

Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) between Padua and Japan

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Today I would like to discuss Alessandro Valignano, a major figure among the Jesuit missionaries active in Asia and especially in Japan during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. But first, some words are required about the origin of these missionaries.

The Society of Jesus, whose members are usually called the Jesuits, was founded by Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) in Paris in 1534. In 1540, the Society was recognized as a religious order by Pope Paul III (1534–49). It was Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542), a member of a noble Venetian family, who advocated this recognition. He was also a philosopher who had learned the teachings of Aristotle from Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) at the University of Padua. At the time, Padua was one of the most important centers of Europe for philosophy, medicine and law. It belonged to the Republic of Venice, which was the free and powerful, *serenissima* (most serene) country. Although Contarini died soon after the recognition of the Jesuit order, he would have amply helped its activity if he had lived longer.

Loyola's closest friend and classmate at the University of Paris was Francis Xavier (1506–52). In 1537, Loyola and Xavier left Paris for Venice, hoping to visit Jerusalem as pilgrims with their comrades, and then lived in Venice. But this attempt was unsuccessful. So they decided to go to Rome to pay homage to the papacy. Xavier was to become the first Jesuit missionary sent outside Europe to propagate the Catholic faith. I will come back to Xavier later.

Alessandro Valignano was born in Italy, in the town of Chieti in February 1539, immediately before the papal recognition of the Society he would join in 1566. Chieti is a major city in the Abruzzi (also called Abruzzo) facing the Adriatic Sea. At that time this region was part of the Kingdom of Naples under Spanish rule. The region's mountainous scenery in front of the sea bears a striking resemblance to Nagasaki, where he was to land later. The Adriatic Sea connects this *paese* (country) with the Republic of Venice¹. Valignano

¹ Marcello Valignani, La famiglia Valignani al tempo del Padre Alessandro, in Alessandro Valignano S.I. Uomo del Rinscimento: Ponte tra oriente e occidente, a cura di Adolfo Tamburello, M. Antoni J. Ücerler, S.J., e Marisa di Russo, Roma, 2008, 27-42:34.

was a born seafarer.

During his first visit to Japan in early 1580s, Valignano traveled from the old imperial capital, Kyoto, to the newly developed harbor town, Nagasaki. He chose a longer ocean route to reach Kyushu over the shorter inland sea route to avoid pirate attacks. When he saw the harbor town of Sakai near Kyoto, this merchant town could have reminded him of Venetian Republic. “Sakai is, he writes, one of the foremost, wealthiest, and most famous cities in the entire country. Not only is it a city of considerable size, the home of many rich merchants, but it is also a free city, a sort of republic (*a maniera de republica*) which has always enjoyed great privileges and liberties”². In this town was born Sen-no-rikyuu (1522–91), master of the tea ceremony. Valignano described the ceremony in detail, being himself greatly interested in this art³.

The family of Valignano was important in their region and close to Gian Pietro Carafa (1476–1559), Bishop of Chieti from 1504 to 1524, Cardinal Archbishop from 1537 to 1550, and future Pope Paul IV⁴. Carafa was one of the influential members of the Catholic Reform under the sovereignty of Paul III. He was a conservative cardinal who opposed Contarini’s tolerance toward the Protestants. Carafa was also responsible for the reorganization of the Roman Inquisition in 1542, playing a prominent part in founding the Theatine Order. The term Theatine derives from Chieti (*Theate* in Latin).

Valignano learned law and graduated from the University of Padua in 1557. He was tonsured by the bishop of Chieti in May of the same year and then granted the abbacy of San Stefano del Casale. In 1559, he was also made a canon of the cathedral, giving his father hope that the Carafa connection would promise his son a more prosperous career.

Arriving in Rome in the same year, Valignano learned that Paul IV, his potential protector, had passed away. The long-awaited death of this unpopular pope liberated the Romans and others from the overbearing control, but also produced confusion. During four years of his papacy from 1555 to 1559, Carafa did not reconvene the

² Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignano’s Mission Principles for Japan*. Volume I. From His Appointment as Visitor until His First Departure from Japan (1573–1582). Part II: The Solution (1580–1582), Anand, India 1985, 138. This edition is the English version of the following original version. Josef Franz Schütte, S.J., *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*. I. Band. Von der Ernennung zum Visitator bis zum ersten Abschied von Japan (1573–1582). I. Teil: Das Problem (1573–1580), Roma 1951. II. Teil: Die Lösung (1580–1582), Roma 1958.

