



## IPPOLITO DESIDERI'S FIRST REMARKS ON LADAKH

ENZO GUALTIERO BARGIACCHI

THE pioneer British veterinary surgeon and great explorer William Moorcroft<sup>1</sup> spent considerable amount of time in Ladakh between 1820 and 1822, during a challenging expedition to find horses in Central Asia. The horses were to be used to strengthen the East India Company's stud, for which he was responsible. While this was the official reason for the expedition, it is best remembered for its pioneering exploration, and its part in the origin of the 'Great Game' which for a whole century characterised the rivalry between the British and Russian Empires in Asia. Particularly significant in an academic context was Moorcroft's meeting with Alexander Csoma de Kőrös<sup>2</sup> on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1822, which made it possible for the Hungarian linguist to devote considerable attention to the Tibetan language and led to his subsequent recognition as the effective founder of modern Tibetan studies.

Moorcroft later reached Bukhara [Buhara], but his expedition was ill-fated in a number of ways: it would prove fatal for Moorcroft himself, who died on the return journey in northern Afghanistan, and was also less successful than it might have been as a fact-finding journey, since the published account of the exploration arrived too late to avoid being overshadowed by another, popular account (BURNES 1834) of the journey to Bukhara made by Alexander Burnes (1805-1841) seven years earlier. Similarly, Moorcroft's information on Ladakh might have considered obsolete after the publication (almost at the same time as Moorcroft's work) of a description of journeys in Kashmir and Ladakh by Godfrey Thomas Vigne (1801-1863),<sup>3</sup> taken between 1835 and 1838.

Nonetheless Moorcroft believed himself to be the first European to visit Leh and these are his remarks on the discovery of a Bible in Pashkyum, a vil-

<sup>1</sup> William Moorcroft (christened in Omskirk, Lancashire, 15.6.1767-Andkui, Afghanistan, 27.8.1825), son of Ann, unmarried, born in Omskirk in 1747 to Richard Moorcroft and Dorothy Prescotts (married in 1741), studied veterinary science in Lyon. In India from 1808 onwards, after an early journey to western Tibet (Gartok and the region of mount Kailas and lake Manasarovar) with Hyder Jung Hearsay, he made the great expedition (with George Trebeck, George Guthrie, Indian servant Mir Izzet Ullah, and the only survivor, Ghulam Hyder Khan) which would take him from Kashmir (September 1823) to Bukhara (3.2.1825), via Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz (where he was held prisoner for six months in 1824). For more on Moorcroft see ALDER 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Kőrösi Csoma Sándor (Kőrös, Háromszék county [Transylvania, today Romania] 4.4.1784-Darjeeling, Bengal, 11.4.1842) was born in a village in the province of Transylvania in Hungary, inhabited by Szekely aristocrats who traditionally guarded the extreme frontier of Christian Europe against incursions by Ottoman Turks. Driven to undertake the romantic quest for the origins of his people (believed to inhabit some remote region of central Asia), he embarked on a great journey, almost entirely on foot, crossing Syria, Baghdad, Persia, Bukhara, Afghanistan, Punjab and Kashmir over two and half years, to reach Ladakh.

<sup>3</sup> VIGNE 1842.



lage near Kargil: «How it had come there no person could inform me, but it might possibly have been given to the former Raja by Desideri who visited Ladakh, although it is very doubtful if he reached Lé».<sup>4</sup>

Another century later, August Hermann Francke (Gnadenfrei, Silesia 5.11.1870-Berlin 16.2.1930), a German Moravian missionary, recorded Moorcroft's doubts in the first volume of his important work *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, without definitely confirming Desideri's visit to Leh:

The first European to visit Leh was apparently the Jesuit Desideri who visited Ladakh in 1715 during the reign of King Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal [...]. The Jesuit was kindly received by the king [...]. I regret to say that I have not yet seen a satisfactory account of this interesting and important journey. A relic of Desideri's mission was discovered by the next European visitor to Ladakh, Moorcroft [...] I feel confident that a critical edition of Desideri's diary will establish beyond doubt the fact that Desideri actually visited Leh.<sup>5</sup>

Francke only dispels these doubts in the second volume of this same work:

The Jesuit Desideri visited Leh in 1715 A.D. He calls the king Nima-Nimghial, and testifies to the absolute independence of the Ladakh Empire. The Latin Bible found by Moorcroft (*Travels*, vol. II, pp. 22-23) in Ladakh was probably left there by Desideri. It came from the Papal Press, and was dated 1598 A.D.<sup>6</sup>

To be precise, the first European to reach Ladakh was actually the Portuguese merchant Diogo d'Almeida, who claimed to have stayed there for two years in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and who told the archbishop of Goa (Augustine friar Aleixo de Menezes) that Christians lived there and that they had churches and priests similar to those in Portugal.<sup>7</sup> This account is questionable to say the least, since it seems to echo very closely the accounts of Muslim merchants who were more likely than a Christian (albeit a nominal one) to consider the temples and monks of this region to be Christian after such a long stay in Ladakh. To be sure, an earlier Jesuit missionary did go to Ladakh: Francisco de Azevedo,<sup>8</sup> who left us a reliable account of his travels. In 1631 he travelled from Agra to Tsaparang, where a Jesuit mission had been founded by Anto-

<sup>4</sup> MOORCROFT, TREBECK, 1841, II, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> FRANCKE 1914, I, pp. 68-69.

<sup>6</sup> FRANCKE 1926, II, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> Ancient documentation shows that «a Portuguese named Diogo de Almeida, a man of some repute, gave the Archbishop the following news: [...] he says that this Kingdom of Thibete is beyond Guiscumir, recently conquered by the Moghul kings [Kashmir was conquered by Akbar in 1587], and this Kingdom and Thibete are separated by just a few, very high mountain ranges [...]. There are many churches, richly decorated with icons and images of Christ Our Lord, Our Lady and the Holy Apostles. There are many priests who remain celibate as ours do, and their robes are also similar to ours, although their heads are completely shaved. [...] The aforementioned Portuguese told the Archbishop all these things in 1603 [...]» [excerpt from GOUVEA 1606, livro I, cap. 1, fol. 3. This text was translated into French by Jean-Baptiste de Glen: see GOUVEA 1609, pp. 10-13; more recently it has appeared in Italian in TOSCANO 1951, pp. 36-38 (TOSCANO 1977, pp. 66-69).

