed all these reflections, requests, and details about his family's circumstances, within a tone of formal humility and submission, precisely – as he wrote – «like a child to his father».<sup>84</sup>

In this game of mirrors, and in these epistolary exchanges, the

78 «tre son Zitelle non ancora collocate, dell'altri cinque il più grande non ha 14 anni, e l'ultimi due sono ancora lattanti», *ibid.*

79 «non ho Padre né madre, né fratelli né sorelle», ARSI, *Sic.* 188, f. 133v.

80 «di poca salute, e disfatta da 20 parti, oltre l'aborti 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», *ibid.*

81 «l'unico figlio, di cui potremmo far capitale d'averlo, se non per altro, almeno assistente al capezzale per serrarci l'occhi», *ibid.*, ff. 133v–134.

82 «o che sia per uscire affatto di cervello, o che sia per restar morta di colpo apopletico», *ibid.*, f. 134.

83 «le leggi Divine et humane prescrivono da figli ogni soccorso», *ibid.*

84 «come figlio a Padre», *ibid.*

Superior General not only was the spiritual father of Ignazio, but of Ignazio's real father too, who was begging him not to let his son go. Of course this submission was 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. As we can see 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 General's strategy as a mediating figure between competing interests**

We have seen from the contrasting letters sent to the General 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 – that the difficult position had been created for the General to produce replies to both of them. As we have noted, we have the good fortune of surviving records of the General's correspondence with both parties.

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».<sup>85</sup> The General added that indeed he had warned the Provincial about the importance of the peace of the Magnisi family, which was held «very close to heart».<sup>86</sup> Then, in the following month of April 1704, General González wrote to Ignazio with a brief note of praise about the «holy estrangement from your Relatives, that Your Reverence expresses»<sup>87</sup> (in his letter of 6 March 1704). At the same time, the General suggested that Ignazio discuss his vocation with them again; he remained unmoved about the importance of securing their approval along with his: «but before leaving, it is advisable to calm your Lord Father and Lady Mother somehow».<sup>88</sup>

85 «non si mancherà dei dovuti riguardi verso la persona, e della sua Signora Consorte, nel risolvere la partenza del Padre Romeo loro figlio», ARSI, *Sic.* 40, f. 47 (Palermo, 31 March 1704).

86 «sommamente a cuore», *ibid.*

87 «santa alienazione da' Parenti che Vostra Reverenza esprime», ARSI, *Sic.* 40, f. 50, (Palermo, April 1704).

88 «ma prima di partir di costà conviene che in qualche modo acquietati i suoi Signori Padre e Madre», *ibid.*

From the surviving documentation on the matter, however, we may conclude that it was unlikely that the Marquis and the Marchioness would change their mind: on the contrary, the Marquis 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 General probably was well aware that the Jesuit had little chance of leaving while Ignazio's parents were alive: however, he chose not to discourage him definitively (also because this situation could have changed upon their deaths), 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 of 1704, the General received further requests from Ignazio, without, however, renewing his 'patente' for departure to the Indies. He tried to console Ignazio 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 Paternity 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.<sup>89</sup> General González assured Ignazio that he would be praying to the Lord for this, but only «if this is His [God's] will ... without offence to people ... on every account they deserve the most particular respect, from you and from me».<sup>90</sup>

The Sicilian *Epistulae Generalium* contain many replies to letters sent from Ignazio over the following years that are no longer preserved. From the General's replies it seems that Ignazio knew that his father continued to divert the course of his destiny away from the overseas missions. From this we may deduce the cruel irony of Ignazio's situation, that centred around his elevated social status, and the standing of his family in particular. Ignazio's noble birth likely gave him access to the Superior General over so many years, and ensured so many replies to his letters; it was his status, too, that prevented his departure, for the sway of his family in Sicilian life and their close ties to the Jesuits, apparently were such that his family's wishes over-rode the General's decision to send him overseas.