³ Alessandro Valignano, *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangus de Jappão (Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone)*, a cura di Josef Franz Schütte, S.J., Roma 1946.)

⁴ Schütte, *op.cit.*, Part I: The Problem (1573–1580), Anand, India 1980, 31.

Council of Trent initiated by his forerunner Paul III in 1545, denounced the Peace of Augsburg and established the ghetto in Rome. He particularly hated the “marranos” living in Ancona on the Adriatic Sea near Chieti who engaged in commercial trade with Turkey.

The ex-Jesuit and cabalist, Guillaume Postel (1510–81), who was then in papal prison as an obstinate heretic, was also freed as the prisons were broken during the mob disorders following the death of Pope on 18 August. Six years earlier, Postel’s interest in the newly discovered Asia and America motivated him to publish *Des merveilles du monde, et principalement des admirables choses des Indes et du nouveau monde* (Paris, 1553). In this work he described Japan as an ideal isle on the basis of the letters written by Francis Xavier. He was allowed to enter the Jesuit Order by Loyola himself. Around 1555 he then conceived a strange, but sincere, story of the Venetian Virgin, who would save mankind. In the town of Venice, he also composed an *Apologia pro Serveto Villanovano* against John Calvin. It was about this period that Valignano frequented the university of this republic.

Valignano’s dream of a career in the Papal state disappeared with the death of Paul IV. He gave up his canonry and, a little later in 1561, returned to Padua to study jurisprudence, although he had already received a doctor in law before going to Rome in 1557. Around the time of Valignano’s return, more than 1500 students were matriculated at Padua. Almost half of them were jurists. Padua was huge: the university hosted more than a thousand students from all over Europe⁵.

How many people lived in Padua? The Great Plague of 1575–77 may reveal the population. It is said to have taken about 10,000 lives, reducing the population to 30,000. The Paduan territory held 100,000 to 144,000 souls through most of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries⁶.

Among Valignano’s Italian contemporaries who studied at Padua, we know such famous figures as Girolamo Cardano (1501–76), Bernardino Telesio (1509–88), Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) and Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (1529–97), and these are only the most important ones. Further, we must not forget the name of Torquato Tasso (1544–95). He studied at Padua in the years 1560–62 and 1564–65, being almost contemporaneous to Valignano.

As for the non-Italians, let us mention the famous Spanish anti-Trinitarian, Michael

⁵ About the description of the university I’ll consult and follow Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore and London 2002.

⁶ Grendler, *ibid.*, 38.

Servetus (1511–1553), for whom Postel wrote an apology as I have mentioned. There was also a Swiss physician, Theodor Zwinger (1533–1588), who received a doctor in medicine after his study at the universities of Basel, Lyon and Paris. Reginald Pole (1500–1558) was born in England and was a typical Catholic Reformer close to Contarini. When he enrolled in Magdalen College at the University of Oxford, he was only 12 years old. He received a Bachelor of Arts at the age of 15. In 1521, he entered the University of Padua, where he met several leading minds of humanists and ecclesiastics.

Italian Universities differed from those of Northern Europe or Spain on many points. They granted doctoral degrees although they almost never awarded bachelor's degrees. Most students in Italian universities were 18 to 25 years old, a little bit older than those in northern universities. But there was certainly an exception. Tasso entered *lo studio padovano* when he was under 18 years old. The majority of Italian professors were married laymen, rather than members of the clergy. Teaching was done through public lectures open to all and delivered by professors appointed and paid by the civil government⁷.

I would like to emphasize further characteristic points of Padua. According to the traditional interpretation, medieval and Renaissance universities in Europe consisted of four faculties: arts, law, medicine and theology. In Padua, arts and medicine together formed one faculty, while both canon and civil law represented another faculty along with notarial art. Whereas the faculty of arts had nearly 24 professors with ca. 7 vacancies, ca. 20 professors taught at the faculty of law through most of the 1560s and 1570s⁸.

Generally speaking, faculties of theology were nonexistent in Italy. The situation was quite different from at Paris and Oxford. Thus students in the faculty of arts at Padua learned the philosophy of Aristotle for medical science, not for theology. The teaching they received can be characterized as being tremendously secular. That is why it was often called “secular Aristotelianism” to point out its distinctive feature.