<sup>8</sup> Francisco de Azevedo (Lisbon 1578-Goa 12.8.1660), entered the Society of Jesus in Goa in 1597. He left Agra on 28.6.1631 and reached Tsaparang on 25<sup>th</sup> August, leaving from there with João de Oliveira on 4<sup>th</sup> October for Leh, where he arrived on 25<sup>th</sup> October. He left Leh on 7<sup>th</sup> November, and after passing through Nagar (the capital of Kulu) on 26<sup>th</sup> November, he returned to Agra on 3rd January 1632.

nio de Andrade.<sup>9</sup> In the company of another Jesuit – João de Oliveira – who served as a companion and interpreter, he then moved on to Leh where he met the king of Ladakh who had recently extended his reign over the kingdom of Guge. Azevedo's account, following his return to India via Lahul and Kulu, was written in Portuguese and brought to light by the Dutch Jesuit Cornelis Wessels,<sup>10</sup> when he published it in English in 1924 as an appendix to his famous work on Jesuit exploration of central Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Given the date of the Bible found by Moorcroft, it was probably left by de Azevedo or came by some other means from the Jesuit mission in the kingdom of Guge.

The attribution of this Bible to Desideri was understandable since his journey to Lhasa across Kashmir and Ladakh had been well-known and documented for two whole centuries. Some information was contained in a private letter sent by Desideri when he arrived in Lhasa to his friend and fellow-Jesuit Ildebrando Grassi, who was at the Mysore mission in India. This letter was published, in French, in the famous and popular collection of letters sent by Jesuit missionaries from their various missions entitled *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*.<sup>12</sup> The series, which was begun in 1702 by French Jesuit priest Charles Legobien (1653-1708) and continued from 1711 onwards by confrère Jean-Baptiste Du Halde,<sup>13</sup> reached 34 volumes in its first edition, which was completed in 1776.

<sup>9</sup> Antonio de Andrade (Oleiros, Castel Branco district, Beira Baixa province, Portugal, 1580-Goa, India, 19.3.1634) arrived in Tsaparang in early August 1624, after becoming the first European to cross the Himalayas.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelis Wessels (Helmond, Brabant Wallon, Nederland, 8.9.1880 - Maastricht, Limburg, Nederland, 2.2.1964).

<sup>11</sup> WESSELS 1924. De Azevedo is discussed in pp. 94-119, and his account appears as Appendix I, *Azevedo's Account of his Journey to Tibet. Second part* ("De Agra pera o Tibet"), pp. 282-313.

De Azevedo's account was later translated into Italian in TOSCANO 1951, pp. 223-258 (TOSCANO 1977, pp. 355-399), and into French, see DIDIER 1996, pp. 141-209.

<sup>12</sup> "Lettre du Pere Hypolite Desideri, Missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jesus, Au Pere Ildebrand Grassi Missionnaire de la mesme Compagnie dans le Royaume de Mayssur. Traduite de l'Italian. A Lassa le 10 Avril 1716", in LEGOBIEU et alii 1707-1776 (Recueils I-XXXIV), xv, 1722, pp. 183-208. See also other editions: 1780-1783 [edited in 26 volumes by Yves Mathurin Querbeuf S.J. (1726-1797) for J.C. Merigot, Paris], xii («Mémoires des Indes»), 1781, pp. 430-445; 1819 [reproduction of the previous edition, in 14 volumes edited by De Backer for J. Vernareil, E. Cabin et C., Lyon], vii («Mémoires des Indes»), pp. 259-268; 1838-1843 [a four-volume edition edited by M. L. Aimé-Martin for the Société du Panthéon Littéraire, Paris], iii («Chine»), 1843, pp. 531-535. In translation (the original Italian is missing): German, *Der Neue Welt-Bott* [edited by Joseph Stöcklein S.J., Augsburg und Grätz, 1726-1736], I, 1726, pp. 90-93; Spanish, *Cartas edificantes y curiosas* [translated by Diego Davin S.J., Madrid, 1753-1756, 16 volumes], x, 1755, pp. 50-61; Italian *Scelta di lettere edificanti scritte dalle missioni straniere* [Milano, Ranieri Fanfani, 1825-1829, 18 volumes], xv, 1829, pp. 40-50 [the same editor published a six-volume edition during these same years, 1825-1829, with colour prints, in which Desideri's letter appears in vol. vi, 1829, pp. 40-50]. Ildebrando Grassi (Bologna 1683-Pondicherry 22.5.1731).

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (Paris 1.2.1674-Paris 18.8.1743), who began to edit the *Lettres édifiantes* from vol. ix, 1711, is renowned for his great work on China: *Description géographique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*, Paris, P. G. Lemercier, 1735, in four volumes [also printed at La Haye in 1736 and translated: into English (*The General History of China*, 1736, in four volumes; 1738 and 1741, in two volumes), German (1747-1749, in four volumes), Russian (the first 2 volumes, 1774 and 1777)]. This work made use of maps published in 1733 by Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (1697-1782), "geographer to the king", in the *Atlas de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*, reproductions of maps made by the Jesuits, directed by Jean-Baptiste Régis (1683-1738) at the court of Peking.