89 «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», ARSI, Sic. 40, f. 109 (Palermo, 11 August 1704).

90 «se questa è Sua volontà ... senza offesa di persone ... per ogni motivo meritano da lei, e da me un particolarissimo rispetto», *ibid.*

Ignazio nevertheless remained hopeful that he might yet leave for good. It was during this time that there was a change in the governance of the Society, with the death of General González in October 1705 and the election of General Tamburini in late-January 1706. Not long after this, both of Ignazio's parents likely had died, around the end of that decade, but it was too late for Ignazio's dream of reaching the Indies.<sup>91</sup> Tamburini's reply to Ignazio (by now, thirty-five-years old), dated 14 September 1711, reveals an increasing exasperation, apparently reprimanding him for failing to understand that it was no longer possible 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 fulfilment 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.<sup>92</sup>

We may expect that Ignazio experienced some shock in reading these quite strong and unambiguous words from the Superior General; however, we find that he was not particularly discouraged by them. He stayed in touch with the Superior General, although his focus did appear to include matters not exclusively oriented to his

91 See a reference to memorial masses for Ignazio's father: ARSI, *Sic.* 43, ff. 36–37 (Palermo, 4 March 1709). We know that Ignazio's mother had died after 1404, when she protested her son's departure, and before 1717, when Ignazio mentioned that his relatives were deceased: ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750, f. 464 (Marsala, 15 March 1717).

92 «bisogna ... che Vostra Reverenza si contenti di quel merito che il Signore le darà per i suoi buoni e santi desiderii, 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 costì dove opera si bene in gloria del Signore non solo difficultano, 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, f. 139 (Palermo, 14 September 1711).

vocation to the Indies: he wrote about the Sicilian missions, and over the years asked to have certain companions join him in his work,<sup>93</sup> or to promote their good works and talents for particular roles; he also wrote about his efforts in trying to solve internal disorders.<sup>94</sup> Even in these 'obedient' letters, however, we glimpse 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 labours already expended for the Society, the General told him, no longer permitted him to face the trials of the journey, but that 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».<sup>95</sup>

### Ignazio and the Sicilian missions

As we know from Ignazio's only partially extant letters among the *Litterae Indipetae*, he did not give up and in March 1717, after a break of two-and-a-half years in writing, he reminded the General that there was nothing to stop his departure now (not even his age of forty-one, in his view), given that his «domestic enemies» who had brought about such «confusion» in his affairs had now died (see his letter of 15 March 1717, cited above). Nevertheless, at some point, Ignazio seems to have accepted his fate to remain in the 'Indie di qua': this is reflected in his 1717 catalogue record, which notes his work in the Sicilian missions, and at the end of that year, the *Epistulae Generalium* reveal that Tamburini acknowledged his work and wrote very warmly to him about his victory over this very persistent cause for suffering pain in his vocation. He

93 Tamburini wrote: «mi espone de i due Compagni che desidera per le Missioni ... ne scrivo al Padre Provinciale informandolo di tutto, e l'assicuro, che quando non vi sia cosa che osti, senza dubio la consolerà», ARSI, *Sic.* 44, f. 149 (Palermo, 20 October 1711).

94 The Father General promised: «Non mancarò di provvedere a' bisogni delle Missioni in cotesto Regno premendomi al maggior segno un Ministero sì proprio nostro, e sì profittevole a' prossimi ... mi attristano gli altri disordini che mi rappresenta, s'insisterà però con tutta efficacia al necessario rimedio», ARSI, *Sic.* 44, f. 74 (Palermo, 8 August 1712).