Valignano's consciousness of the three Aristotelian sources of learning (authority, reason and experience) is shown well in his writings. Here authority does not mean that of the Bible or ecclesiastics, but that of Aristotle and the commentators of his philosophy. But facing the unfamiliar traditions and customs of Japan, Valignano

⁷ Grendler, *ibid.*, 4–5.

⁸ Grendler, *ibid.*, 34.

emphasized reason and experience, trying to degrade learned authority and desert preconceived opinions.

In 1561, upon returning to Padua for further study, Valignano's name appeared in the criminal records of the *serenissima* Republic, where Padua was situated. His university career came to a sudden halt on the night of 28 November 1562. An altercation with one Franceschina Trona apparently ended with him slashing her face with a knife or a sword, inflicting a severe wound requiring fourteen stitches. He was a man of giant stature⁹. He must have scared her tremendously. He was put into jail and not freed until March 1564, only after the intervention of Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538–84) and the papal nuncio together with payment of a substantial fine. The young violator is referred to as a student, not as a cleric in all the documents of the case¹⁰.

Valignano disappears from our view only to reappear at the Papal court in the service of worldly Cardinal Sittich von Altemps (D'Altemps), the cousin of Cardinal Borromeo and nephew of the new Pope Pius IV¹¹. Valignano abandoned the service to enter the Society of Jesus as a novice in May 1566. After a year in the novitiate in the Jesuit House of Sant'Andrea in Rome, he was transferred to the Collegio Romano to begin his further studies. Sant'Andrea, also known as Sant'Andrea a Monte Cavallo or Sant'Andrea de Caballo, was the first permanent novitiate for the Roman province of the Jesuits, and it was named after a small church on the site assigned to the Society by Giovanni Andrea Croce, Bishop of Tivoli, on 20 May 1565¹².

According to Paul F. Grendler, a prolific historian of Renaissance education, the Collegio Romano was founded by the Society in 1551 as the largest and best-known institution of higher education in Italy. There many scholars taught grammar, rhetoric, humanities, Greek, logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and theology at every level from elementary to advanced. In 1556, Pope Paul IV conferred to the Jesuits the right to award doctorates in arts and theology to the students of the Collegio. But it was not a university, because it neither taught nor awarded degrees in law and medicine. Its curriculum was not complete as was seen in other

⁹ Schütte, *op.cit.*, Part I, 39.

¹⁰ J.E. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits. Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan*, London and New York 1993, 22. Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742*, New York 1994, 33.

¹¹ Moran, *op.cit.*, 22; Ross, *op.cit.*, 33; Augusto Luca, *Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606). La missione come dialogo con i popoli e le culture*, Bologna 2005, 24.

¹² Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque. Jesuit Art in Rome 1565–1610*, Toronto and Buffalo and London 2003, 40.

Italian universities¹³.

For Valignano, however, a new sphere of activity begins in Rome. He did not go to its old university founded in 1222, but to the school newly established in 1551, where the accomplished scientist Christopher Clavius (1538–1612) taught. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), a professor at Padua, praised Clavius as a fine scholar. Valignano took the three vows of a religious on 12 February 1570. On 25 March 1571, he was ordained a priest in the Lateran by Scottish Bishop, William Chisholm, who was the vice-regent of Cardinal Sabelli, administrator of the diocese of Rome. Valignano served briefly as the novice-master of Sant'Andrea where he supervised the early months of the novitiate of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). In September of the next year he went to Macerata, hometown of Ricci, as Rector of the Jesuit College there, so far a usual career for an able young man in the Society¹⁴. In this town there was also a university acknowledged by Paul III in 1540 at the same time as his recognition of the Jesuit Order. Macerata became the fourth university, after Bologna, Rome and Perugia in the papal state¹⁵.

Early in 1573, Valignano wrote to Everard Mercurian (1514–80), the recently elected fourth General of the Society, to ask to be sent as a missionary to the Indies. In August, Mercurian summoned him to Rome. Mercurian arranged for Valignano to make his Solemn Profession and pronounce the famous Fourth Vow of the Society. The ceremony was held at the church of Sant'Andrea in Quirinale on 8 September 1573, and Valignano was appointed Visitor (*Visitor* in Latin) to the East, which represented a vast area stretching from Mozambique to Japan. He was to be in sole charge of all the Jesuit missions and missionaries inside this area¹⁶.

