

entire worldview of Reformed scholasticism: it also remains a principle that other bitterly polarised eras might do well to consider.

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

ALEC RYRIE

Early modern litterae indipetae for the East Indies. By Elisa Frei. (Jesuit Studies, 40.) Pp. x + 162. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2023. €99. 978 90 53800 9; 2214 3289
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In four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion Elisa Frei examines the *litterae indipetae* written by Jesuits living in the Italian assintancy who sought to work in the East Indies, particularly China and Japan, between 1687 and 1730. Frei explains the geographical and chronological scope of her work, as well as the type of documents under examination, in the following ways: firstly, the period under investigation was a particularly ‘tormented’ one, which made Jesuit applications to become missionaries in this area during this time one that attracted the ‘most determined, motivated, and obstinate’ candidates. To focus on documents that foreground evangelical and missionary fervour above all, Frei’s selection of *litterae indipetae* to analyse both qualitatively and quantitatively is well chosen. The directness of these ‘ego-documents’ indeed provides a close insight into the voices of these petitioners to the Indies (p. 3). Frei enables ‘unknown ... unimportant’, and, ultimately, ‘unsuccessful’ Jesuits ‘to speak for themselves’ and from there she unravels the motivations, emotions and networks surrounding these petitioners as they envisioned their (unfulfilled) role as Catholic missionaries in the Eurasian world (p. 3).

After an introduction to the genre, Frei analyses the push and pull factors before zooming in on the network surrounding the petitioners and two specific case studies, namely China and Japan. The introduction does highlight both the instructions and guidelines from above provided by Jesuit generals such as – most importantly – Michelangelo Tamburini, and the ‘inflamed feelings’ as petitioners from below found creative ways to express their deepest desires directly to the person of highest authority within their order. Despite the effort to provide clear directions to aspiring candidates (p. 13), the genre does not seem to have essentially changed after Tamburini’s input, perhaps, as Frei (in line with Aliocha Maldavsky) suggests, because the letters are illusionary documents that reflect religious desires without really having a clue what lay beyond their European lands and imaginations. A more in-depth analysis of health, age, skills, virtue and rhetoric further in the introduction reveals that ‘everything could support [the petitioner’s] cause’ (p. 37).

Digging deeper into rhetoric as a variable, Frei then guides the reader to what she calls pull and push factors in the next chapter. She starts by listing the most readily available texts and publications on the Jesuit missions in the Far East by authors such as Xavier, Valignano, Ricci and Bartoli in addition to other media and paintings or sculptures. However, she also notes that with the exception of Xavier and Bartoli, most petitioners did not make explicit references to the literary sources that inspired them. Next is the connection between these emotionally charged letters and the idea of martyrdom; while some letters were written in blood, the Jesuit general did need to keep in mind how to balance martyrdom

with the best use of the Society's limited resources. Frei wraps up the pull factors as she examines miracles and other supernatural signs or conversions that petitioners would use in an effort to convince the general to send them to distant missions. Family tensions and a restrictive environment within their Jesuit community in Europe are the push factors that motivated petitioners to seek a more fulfilled spiritual life abroad. Frei distills the above *leitmotifs* from the entire body of letters she has studied, incorporating many examples along the way. One question remains: was there a surer way to have one's petition granted?

Frei addresses this very question in chapter iii, as she lays out the petitioner's networks. There were three actions or factors that could increase a petitioner's chances: organising a face-to-face meeting with the general; promoting their petition *via* a visiting procurator; and cultivating a direct relationship with the general. The chapter ends with the example of a Sicilian Jesuit whose case combined the above three variables. A few pages in, procurators of the East Indies and their impact on the ebb and flow of writing *litterae indipetae* takes the main stage as Frei analyses the European visit from China of Filippo Grimaldi in particular. Many applied; some even wrote four letters while Grimaldi toured the continent (p. 82). Frei highlights once again the many factors that could derail a successful application, such as, for example, indecision, defections, late ships etc (p. 87). The final case study, of Ignazio Maria Romeo, illustrates the importance of the general's replies (the *epistulae generalium*) and how this collection of documents can help the researcher in writing a 'comprehensive and less biased' Jesuit history seen from the perspective of what some may call subaltern.

In the final chapter, 'Case studies: China and Japan', Frei considers both unsuccessful and successful candidates and their desires for the Far East. Frei's statistical data at the beginning of the chapter is interpreted both in a quantitative and qualitative way; Sicilian and Neapolitan Jesuits often expressed an explicit desire to go to the Philippines (the destination mentioned most – 27 per cent – in 1,565 *litterae indipetae* preserved in the *Fondo Gesuitico*), as this was also a Spanish territory and could be used as a springboard for entering China or Japan (p. 115). Qualitatively, Frei points out that one Sicilian Jesuit, Mario Finochiaro, did express his fears of 'dying of melancholy' if he were to get stuck in the Philippines (p. 115). In line with the rest of the book, Frei's detailed examples are full of quotations that bring to life these lesser known Jesuit applicants and their all-consuming desires to become instruments of a global Christianity. Their letters are not necessarily (even rarely) an illustration of in-depth knowledge of that world or the tasks and daily lives of missionaries for that matter, but that did nothing to diminish their 'inflamed pleas' (p. 146). Frei uses multiple sets of documents to recount the stories of the people at the very base of the global Jesuit enterprise and how they envisioned their lives could be meaningful whether they were successful or not in becoming a part of the East Indies missions.

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
MONTEREY BAY

FREDERIK VERMOTE