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 sì lungo, e sì arduo», ARSI, *Sic.* 45, f. 220 (Palermo, 8 August 1713).

wrote that it gave him «no small consolation» to learn that «after diligent reflection Your Reverence acknowledges the ministry of the missions to be commendable».<sup>96</sup> 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 sanctifying 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».<sup>97</sup>

We find further replies to Ignazio in 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»,<sup>98</sup> the details about which Ignazio had informed him. By way of reply, he wrote in mid-May, when Ignazio apparently had before him a period of repose: «please 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».<sup>99</sup> In the same year, Tamburini thanked him for other «news ... about the various responsibilities of our houses and colleges in relation to the missions»;<sup>100</sup> for his commitment to promote them;<sup>101</sup> and assuring Ignazio that, «at the opportune time, all of these matters would be settled as necessary».<sup>102</sup> A few years later, his 1720 catalogue records further roles and responsibilities, along with his missionary work, and including work with the Tribunal of the Holy Office. His letters from the General reflect these roles: he was praised for his

96 «non ordinaria consolazione l'avviso che Vostra Reverenza mi porge di essersi dopo diligente desaminazione riconosciuto per commendabile il ministero delle missioni», ARSI, *Sic.* 47, f. 352v (Palermo, 13 December 1717).

97 «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, f. 352v.

98 «relazione ... della fondazione di coteste missioni e delle varie vicende alle quali è stata sottoposta», ARSI, *Sic.* 48, f. 61 (Palermo, 18 May 1718).

99 «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, f. 61 (Palermo, 18 May 1718).

100 «notizie ... intorno a vari obblighi delle nostre case e collegi in favore delle missioni», ARSI, *Sic.* 48, f. 93 (Palermo, 1 August 1718).

101 See, for example, ARSI, *Sic.* 48, f. 123 (Palermo, 24 October 1718).

102 «per ordinare a tempo congruo, che si dia loro quel provvedimento che sarà necessario», ARSI, *Sic.* 48, f. 132 (Palermo, 14 November 1718).

zeal and warmly thanked for his donations<sup>103</sup> (in several letters);<sup>104</sup> the General 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, and specifically in relation to a «trial» of one Father Urso.<sup>105</sup>

At the end of 1720, Ignazio apparently wrote a letter filled with «many difficult points»,<sup>106</sup> 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. In his letter, General Tamburini assured Ignazio 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».<sup>107</sup> In the meantime, on 3 February 1721, 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.<sup>108</sup> After some months, Ignazio was praised because he helped in another delicate matter: the General wrote in gratitude «for the happy outcome of Father Baracco's matter, concluded with such satisfaction for the afflicted Father, and with such honour for the Society, thanks to your good heart and competence, with which Your Reverence dealt with it».<sup>109</sup> In the same letter, Ignazio once more was assured of the General's conviction of the importance of the Sicilian mission: «I will take to my heart the care of these Missions, and the Missionary Fathers ... a ministry that indeed belongs to the Society».<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless,

103 See, ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 10 (s.l., 25 March 1720).

104 On this theme, see, further: ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 68 (Palermo, 4 November 1720).

105 «grandi fatiche, viaggi e diligenze impiegate per mantenere il buon nome della Compagnia nella causa del Padre Urso», ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 22 (s.l., 13 May 1720).

106 «punti molto difficili», ARSI, *Sic.* 49, C. 87r (Palermo, 3 February 1721).

107 «si usi ogni diligenza per fare quel che si può, se non può farsi tutto quel che si deve», *ibid.*

108 ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 93 (Palermo, 17 February 1721).

109 «per l'esito felice che ha procurato all'affare del Padre Baracco terminato con tanta soddisfazione dell'afflitto Padre, e con tanto decoro della Compagnia mercè del buon cuore, e della destrezza con cui Vostra Reverenza ha maneggiato», ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 124 (Palermo, 9 June 1721).