Around 20 September, the Italian Visitor left the Eternal City, travelling by way of Milan to Genoa. On 25 October, he boarded the ship with a large group of Jesuits. On the following day in favorable weather, they sailed out from the harbor of Genoa. On 10 November they landed at Alicante, the Spanish harbor in the kingdom of Valencia. Valignano reached Valencia on 14 November. His plan was to assemble the missionaries whom the Spanish provincials would put at his disposal and to satisfy himself personally as to their aptitude¹⁷. On 14 December, he stayed in Plasencia, near the western borders of Spain, whence he was anxious to take the road to Portugal on

¹³ Grendler, *op.cit.*, 4.

¹⁴ Ross, *op.cit.*, 33–4.

¹⁵ Grendler, *op.cit.*, 112.

¹⁶ Ross, *op.cit.*, 34.

¹⁷ Schütte, *op.cit.*, I, 56–7.

the following morning and hoped to be in Évora in four days¹⁸. He arrived there on 21 or 22 December 1573, and journeyed via the capital to Almeirim, which had the Jesuit residence and the king's castle standing in the middle of a small town. Until then Valignano principally chose Spanish and Italian missionaries, including many *confessi* (new Christians of Jewish extraction).

Asia was mainly under the Portuguese *padroado* (patronage), so Portugal doubted Valignano's policy and measure. He persuaded the Portuguese authorities to accept the plan that he wanted to realize in Asia, although he was still young and had served only seven years in the Society of Jesus. He tried to overcome difficulties and national antagonism¹⁹, administering his office *con spirito soave* (with mild mind). Valignano often and willingly used *soave (suave) modo* (mild and gentle way) to express feelings toward other things and others²⁰. When he finally embarked in March, he was able to take with him forty-one missionaries, so that the great *missão* (mission) of 1574 numbered forty-two to India and Japan, including Valignano himself. At sunrise in 21 March, the feast of St. Benedict and also Laetare Sunday, a favoring wind wafted the fleet of the five ships from the harbor of Lisbon to the open sea. Valignano was never to see Europe or his homeland again²¹.

The Captain's ship, with the visitor on board, entered the harbor of Goa on 6 September 1574²². Valignano stayed in India for three years, spending most of the time journeying for official business. He visited various stations both north and south, penetrating as far as the inland of Mannar, lying off Ceylon, and the Portuguese city of São Thomé (Meliapor) on the eastern coast. On 20 September 1577, he left Goa and India, reaching Malacca on 19 October. He stayed there till 15 July of the next year, awaiting monsoons. And he reached Macao on 6 September 1578. After one month, on 7 July 1579, he left Macao for Japan and on 25 July, the feast of St. James, he set foot on Japanese soil for the first time.

Thirty years passed between the arrival of the Visitor and Francis Xavier's landfall in Kagoshima in 1549. More than one generation passed after the first three Portuguese arrived on the island of Tanegashima in 1542. Meanwhile, Xavier founded the Jesuit Collegio in India, the Council of Trent was closed in 1563, and the Counter-Reformation began in full-scale. Taking the Italian Valignano and Spanish Xavier into

¹⁸ Schütte, *ibid.*, 64–5.

¹⁹ Schütte, *ibid.*, 79.

²⁰ Schütte, *ibid.*, 83.

²¹ Schütte, *ibid.*, 91.

²² Schütte, *ibid.*, 92.

consideration, we find that the age of the “Christian Century” in Japan’s history, first suggested by worldwide historian Charles Boxer, underwent the multi-layered influences of Western culture and philosophy.

On one hand, Xavier studied Scholastic and Thomistic theology in Paris, followed by Aristotelian philosophy. On the other hand, interestingly enough, Xavier seems to have been influenced by Renaissance Platonism because, coming to Japan and knowing the doctrines of Buddhism and its negation of the afterlife, he emphasized the Christian dogma of the immortality of the soul that had become an article of faith at the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513. While Xavier had no interest or knowledge of Japan when he left Europe, Valignano knew Japan to some degree. While in Spain and Portugal, he wondered how Christianity would fare in Japan where good people were living. He studied law in Padua, where theology was nonexistent as I have already said, and the secular Aristotelian tradition attached great importance to logic and reason. Although Aristotle and his commentators did not always claim the continuity of the soul after death, if we consider his aim of writing, it seems that Valignano emphasized the immortality of the soul in his *Catechismus Christinae fidei*.