Desideri's letter appeared in the fifteenth volume published in 1722, and contained the first (and for over a century the only) information about Ladakh in a European language. For this reason the information was printed in all the leading collections of descriptions of journeys.<sup>14</sup>

The fate of Desideri's discoveries and his accounts is highly unusual. The Jesuit missionary is the author of important works in the Tibetan language and a *Relazione* of his long journey and stay in Tibet, presented thus by Filippo de Filippi:<sup>15</sup>

Desideri's *Relazione*, composed entirely from personal observation made on the spot, and from investigations of the Tibetan texts constantly controlled by the Doctors of the Law, has a scientific value of the first importance which has not been affected by the studies which have since appeared.<sup>16</sup>

During a celebration in honour of Csoma de Kőrös, Giuseppe Tucci<sup>1</sup> expressed a similar opinion – that Desideri's *Relazione* is a work «which is profound and detailed enough to stand the test of time and further, improved investigations». <sup>1</sup> In the same way, Luciano Petech defines Desideri's works as «a wonderful description of the lamaist religion, showing a deep and intimate understanding of its fundamental features that few European academics could achieve two centuries later». <sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> These include: *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London, Astley, 1745-1747, four volumes (IV, 1747, pp. 655-658) [in the German edition, *Allgemeine Historie der Reisen zu Wasser und Lande*, 1747-1777, 21 volumes: VII, 1750, pp. 562-567]; *Histoire générale des voyages*, Paris, Didot, 1746-1761, 16 volumes (tome VII, 1749, Livre IV, Chap. IV, § II, pp. 433-437; edn. Pierre de Hondt, La Haye: tome IX, Livre IV, Chap. VII, § II, pp. 455-460) [Italian edn., *Storia generale de' viaggi*, translated by Gasparo Gozzi, 27 volumes: tomo XXVII, 1758, Libro IV, Cap. VII, § 2, pp. 280-290]; PINKERTON 1808-1814, pp. 595-606; MURRAY 1820, I, pp. 441-445. Published in various other places, the same letter still appears, translated into English, as *Appendix II*, in MARKHAM 1876, pp. 302-308. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1879; reprint New Delhi 1971 and 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Filippo De Filippi (Turin 6.4.1869-Settignano, Florence, 23.9.1938), son of Giuseppe and Olimpia Sella, doctor, mountaineer, explorer, author of various scientific expeditions especially between the Karakorum, Western Himalayas and Central Asia. He took part as a doctor and naturalist in the expedition of Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoia, Duke of Abruzzi (1873-1933) and wrote an account of it: DE FILIPPI 1912. A new, abridged Italian edition of this work is available (White Star, Vercelli, 2006), with the title *Il Duca degli Abruzzi e Filippo De Filippi nell'Himalaya (1909)*. Also important is the great expedition made with leading researchers and scientists between 1913 and 1914, described in DE FILIPPI 1924. The huge mass of information gathered by the 1913-14 expedition was studied and published in 16 volumes (18 tomes) of the *Relazioni scientifiche* published by Zanichelli between 1922 and 1934; in particular Vol. I of Series II («Geological and geographical results»): DAINELLI 1934 (this volume shows the most complete, detailed and in-depth history of the exploration of the region that includes Ladakh).

<sup>16</sup> DE FILIPPI, *Preface*, in DE FILIPPI 1932, pp. 33-46: 37.

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe TUCCI (Macerata 5.6.1894-San Polo dei Cavalieri, Rome, 5.4.1984), author of *Indo-tibetica* (1932-1941; English edn. 1988-1989), *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949) and numerous specialist and popular works, always of a high standard. Such a high profile figure in the most varied areas of Oriental studies that he needs no introduction.

<sup>18</sup> TUCCI 1942, pp. 3-20 (Italian text, pp. 3-11: 3; Hungarian text, pp. 12-20: 12) [This speech, given during the centenary commemoration of the death of Kőrösi Csoma, was republished in TUCCI 1971, pp. 419-427: 419].

<sup>19</sup> PETECH 1952-1956, V, 1954, pp. XI-XXXVI [“Introduzione alle Parti V-VII” (Ippolito Desideri)]: XXVII-XXVII. PETECH 1952-1956, henceforward quoted as *MITN*, is a work, in seven separate parts [Vol. II of «Il Nuovo Ramusio». A collection of journeys, texts and documents relating to relations between Europe and the East, ed. by ISMEO (scientific director Giuseppe Tucci)], expertly edited by Luciano Petech (born in Trieste 1914, resident in Rome), that contains: in the first four parts (1952-1953), letters and accounts

Unfortunately the work of this pioneer remained unpublished for over two hundred years. Although it was prepared for printing, with a 'Warning to the reader', it was prevented from being published and subsequently both forgotten and widely ostracised. The fortunes of Desideri's work are woven into a complex pattern of sectional histories and general history spanning three centuries and assuming both local and global dimensions: an intriguing, fascinating and significant story which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

Without the *Relazione*, nothing remained but the information contained in the famous letter written by the missionary, who, on arriving in India, was surprised and disappointed to discover that his first impressions had been circulated. These are his remarks on the subject:

In the xv<sup>th</sup> small volume of the same collection [*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*] there is a letter of mine, which, when I had arrived at the capital of the third Tibet, I wrote in Italian to Father Grassi, giving him a short account of my journey. I take this opportunity to remark that the date and time of our arrival and of our departure from Kascimir must be corrected; but that is not the chief point I wish to draw attention to now; I want to remark that in the said Letter I myself made a mistake about two very important and essential points, which I represented very differently from what I have declared in the Relation. Speaking of the second Tibet, or Lhata-yul, and of the religion there current, I said first that those people do not admit metempsychosis, but believe that the wicked go to Hell and the good to Heaven; secondly, that they seemed to have some knowledge of God and of the Most Holy Trinity. On these two points I made a gross mistake, and erred greatly in the understanding of both.<sup>21</sup>

from Capuchin monks ("I Cappuccini marchigiani"); in the last three parts, letters, *Relazione* (Book 1, Part v; Books 2 and 3, Part vi, 1955; Book 4, Part vii, 1956) and other documents by Ippolito Desideri. We will refer to the Books of Desideri's *Relazione*, published in *MITN*, as DR. (followed by a number from 1-4) and to the letters from this missionary as DL. (followed by the progressive number shown in *MITN* v, pp. 1-93: DL.1-DL.25).