110 «Mi prenderò a cuore la causa di coteste Missioni, e de' Padri Missionarii ... un ministero sì proprio della Compagnia», *ibid.*

Ignazio was in a phase of almost ‘bombarding’ the Superior General with letters, since he had to write to him again about the same topic in July<sup>111</sup> and in August of that same year.<sup>112</sup>

At the beginning of the following year, Ignazio seemed to be completely immersed still in promoting the Sicilian missions,<sup>113</sup> and helping the Society of Jesus with ‘burning questions’, like, for example, «quietening down the tumult generated by this Tribunal of the Inquisition about what happened to Father Lescata»,<sup>114</sup> or a «scandal caused by a notorious case of disobedience of my orders», that is, a directive from the General to another Jesuit father.<sup>115</sup> 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 during the summer of 1722, the Superior General attempted 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; and even when these are not well justified, I will insist on obedience to the orders that have been issued ... you may observe in this that work must not triumph over reason».<sup>116</sup> It seems, furthermore, that Tamburini believed that Ignazio was going too far in his tasks, and advised him that he could not control everything and be everywhere: «it is hard to combine the Prefecture of the Missions with other tasks in the service of God, that converge around Your Reverence; even more so if Missionaries must offer

111 ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 135 (Palermo, 14 July 1721).

112 ARSI, *Sic.* 49, f. 146 (Palermo, 18 August 1721).

113 ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 95 (Palermo, 3 August 1722).

114 «quietare il rumore eccitato in cotesto Tribunale dell’Inquisizione dalla conclusione del Padre Lescata», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 104 (Palermo, 3 August 1722). This is a different letter from the one quoted above.

115 «scandalo cagionato dalla notoria disubbidienza a miei ordini», *ibid.*

116 «Ridonda anche in me l’afflitione che le hanno recata le difficoltà che Vostra Reverenza incontra nell’esecuzione del Regolamento stabilito intorno alle Missioni; e sebbene quando queste non sieno ben giustificate insisterò nell’osservanza degli ordini dati ... ella ben vede che non deve l’impegno prevalere alla ragione», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 113 (Palermo, 31 August 1722).

themselves to the Holy House, which is too distant from the City, especially for those who have to be called continuously to other urgent and necessary assignments».<sup>117</sup> Here, the General seems to be showing signs of disappointment about Ignazio's excessive commitment to everything he cared for: the Indian missions before, and the Sicilian ones after.

Ignazio in fact appears to have proposed a solution to his problems, requesting two companions to help him with his tasks: «one who may serve in the city, and another to whom the affairs of the Countryside might be entrusted».<sup>118</sup> Tamburini, however, replied that there was an incompatibility between all of these tasks and did not agree to this step. He closed his letter communicating to Ignazio that he would be substituted. This replacement theoretically was not intended to punish him, but to keep «every occasion of bitterness»<sup>119</sup> away from him. The General in any case had already charged the Provincial to find «someone who was competent, and less busy» than Ignazio.<sup>120</sup>

### **Ignazio wants to leave his 'Religion'**

The crisis was not over, however, and in October of 1722, we find in the *Epistulae Generalium* a quite unexpected letter from Tamburini to Ignazio concerning the possible exit of Ignazio from the Society of Jesus. For the Superior General, the news came to him as «absolutely unexpected, the request that Your Reverence puts to me to be able to move to another religious order».<sup>121</sup> He was even more shocked to learn that Ignazio claimed that he conceived and matured this decision over a period of 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, which never made

117 «difficilmente potrà combinarsi la Prefettura delle Missioni, con gl'altri impieghi di servizio di Dio che si uniscono in Vostra Reverenza; tanto più se i Missionarii dovranno porsi nella Santa Casa troppo distante dalla Città per chi deve esservi di continuo chiamato da altre premurose et indispensabili incombenze», *ibid.*

118 «per aver Compagno di cui servirsi in Città, et un altro a cui raccomandare gl'affari di Campagna», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 120 (Palermo, 14 September 1722).