Whereas Xavier visited Japan only once and stayed two years and three months, Valignano went three times and dwelled for some ten years as Visitor subject only to the General, the Pope and God²³. His first stay spanned from 25 July 1479 to 20 February 1582. Valignano respected Xavier as a guide and described his life of virtue and his ardent apostolate in his *Indian History*²⁴. Nonetheless, he criticized the credulity of the people in what is called a “miracle” wrought by Xavier²⁵. Valignano would seem a good disciple of Pomponazzi for the denial of such miracles. He perhaps knew the insistence of Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) because, like Ficino, he was sure that miracles occur less frequently in his age than in antiquity. He was also convinced that a reasonable theory would be needed to persuade unbelievers, even if it is not Ficinian Platonism.

Xavier tried to send two Japanese to Europe and one of them safely reached there, visiting Loyola in Rome and studying in Coimbra as a Jesuit. Like Xavier, Valignano founded a Collegio on the basis of *studia humanitatis* and organized the first Japanese embassy to Europe from 1582 to 1590. This is the famous group of four Japanese

²³ Moran, *op.cit.*, 23.

²⁴ Schütte, *op.cit.*, Part II, 316.

²⁵ Alessandro Valignano, *Historia del principio y progreso de la campaña de Jesus en las Indias Orientales* (1542-1564).

young nobles. To accompany this Embassy on its return, Valignano visited Japan for the second time from 21 July 1590 to 9 October 1592. He introduced the movable type printing from Europe, and had European classics translated into Japanese.

The first publication of the Jesuit press in Rome was an expurgated edition of Martial's epigrams that appeared in 1559. By 1556, there was already a Jesuit printing press in India²⁶. It took a quarter century to arrive in Japan from India. We should not forget that marvelous block printing had already been developed in Japan and China. It astonished even Michel de Montaigne (1533–92). The Jesuit library in Japan included many pagan writers, not only Cicero and Virgil but also Caesar, Sallust (Sallustius), Horace and Martial.

Valignano's third visit was as follows²⁷. On 23 April 1597, he bade farewell forever to India, from Goa, and he reached Cochin on 27 or 28 April, Malacca on 16 June and Macao on 20 July. Leaving there in the middle of July 1598, he crossed over to Japan and on 5 August landed there. This third visit ended only on 15 January 1603.

In 1604, the Visitor was planning to return to Japan again. In Macao the following year, he asked the General to relieve him from his duties as superior. A year later he wrote that he would leave for Japan in June 1606, 'unless it please Our Lord to take me for the other life, which is what I would much prefer.' His prayer was heeded, according to Moran²⁸, writer of the monograph on Valignano. There were no more voyages, and he died in Macao on 20 January 1606.

Josef Franz Schütte, modern and laborious Jesuit scholar, contributed much toward understanding Valignano's ideas by emphasizing the meaning of the first visit. As his books show²⁹, Visitor's mission principles should not be regarded as unchangeable. A mind like his, highly sensitive to outward impressions and inner convictions, worked continuously on the task of improving his norms of action and adapting them to new and unusual conditions. Such a man as Valignano could be compared with the contemporary humanist, Montaigne, on this point.

Since Valignano valued the Christian faith as universal and eternal, his doctrines would necessarily conflict with the particular and the local. But for him habit was a second nature and no less powerful, and therefore was identified with the human condition in general. To be deprived of habit was to be deprived of life itself, as

²⁶ Moran, *op.cit.*, 145–46.

²⁷ Schütte, *op.cit.*, Part I, 38–9.

²⁸ Moran, *op.cit.*, 4.

²⁹ Schütte, *op.cit.*, Part I, 4.

Montaigne tells us in his *Essais* (I, xxiii. III, x). It is instructive to consider Valignano, a man of the Italian Renaissance, in the context of Japanese history, and the intellectual climate that he encountered.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

P.S. The 40th Meeting of the Japanese Society for Renaissance Studies at Gakushuin Women's College, 19 May 2013, welcoming Prof. Lino Pertile, Director of Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies and Dr. Jonathan Nelson, Assistant Director of the same Center.

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