<sup>20</sup> BARGIACCHI 2003, pp. 4-103. This work will be published in a complete edition, translated into English, by ISIAO (Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente).

A few points regarding the manuscripts of the *Relazione*. The non-autograph first draft complete with appendices was found in Pistoia in 1875 by Gherardo Nerucci and presented by Carlo Puini (now known as ms. F and preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, Fondo Rossi-Cassigoli, ms. 270). Autograph manuscripts preserved in the historical archive of the S.J. (ARSI), are: ms. C (Goa 73), partial autograph version of ms. F; ms. B (Goa 72), second and third draft (B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, before and after corrections), contains Books I, II and III; ms. A (Goa 73), fourth and last draft for the first two Books and second draft (continuation of B<sub>1</sub>) for Book IV. Mss. A and B were discovered by C. Wessels, see WESSELS 1924, pp. 205-281 (Chapter VII, Hippolyte Desideri): 275-281.

<sup>21</sup> *MITN* VI, DR.3, Cap. xxii, pp. 302-303. The text mentioned here is the translation by Belgian Jesuit historian Henri Hosten (Ramskapelle, Western Flanders, Belgium, 26.3.1873 – Bruxelles 16.4.1935), reproduced in his prestigious collection of letters from Desideri and documents relating to him, in the original Italian and in English translation, see HOSTEN 1938, Article n. 24, pp. 567-767: 638-639. Hosten's work, dated «Darjeeling, Nov. 1, 1929» and published in its original form after the author's death, was reprinted in volume, changing the page numbers only (1-201) and with the title inverted, see HOSTEN 1938, (mentioned from pp. 72-73).

Hosten translated the excerpt from the volume by Carlo Puini (Livorno 29.5.1839-Florence 4.6.1924), Sinologist and early Italian scholar of Buddhism and Tibetology, who had edited a monograph about Tibet using Desideri's *Relazione*, fragmented and reorganised according to his criteria, see PUINI 1904, p. 186. A different English version can be found in DE FILIPPI 1932, p. 303.

Hosten had devoted some time to Desideri's letters, see HOSTEN 1918, pp. 338-340 (n. 34, 24.8.1918), 399-400 (n. 40, 5.10.1918), 409-410 (n. 41, 12.10.1918), 498-500 (n. 50, 14.12.1918). After an interesting analysis

The missionary adds the following:

I confess I did very ill to write that letter to Father Ildebrando Grassi, dealing, although lightly, with the religion and opinions of a people I hardly knew and with whose language I was hardly acquainted. But I think it was wrong to publish that letter containing two quite inexact statements, and could not believe my eyes when I saw it in print long afterwards at Pondichery, and remembered having written to Father Ildebrando Grassi.<sup>22</sup>

We will see later that Desideri's characteristic honesty and admirably scrupulous accuracy led him to a perhaps excessively severe judgement of those early observations.

During his visit to Ladakh the missionary certainly did not possess that full knowledge of the language which enabled him to write five books in Tibetan and above all, to completely understand, illustrate and discuss the basic concepts of Buddhism. His description of the emptiness and interrelation of all things, expressed in lovely and efficacious prose, is even today of incomparable clarity. Although it lacks something of the unparalleled prose of the original, here is a small sample from a recent and accurate translation by Michael Sweet:

all things are empty of existence in themselves. The reason [...] is that nothing owes its own existence to an intrinsic nature and exists essentially on its own. The reason for this being so [...] is that nothing is totally independent inasmuch as there is nothing that is [...] unconnected unlinked, and without reciprocal correlation [...] but] everything considered in the light of its essential nature has some correlation with some term or object, then nothing possesses its own essence absolutely of itself, but rather from the term or object which it is correlated.<sup>23</sup>

This aroused admiring astonishment in Tucci, who commented thus:

In our own time, too, few westerners thoroughly understand the depth of this doctrine [regarding the emptiness of all phenomena, *śūnyatā* in Sanskrit, *stong-pa-nyid* in Tibetan]; so it is marvellous that Desideri, who had no knowledge of Indian philosophy, was able to grasp the real meaning of these complex ideas.<sup>24</sup>

of Desideri's letters and related research (n. 34), Hosten had published the English translation of the letters designated in *MITN* v as DL.4 (nos. 40 and 41) and DL.7 (n. 50); the latter, originally published in French in *Lettres édifiantes* is shown in MARKHAM's 1876 version with a few corrections.

<sup>22</sup> *MITN* VI, DR.3, p. 304. The excerpt is shown here in the translation included in DE FILIPPI 1932, p. 304.

<sup>23</sup> See *MITN* VI, DR.3, Chap. x, p. 204. The summary, inadequate translation in DE FILIPPI 1932, p. 249 does not do justice to this rich description. Michael Sweet, who is completing a new, long-awaited, critical edition of Desideri's *Relazione* in English, has kindly provided the translation of this excerpt.

<sup>24</sup> TUCCI 1940, pp. 24-26: 25. Regarding the conclusions drawn by the missionary in his analysis, Tucci says elsewhere: «Who has put it better than Desideri, that in spite of its idols Buddhism is a Godless religion?» [G. TUCCI, *L'Italia e gli studi tibetani*, «Civiltà. Rivista bimestrale della Esposizione Universale di Roma», a. I, n. 2, 21.6.1940, pp. 75-86 (abstract in German, French, English and Spanish, pp. 98-100): 78]. This same statement appears in other, later works by Tucci, see TUCCI 1943, p. 227, and TUCCI 1949a, p. 204. In the last of these, republished by ISIAO in 2005, edited by Francesco D'Arelli, he also states that «Desideri's work was ahead of his time: the secrets of meditations of the Great Vehicle Buddhism, which began to be revealed to scholars of the Orient at the end of the last century, are already clear in the academic logical structures of his account» (p. 204; edn. 2005, pp. 157-158).