119 «ogni occasione di amarezza», *ibid.*

120 «qualche soggetto capace, e meno occupato», *ibid.*

121 «affatto improvvisa l'istanza che Vostra Reverenza mi porge di poter passare ad altr'ordine Religioso», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 136 (Palermo, 26 October 1722).

me dread such inconstancy after so many years of religious life».<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Tamburini felt sure that a mere «temporary excitement»<sup>123</sup> had prompted Ignazio to write his letter. In the meantime, he hoped that «you will have come to your senses and return to a greater loyalty to that Lord, to whom so many times in the past you swore your allegiance».<sup>124</sup>

The General wrote that Ignazio would have understood, surely, that his plan «cannot be approved, neither by God nor the World; neither could it be approved by you nor your prominent relatives, whose honour you take so much to heart».<sup>125</sup> The General enjoined his correspondent to leave behind this «volubility» before it was too late: «since I like to believe that you have already changed your mind about this rushed proposal, I assure you that it will remain forever cancelled from my memory, where only the virtues of Your Reverence and your merits within the Society of Jesus will remain alive».<sup>126</sup>

Tamburini probably understood that the reason for this crisis of vocation was Ignazio's frustration first, about his denied appointment to the Indies, and second about the Sicilian mission, and the fact that he did not feel appreciated for all he had done for it. Before concluding the letter, the General tried to explain 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, since giving 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 concludes 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

122 «La stima ch'ella ha sempre dimostrata della sua Vocazione, il zelo con cui l'ha propagata ...la sodisfazione con cui ha sempre corrisposto agl'obblighi di essa, non m'hanno mai lasciata temere in Vostra Reverenza dopo tant'anni di vita religiosa una tale incostanza», *ibid.*

123 «l'impeto della passione», *ibid.*

124 «avrà ripigliati sentimenti di maggiore fermezza, e di maggior fedeltà a quel Signore a cui tante volte ha giurato», *ibid.*, f. 136v.

125 «non poter essere approvata né da Dio né dal Mondo, né poter essere a lei né al suo cospicuo parentado di quel decoro che tanto le sta a cuore», *ibid.*

126 «volubilità»; «siccome mi giova crederla già pentita di una sì precipitosa proposta, così l'assicuro che resterà perpetuamente cancellata dalla mia memoria, in cui resteranno vive soltanto le virtù di Vostra Reverenza et i suoi meriti con la Compagnia», *ibid.*

will appreciate his «humble and steady resignation to his divine will».<sup>127</sup>

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 now ... will have recognized the enemy's deceit; under the false pretences 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».<sup>128</sup> The General reminded Ignazio that staying within the Society of Jesus could help him gain «that level of perfection that God requires of you».<sup>129</sup> The reasons for leaving the Society for another order that Ignazio mentioned (but the letter does not survive) 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 never lack the means to exercise your virtue».<sup>130</sup> The General reminded Ignazio that he should be acquiescent «towards every tribulation that you may meet, indeed even when Your Reverence has no occasion to exercise any other virtue than that of obedience»,<sup>131</sup> for submission of one's own will to the Divine one was a true and valuable sacrifice to God.

We would not know anything about these repeated attempts to keep Ignazio inside the Society of Jesus, if they had not come down to us from the Superior General's registers of letters to the Sicilian Province. Without these letters, he would have seemed a Jesuit like any other, who lived out his religious vocation without particular incident, although clearly he had a particular penchant

127 «Per ciò che riguarda l'impiego da lei fin'ora esercitato, non le deve parere strano che si pensi di addossarle a persona di lei meno occupata, non essendo nuovo nella Compagnia il dare et il togliere gl'uffici secondo che si vede maggiormente convenire al Servizio et alla gloria di Dio»; «umile e costante rassegnazione alla sua divina volontà», *ibid.*

128 «a quest'ora ... l'averà conosciuto l'inganno del nemico, il quale sotto apparenze di maggior bene vorrebbe indurla a mancar di fede a Dio, a cui ella potrà servire con tutta l'ampiezza ne' ministeri proprii della Compagnia», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 149 (Palermo, 16 November 1722).

129 «quel grado di perfezione che Dio esige da lei», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 158 (Palermo, 21 December 1722).