More recently, Rudolph Kaschewsky «quoted word for word [Desideri's «explanation of the famous formula *Om mani padme hum*»] since it may mark the memorable beginning of Tibetology in the West». <sup>25</sup> The same level of conceptual depth and precise linguistic analysis can be found in his treatment of the 'wheel of the existence' (*bhāvachakra*), <sup>26</sup> and in other themes.

Even without that command of the language and philosophical and theological concepts, the letter containing the first impressions of Ladakh still presents several points of interest worth noting. First of all, it should be made clear that the French translation of the letter that was circulated (of which the original has been lost) was very similar to an earlier letter <sup>27</sup> sent from Leh to the General of the Society of Jesuits, Michelangelo Tamburini; <sup>28</sup> in fact the description is practically identical. As Hosten rightly states regarding his confrère's popular letter:

This letter is so similar in many things, choice of details and disposition of the matter, to the previous one, that I am of the opinion that he took with him to Lhasa the previous letter, written from Leh, and used it for the composition of the present letter. <sup>29</sup>

The letter sent from Leh to his General is important for other reasons too. It contains the news of a clash of opinions between Desideri and his travelling companion and superior, Portuguese Manoel Freyre: <sup>30</sup> this information, which was erased from the *Relazione* for the good of the Society, sheds some light on aspects regarding the real goal of the mission and the controversy between the Jesuits and the Capuchins, <sup>31</sup> which had remained unclear.

But here and now we are interested in the observations regarding Ladakh, considered important enough by their author to be copied and taken with him to Lhasa, where they would be copied out again in the letter to his confrère.

The journey across the Pir Panjal Mountains to Srinagar in Kashmir, and thence to Leh, is described more extensively in beautiful prose in the *Relazione*.

<sup>25</sup> KASCHESKY, 2001, pp. 3-20, 10. Excerpt translated from *MITN* VI, DR.3, Chap. xx, p. 290. See a different translation in DE FILIPPI, 1932, p. 296.

<sup>26</sup> *MITN* VI, DR.3, Chap. xxii, pp. 307-308, see also DE FILIPPI 1932, pp. 305-306.

<sup>27</sup> From Leh, 5.8.1715, published in *MITN* V as DL.6 (pp. 22-32), and in English as n. 7, in HOSTEN 1938, pp. 625-638 (HOSTEN 1998, pp. 59-72). Desideri's letter to his confrère Grassi, reproduced in *MITN* V (DL.7, pp. 32-40) in the early French translation (Italian original missing), appears in English in HOSTEN 1938, as number 8, pp. 638-646 (HOSTEN 1998, pp. 72-80).

<sup>28</sup> Michelangelo Tamburini (Montese, Modena, 4.12.1647-Rome 28.2.1730) was the XIV General of the Jesuits.

<sup>29</sup> HOSTEN 1938, p. 639 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 73).

<sup>30</sup> Manoel Freyre, born in Ancião (Portugal) in 1679, entered the Society of Jesus in Goa on 7.10.1694; after 1710 he was involved in the Agra mission. He reached Lhasa with Desideri and left again almost immediately for Kathmandu and Patna, returning to Agra, where on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1717 he wrote his Latin account of the journey, *Tibetorum ac eorum Relatio Viarum*, see the original annotated version in *MITN* VII, pp. 194-207, 230-231; partial English translation, in DE FILIPPI, 1932, pp. 351-361; integral English translation in the precise and in-depth critical edition by SWEET 2006, pp. 1-33: 13-28. The subsequent news of Freyre is patchy: around 1719 he left the S. J. and the only further trace of him found to date is an (unsuccessful) application for readmission written from Goa in 1724.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Sweet discusses this in depth in SWEET 2006.

In her 1985 monograph of Ladakh Janet Rizvi is generous in her acknowledgment of the Pistoiese missionary's virtues, and even goes so far as to say:

Perhaps the most interesting event in the eighteenth century is the visit of the Jesuit priest Ippolito Desideri in 1715. [...] His *Relazione*, while mainly concerned with Tibet and with Buddhism, contains the earliest general account of Ladakh by a Western observer, and is thus a valuable supplement to the Ladakhi and Tibetan sources which are the basis of our knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

This writer maintains that «Desideri gives us a valuable glimpse of Ladakh in that period», and underlines the vivid nature of his descriptions of the paths and journeys of his time: «Desideri [...] gives an idea of what it was like then», ending with the statement that «The modern student of Ladakh has good reason to be grateful to him».<sup>33</sup>

Later, at the eighth IALS "Colloquium" held in 1997, Rizvi quoted Desideri extensively, specifically his description of wool trading between Kashmir and Ladakh.<sup>34</sup>

In the proceedings of the same "Colloquium", John Bray and Chris Butters recalled the missionary's account of the king of Ladakh: «Desideri records that the king was hospitable and pressed the two Italian priests to stay».<sup>35</sup>

The descriptions of the journey contained in the letter under consideration may not reflect the perfect, elegant prose of the *Relazione*, but are extremely effective in conveying the characteristic features of the journey and the places visited. To give an idea of this, let us follow our traveller across the mountains between Kashmir and Ladakh, an area furrowed by the deep gorges of the Indus River and its tributaries.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> RIZVI 1983, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, respectively pp. 263 and 109. Rizvi further states that Desideri's *Relazione* «provides a unique insight into the life of the Tibetans and the mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism which is said not to have been superseded by modern studies in any European language», see pp. 262-263.

<sup>34</sup> «Desideri [...] leaves no room for doubt as to the importance of the wool trade between Ladakh and Kashmir, and the production of what he calls *scials*» see RIZVI 1999, pp. 317-337: 321.

The same author also made use of Desideri's account in RIZVI 1999, pp. 31, 55, 164, 184.

<sup>35</sup> BRAY, BUTTERS 1999, pp. 49-57: 52.

<sup>36</sup> The description of the crossing of the Pir Panjal mountains on the way from Lahore to Srinagar in Kashmir is highly significant: «On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, we set out from Lahor in a few days arrived at the Caucasus Mountains. These mountains are very rough and steep, owing to their height; they form like a ladder of mountains, one rising above another, till one reaches a horribly high and steep mountain, called the Pir Pangial, whom the superstitious travellers pay great reverence and offerings to, as they pass, in the belief that it is the abode of a very old man, the custodian of those mountains; opinion, which I believe is founded on the fable of Prometheus. Some of those mountains are perpetually covered with snow and ice. It took me twelve days to cross those mountains on foot. The difficulty I met was that I had often to get on foot across torrents of very cold water, molten snow in fact, between pieces of ice and over most troublesome stones; sometimes, the stones were so troublesome, the torrent was so violent, and I got so benumbed by the piercing cold water that, to pass those torrents, I was finally obliged to hang on to the tail of some pack-bullock which happened to cross. After that, benumbed and wet as I was, I would continue on my way braving the wind and the sharp cold, against which my clothing protected me very ill. Rough though these mountains are, they are very fertile in many places, and pleasant on account of the great variety of trees; they are inhabited and governed by petty kings subject to the Emperor of the Mogor» [MITN V, DL.6, pp. 22-23; here in English as in HOSTEN 1938, p. 626 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 60). Letter translated into French, DL.7, in MITN V, pp. 33-34; see also MARKHAM 1876, p. 303].



The journey from Dras to Leh is likewise all the time over mountains, truly the abode of horror, aridity and desolation. These mountains succeed one another, or are placed one above the other; or, what is oftenest the case, they are so near to one another that they are separated only by icy cold water issuing from the snow which melts till it snows again the next winter; and, as the water runs over stones, fragments of mountains, it forms awful torrents. It is impossible to travel by the top of the mountains, owing to the perpetual snows; hence, there remains only the road half-way down, that is along the slopes of the said mountains. But, ah me! the road is so narrow that one cannot frequently rest on its straight one foot at a time; one must proceed step by step, one foot behind the other, with difficulty and trouble, suspended in such a way that, if the foot slips ever so little, one must fall down the precipice among the rocks and be killed in the furious torrents flowing at the bottom; if by good luck one were to escape death, one would at any rate be half broken to pieces or miserably maimed, as we saw happening to some poor people. Therefore, all the time, one must advance with fluttering heart and trembling feet, and, on one's lips and in one's inmost heart, fervent commendations to God. The more so, as those mountains, in addition to such paths, are such by nature that, being composed of arid rocks, there is not a tree, not the smallest shrub, not the smallest blade of grass to which, in one's time of danger, one might cling ever so little with trembling hands, if not with safety, at least with some hope. About myself I confess plainly that I often gave myself up for lost; [...] At other times, one must cross furious torrents; generally the bridge is nothing but a narrow piece of stake, offering not an inch of security to one's dubious feet. At one place there is a kind of bridge which is truly curious. It is not made of stone, or of wood or of stakes, but of ropes made with thin branches of trees. When passing over such ropes, one must go quite barefooted and commend one's soul to God.<sup>37</sup>

This last type of bridge, known as a *jhoola*, «made of ropes of twisted willow twigs, which swayed alarmingly above the roaring torrent below»,<sup>38</sup> is described in considerable detail in the *Relazione*, and the description of crossing the bridge is written with such sentiment that the reader seems to experience the author's apprehension.<sup>39</sup>

In the *Relazione*, Ladakh is correctly positioned geographically with fine descriptions of its products and everyday events.

It is mountainous, sterile, and altogether horrible. Barley is the chief product; a little wheat is grown, and in some places apricots. Trees are scarce, so wood is hard to procure. There are many sheep, especially very large geldings; their flesh is most excellent, and their wool extraordinarily fine. [...] They eat meat and the flour of roasted barley, and drink Chang, a sort of beer made from barley [...]. Their clothes, made of wool, are of suitable shape and make. They are not at all arrogant, but rather submissive, kindly, cheerful, and courteous. The language of this country does not differ much from that of Third Tibet, and the Religion and books relating to religion are similar.

<sup>37</sup> MITN v. DL.6, pp. 24-25; the English translation is from HOSTEN 1938, p. 629-630 and HOSTEN 1998, p. 63-64. Letter in French, DL.7 in MITN v, pp. 24-25; in MARKHAM 1876, p. 304.

<sup>38</sup> RIZVI 1983, p. 263.

<sup>39</sup> See MITN v, DR.1, p. 167; see also DE FILIPPI 1932, p. 7.

There are numerous monasteries and a great many monks [...]. A number of merchants from Kascimir engaged in the wool trade live in this kingdom, and they are allowed to have mosques and openly to hold their religion. Occasionally merchants come from the kingdom of Khotan with well-bred horses, cotton-goods, and other merchandise. Some come from Third Tibet by way of the great desert and bring tea and tobacco, bales of silk, and other things from China. There are villages but only one city in this kingdom, Lhe or Lhatá, which is the capital where the Grand Lamá and the absolute Sovereign live. It is situated in a large plain surrounded by mountains, and dotted with villages. The city at the foot of the hill gradually extends upwards until you reach the Residence of the Grand Lamá and the Royal Palace, both large, fine buildings. Above, nearly on the summit of the hill, is a fortress, while the city is defended by walls on either side and below. The houses, strong built, are roomy and well adapted to the country.<sup>40</sup>

The description of Ladakh in the letters is not as accurate and exhaustive, but the famous letter to Desideri's confrère is an important record of a European's first impressions of Tibetan Buddhism and it also contains some information which is not included in the *Relazione*. This is the summary of his first impression of Ladakh, which he refers to as 'Second Tibet':<sup>41</sup>