130 «come più volte le ho scritto, nella Compagnia e per grazia del Signore non le potrà mai mancar campo di esercitar il suo zelo», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 175 (Palermo, 25 January 1723).

131 «a qualunque contrarietà ella potrà incontrare: anzi quando anche Vostra Reverenza non avesse luogo di esercitar altra virtù, che quella dell'ubbidienza», *ibid.*

for sending a steady stream of letters and requests to the Jesuit Fathers General, apparently a privilege he afforded himself – and possibly was afforded him – on account of his elevated social position before entry, and the status of his family.

In any case, the *Epistulae Generalium* reveal that, several months later, Tamburini still was not surrendering, even if he understood how serious the situation was. The more «esteem and affection»<sup>132</sup> that the General felt for Ignazio, the more he suffered for the decision that was being taken: he wrote of «the anguish of seeing you engaged in a decision that would bring little honour to yourself, or the Society».<sup>133</sup> The General indicated how Ignazio's virtues, merits and intentions certainly could be more useful within the Society of Jesus, in which he could find a «very big field that opens out before you in the Society, perhaps more than others Religions [i.e. religious orders]».<sup>134</sup> He made an offer: if Ignazio was not pleased with his path within the Society, 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».<sup>135</sup>

Finally, Ignazio was exhorted by the General: «do not put yourself at risk of 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», now also placed at risk.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore the General advised, Ignazio should be aware of the fact that the «Angel of Darkness often transfigures himself into the Angel of Light».<sup>137</sup>

132 «la stima, e l'affetto», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 192 (Palermo, 8 March 1723).

133 «il rammarico di vederla impegnata in una risoluzione, che ridonderebbe in poco decoro suo, e della Compagnia», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 192.

134 «vastissimo campo, che le si apre nella Compagnia, forse più che in altre Religioni», *ibid.*

135 «Non mancherà poi a' superiori l'attenzione di assegnarle qualche impiego, che riesca di sua piena sodisfazione, al che io contribuirò di buon grado le mie più efficaci premure», *ibid.*, f. 192rv.

136 «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», *ibid.*, f. 192v.

137 «non di rado l'Angelo delle tenebre si trasfigura in Angelo di Luce», *ibid.*

### Ignazio's last days

After some months, however, the problem could not be ignored anymore and the General capitulated, writing a short and terse answer in which, since «the fantasies of Your Reverence continue to keep you busy in your determination to change Religion [order]»,<sup>138</sup> he asked the name of a religious order that agreed to accept him. There is no surviving record of which order chose.

After two months, in July 1723, Ignazio was given 'official licence' 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 Your Reverence the hoped-for transfer to another Religion; in this way you may deal directly with him about it».<sup>139</sup> Tamburini closed the letter with what we can read as a subtle threat: «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».<sup>140</sup>

This may well have been the end of the story; however, we can find Ignazio's name in the letter books of subsequent months too and it seems that at the end of 1723 he still had not acted on his licence to leave. He wrote yet again to the Superior General requesting to come to Rome to meet personally with him; the General wrote back with a rather detached and laconic reply: «I cannot allow for Your Reverence to take such a long and uncomfortable journey in such dangerous times».<sup>141</sup> He assured Ignazio that he could communicate via epistles more easily than in person, and promised: «I offer you, therefore, all my attention and assurance».<sup>142</sup>

Less than two months later, in February 1724, Tamburini replied one more time to Ignazio. The General did not seem particularly

138 «le fantasie di Vostra Reverenza seguitano a tenerla impegnata nella risoluzione di mutar Religione», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 217 (Palermo, 24 May 1723).

139 «tutte le necessarie facultà per accordare a Vostra Reverenza il sospirato passaggio ad altra Religione; onde di questo punto ella ne tratti con esso lui», ARSI, *Sic.* 50, f. 228, (Palermo, 28 July 1723).