It has a King, called in the Tibetan language Ghalpo. The name of the present King is Nima Nimghial. This King is independent [...]. In the first settlements we came to, the population is Maomettan; elsewhere, they are gentiles; yet they are not superstitious as the gentiles are in other parts, and it would seem that they have had in olden times some knowledge of our Holy Faith.<sup>42</sup>

We have already seen that Desideri later acknowledged the error in these first impressions, caused by the persisting legend that claimed a Christian presence in that region and also by the differing Eastern and Western concepts of divinity. The missionary continues:

God, whom they call Konciok [*dKon-mchog*] in their language, is according to them one and trine. [...] Moreover they say promiscuously Konciok Cik [*dKon-mchog gcig*], or One God, and Konciok Sum [*dKon-mchog gsum*], or Trine God.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting to hear how Desideri explains, in the *Relazione*, the cause of his error.

When I left Kascimir for Tibet, I took an interpreter who knew Persian and Tibetan, and could teach me some of the latter language during the journey. Now all who go

<sup>40</sup> *MITN* v, DR.1, pp. 165-166; here in English in DE FILIPPI 1932, pp. 78-79.

<sup>41</sup> Today's Baltistan was considered as the first (or small) Tibet; Ladakh, as the second (or middle, or great) Tibet; Tibet itself as the third (or greater) Tibet.

<sup>42</sup> *MITN* v, DL.6, p. 26 (DL.7, p. 36). The excerpt is produced here in English in HOSTEN 1938, pp. 630-631 (HOSTEN 1998, pp. 64-65). The translation of DL.7 in HOSTEN 1938, p. 642 is slightly different; see also HOSTEN 1998, p. 76, and MARKHAM, 1876, p. 305.

<sup>43</sup> *MITN* v, DL.6, p. 26 (DL.7, p. 36). The excerpt is in English in HOSTEN 1938, p. 631 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 65). Slight variation in translation of DL.7, in HOSTEN 1938, p. 642 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 76); in MARKHAM 1876, p. 305.

to the Second or to the Third Tibet, whether Europeans or Armenians, Russians or Mohammedans, fall into the error of assuming that the word Kon-cciòà signifies God [...]. My interpreter did the same. When the King, the Vazir, the Grand Lamá of Lhatá, or another Lamá, after asking about our religion with respect to God, replied that they worshipped Kon-cciòà sum – the word sum meaning three or triune, and when I replied that it was absolutely necessary to acknowledge but one and only God, they said they also acknowledged kon-cciòà, the word meaning one and one only, which however, they understand in a different sense.<sup>44</sup>

Here Desideri presents us the great esteem that people retain to the three 'jewels',<sup>45</sup> or three fundamental objects (Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha) in which Buddhists take refuge. The trinitarian form is clear, as each element includes and entails the other two. Although the concepts in question differ greatly from the Christian trinity, they do – like any trinitarian depiction – express a coherent vision in dynamically operative terms.

There is no time here to pursue the uniformity of trinitaries, but it is vital to make clear the way in which Desideri shows us the significance of the Buddhist concept of three doors<sup>46</sup> and the related *om āḥ hūm* mantra which he discovered in Ladakh.

They have their rosary, and, when reciting it, they say *Om ha hum*. When asked what *Om ha hum* means, they say it is God; then coming down to the particular, that *Om* means mind, or arm, that is power; *ha* means word; *hum* means heart, and the three words together means God.<sup>47</sup>

This information is unsubstantiated by Desideri's other writings and has therefore not been subjected to the scrupulous checking reserved for other topics covered in the *Relazione* which, as mentioned above, contains an exemplary discussion of the *om maṇi padme hūm* mantra. However, the first, sketchy description does provide an approximative picture of the Tibetan interpretation of the three areas through which (in ancient Buddhism) karma's generative actions can take place: body; word, voice, or speech; mind.<sup>48</sup> The Vajrayāna used this tripartite classification of the person for the sublimation of the three aspects according to a process of transformation aiming to achieve the «three bodies of the Buddha»,<sup>49</sup> through holding postures,<sup>50</sup> recit-

<sup>44</sup> MITN VI, DR.3, Chap. XXII, pp. 303-304; here in English in DE FILIPPI 1932, pp. 303-304.

<sup>45</sup> Three jewels, or treasures, or three rare and supreme ones: in Tibetan *dKon-mchog gsum*, in Sanskrit *triratna* (*tiratana* in Pali). *Ratna* (Skr.; Pali *ratana*; Tib. *rin-chen*) = jewel, gem; *mchog* (Tib.) = supreme.

<sup>46</sup> In Tibetan *sgo-gsum*, in Sanskrit *tridvāra*.

<sup>47</sup> MITN V, DL.6, p. 26 (DL.7, p. 36). The excerpt here is in English in HOSTEN 1938, p. 631 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 65). Slightly different is the translation of DL.7, in HOSTEN 1938, p. 642 (HOSTEN 1998, p. 76), which gives the version in MARKHAM 1876, p. 305: «They use a kind of chaplet, over which they repeat these words: *Om, ha, hum*. This they explain by saying that *Om* signifies knowledge or an arm, that is power; *ha* is the word, and *hum* is the heart or love, and that these three words mean God».

<sup>48</sup> Body, in Skr. *kāya* (Tib. *sku, lus*); word, in Skr. *vāk* (Tib. *ngag, gsungs*); mind, in Skr. *citta, manas* (Tib. *yiḍ, thugs*).

<sup>49</sup> *Trikāya* in Sanskrit, *sku-gsum* in Tibetan.

<sup>50</sup> *Mudrā* in Sanskrit, *phyag-rgya* in Tibetan.

ing mantras,<sup>51</sup> and meditation.<sup>52</sup> These activities relating to the outer reality and involving the body, speech and mind, correspond at the higher level of the trikāya, to (respectively) *nirmāṇakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *dharmakāya*.<sup>53</sup>

Body, speech<sup>54</sup> and mind are therefore not only the three functional units of every sentient being but also the potential to achieve the three bodies of all the Buddhas.