140 «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», *ibid.*

141 «Non posso permettere che Vostra Reverenza in tempi sì pericolosi si cimenti ad un viaggio sì lungo, et incomodo», ARSI, *Sic.* 51, f. 22 (Palermo, 20 December 1723).

142 «le offerisco perciò tutto l'udito, e la confidenza», *ibid.*

enthusiastic about the resumption of epistolary contact, and was unapologetically slow to reply: «if Your Reverence, in your letters, were to have shown that religious submission that I desire so much for your own good, you would not be complaining now about not receiving an answer».<sup>143</sup> The General for his part advised that all of these complaints and apparent indecision were the consequence of Ignazio's wrong choices and, probably quite annoyed, begged him: «do not trouble yourself with vain suspicions; instead, while by God's mercy you are still standing, reflect seriously on your situation, in order to avoid finding yourself without remedy to the regret of having fallen».<sup>144</sup>

Unfortunately, this letter – registered as having been sent from the General to Ignazio in early 1724 – is the last record that we have: from this point, Ignazio disappears from the letter books, and indeed, from all other relevant archival documents, and so it remains a mystery whether Ignazio stayed, or if he left the Society. The *Catalogi secundi* list his name for the last time in 1723. He is identified as being in the College of Palermo, and as «sanus»; his other characteristics mentioned in the catalogue were not affected by the fact that he had wished to exit the Company during this very period: everything is registered as «bonus» or «magnus» («ingenium, iudicium, prudentia, experientia rerum, profectus in litteris»), as if nothing were happening (perhaps indicating that the exchanges between Ignazio and the General remained private and had not progressed to being discussed with the Jesuits in his province). Whatever the case, the *Catalogi Triennales* of 1727 includes no further mention of Ignazio Maria Romeo.

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; however, we know that he survived beyond this date because of his correspondence, analysed above. Nevertheless, his name is absent from the list of the 'Defuncti', which would suggest ordinarily that he died outside the Society; however, if this were the case, we would expect to see his name listed a few pages later, with the names of those sent from the

143 «Se Vostra Reverenza nelle sue lettere havesse dato segno di quella religiosa sommissione, che io tanto desidero per suo bene, non si lamenterebbe hora di non haverne havuto risposta», ARSI, Sic. 51, f. 40 (Palermo, 13 February 1724).

144 «non affliggersi con vani sospetti, ma, mentre per misericordia di Dio sta ancora in piedi, a riflettere seriamente al suo stato, per non aver poi senza rimedio a pentirsi di esser caduto», *ibid.*

Society, including Jesuits who had been given permission to leave, the 'Dimissi'.

### Conclusions

The *Epistulae Generalium* are a very important and underutilised historical source. In this essay, they have been enlisted, together with the better known *Litterae Indipetae* and other relevant sources, together preserved at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, to reconstruct the case of one Jesuit seeking appointment to the Indies, with the broader objective of shedding light on the appointment process, its key protagonists, and its various documentary trajectories that are still traceable today.

By focusing on documents pertaining to the 'Provincia' of Sicily, we have been able to observe in detail some of the central policies about receiving and answering the petitions for the Indies. We see, for example, that Rome received multitudes, of letters, which were carefully read, annotated and preserved. As we know, many of these *indipetae* are available in the *Fondo Gesuitico* (or elsewhere in ARSI); however, as we have seen in this essay, many of them were lost, and it is only thanks to the letter books from the office of the General that we can recover the data of their contents, their dates, and other essential information, along with the responses of the General himself.

As Ignazio's case shows, the *Epistulae Generalium* provide a different perspective from that of the 'indipeti', prompting us not to take at face value the contents of the petitions, and pointing to (often intentional) misunderstandings on the part of the petitioners towards the many shades of the General's replies, depending on what they wanted to believe about their departure. We find out other details as well: concerning the General's responses to the petitioners – many more than one, and generally punctually, a few weeks after receipt, in the case of this study – the type of hopes he gave to the 'indipeti', and the limits he tried to place on these hopes, while at the same time encouraging persistence in their vocation. We discover in these registers of letters the importance placed on the role and views of the local Jesuits, and, as we have seen, of the candidate's family, whose protests in this case over-rode the decision of the General himself to grant permission to depart for the overseas Indies, pointing to the specific role of elites (and perhaps families lower on the social

scale) in shaping the appointment process in ways that warrant further attention.

The elite status of Ignazio that probably ensured his access to the General and regular replies from him over two decades of persistent petitioning for the Indies, also seems to have been the cause for his being prevented from leaving: the standing of his family in Sicily, and with the Jesuits, ensured that their wishes were respected in this case, and Ignazio's dream never realised. While in subsequent years Ignazio experienced a crisis that pushed him to the edge of abandoning the Society all together (it remains a mystery whether he left or not), the documentary trail that his persistent vocation generated, enables us today to reconstruct a fascinating part of Jesuit history in the early-modern period, the nature of which it is hoped this essay has gone some of the way to illuminating further.

### Summary

This article explores the process by which a Jesuit vocation to the overseas missions was manifested and managed in the early-modern period. It does this through a case study of the Sicilian Jesuit, Ignazio Maria Romeo SJ (1676–1724?). The analysis is conducted through a variety of protagonists (including the applicant himself, his local superiors, his family, and the Superior General), and the extensive documentary trail they left behind, now preserved at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI). In particular, the essay brings together two sources, the *Litterae Indipetae*, or petitions for the Indies, and the *Epistulae Generalium*, containing registers of the Jesuit Superior General's correspondence. While the first source has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention in recent years, the second is barely known in relation to the missionary enterprise: it includes the General's responses to many petitioners for the Indies, and even to their families (in the case of the Jesuit under consideration here), thus providing a vital closure to the epistolary cycle of which only the first part currently is well known, that of the *Litterae Indipetae*. Through a single case study, the essay seeks to present these sources in a new light, with the aim to understand something more about the process of selecting missionaries, the potential role of families, local superiors, and Superiors General in these negotiations, and the importance of correspondence in conducting the Society's business in one of its most distinctive and complex endeavours: the overseas missionary enterprise.

### Sommario

L'articolo intende esplorare come venisse manifestata e gestita in età moderna la vocazione verso le missioni oltreoceano attraverso il *case study* del gesuita siciliano Ignazio Maria Romeo (Palermo 1676-1724?). L'analisi viene condotta attraverso una molteplicità di protagonisti (il richiedente stesso, i suoi superiori locali, la sua famiglia e il Preposito generale) e le tracce che essi lasciarono nella documentazione ora conservata presso l'Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. Il contributo, in particolare, affianca due fonti: le *Litterae Indipetae*, ossia le richieste per le missioni oltremare e le *Epistulae Generalium*, i registri della corrispondenza dei Prepositi generali. Mentre la prima fonte ha sempre goduto di una significativa attenzione da parte degli studiosi, la seconda raramente è stata presa in considerazione in relazione all'impresa missionaria. Le *Epistulae Generalium* contengono non solo le risposte che il Generale ha indirizzato a molti candidati per le Indie, ma talvolta anche quelle destinate alle loro famiglie - questo è il caso del gesuita oggetto del contributo -, contribuendo così a chiudere il ciclo epistolare di cui, generalmente, siamo informati solo per quanto riguarda la prima parte ossia le *Litterae Indipetae*. Attraverso un singolo *case study*, il presente lavoro mira a presentare queste due fonti sotto una nuova luce, col fine di comprendere meglio come si svolgesse il processo di selezione dei missionari e quale fosse il ruolo giocato dalle famiglie, dai superiori locali e dal Preposito generale, sottolineando l'importanza della corrispondenza nell'amministrazione degli affari della Compagnia di Gesù in una delle sue imprese più caratteristiche e complesse: le missioni oltreoceano.