Desideri's sketchy information provides valuable evidence of the importance given to the tripartite categories of body, voice and mind in Ladakh as well as the three syllables of the mantra that represents them. The holy value referred to by the missionary is linked to its great importance for Tibetan mysticism: the esoteric significance of the three syllables was established in the texts of the *Guhyasamāja*, considered since the beginning as a fundamental guide for achievement and mystical experience by the schools of Kadampa and Kagyupa. The subject has been discussed by Tucci in *Indo-tibetica*<sup>55</sup> and *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, where, with his habitual clarity, he provides a classic explanation that merits full reproduction here.

The three syllables: *om āḥ hūm*, through which life (*srog*) is finally inserted into the image or the *mc'od rten*, represent, in Vajrayāna speculation, the threefold *vajra*, the threefold adamantine sphere to which is reduced the quintessence of every being. Even the most ancient Indian speculations had reduced the individual to a threefold element, *vāc*, *manas*, *kāya*, word, spirit and body, but in the Vajrayāna schools they acquire a very different value: they are no longer the components of the living personality, held together by the vital connection itself and subject to dissolution or death; they are a reflection of planes superior to the vicissitudes of time: man, inasmuch as he partakes of the Buddha's very essence, reverberates in himself the planes refracted by the Dharmakāya in its process of attraction and reabsorption, as it appears to the individual intelligence, but which in reality becomes annulled in him. Thus man too is an indissoluble unity of these three *vajra*, *sku*, *gsuñs*, *t'ugs*, body, word and spirit. And the relation extends to the other three means of divine revelation.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Mantra* in Sanskrit, *sngags* in Tibetan.

<sup>52</sup> *Samādhi* in Sanskrit, *ting-nge-'dzin* in Tibetan.

<sup>53</sup> In Tibetan respectively: *sprul-sku*, *long-spyod rdzogs-pa'i sku*, and *chos-sku*.

<sup>54</sup> Word, voice or speech indicates the faculty of expression of language but also the breathing system and subtle circulation of energy connecting body and mind.

<sup>55</sup> See TUCCI 1932-1941, I, 1932, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> TUCCI 1949, I, p. 315. The text continues thus (same page): «Sacred objects, as containers of divine presence, are called *rten gsum*, i.e. "the three supports", *sku gsuñs t'ugs rten*, supports of the physical, verbal and spiritual plane; the images, statues or paintings, are the *sku*, the body, of that essence, which has appeared in various forms, according as the created beings are able to conceive it, causing it to correspond to their capability; a book is the *gsuñs rten*, the voice, the word, the verbal revelation; the *mc'od rten* corresponds to the *t'ugs*, to the spiritual plane, the Dharmakāya-cosmogram, which contains in its interior the Mahāyāna quintessential formula, the *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is gnosis and at the same time the Tathāgata himself, according to a famous verse by Diñnāga. But these three planes may be divided only for didactical purposes, because in fact they form an indissoluble unity, the Buddha's unity, as emanation of the Dharmakāya: only the Dharmakāya is. This explains how the threefold diamond, *vajra*, expressed by the three mystical syllables, is necessary to give the images life, their essential reality being reduced to those three planes. The *sādhaka*, according to the *Guhyasamāja*, p. 23, must repeat the formula "om, I am made of the vajra's essence of the body of all the Tathāgata, the same of the words, the same of the

Tucci then states that «these three planes may be divided only for didactical purposes, because in fact they form an indissoluble unity, the Buddha's unity, as emanation of the Dharmakāya». Desideri had essentially understood and he said that the Tibetans «say those three words together [om̄ āḥ hūm̄] to mean God»<sup>57</sup> (we must excuse here the simplification of calling the supreme reality God).

There are many other observations of Ladakh worthy of interest. Note for example the significance of Padmasambhava worship:

They also worship a being called *Urghien* [...]. When asked if he be God or man, some reply that he is both God and man, that he had neither father nor mother, but that he was born of a flower.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, this subject is discussed more fully and precisely in the *Relazione*, as are the monks and ceremonies, although the brief information provided is accurate and effective.

Lastly, it is interesting to note Desideri's surprise at the open-mindedness and tolerance shown by the Ladakhi towards other religions, including the welcome reserved for the Jesuit himself and for the news he brought of the Christian gospel. Desideri is particularly astonished by their observation that their own holy books say the same things.<sup>59</sup>

His contribution to knowledge of Ladakh and Tibetan society in general is definitely remarkable and deserves careful consideration, as leading figures in various disciplinary fields have noted – Tucci, Petech, De Filippi, Sven Hedin, Fosco Maraini and many others.<sup>60</sup> A grave limitation consists in the fact that much of Desideri's work is available only in Italian, and that the English edition of his *Relazione*, while good for its time, is now inadequate. However, there seems to have been a recent renewal of interest in his work and it is to be hoped that the new and integral English translation of the *Relazione*, published by Michael Sweet in a more extensive and updated critical edition, will soon be available.

Regarding the misfortunes of Desideri's work, Martin Brauen, director of the Zurich ethnological museum, has said this:

spirit". Only thus he will be able to lift himself up to a secret state, coessential with the Tathāgatas and made up of three vajras (cf. *ibid.*, p. 43). Hence by the imposition of the threefold formula, not only is life conferred on the images, but they are made to partake of the adamantine essence; they are transformed into that same diamond throne which is outside the samsaric plane and on which the Buddha is seated, or better which is the Buddha himself.

<sup>57</sup> Translated as «the three words together means God» in the excerpt shown above under note 49.

<sup>58</sup> *MITN* v, DL.7, p. 36 (DL.6, p. 26). The excerpt here reproduced in English translation in *HOSTEN* 1938, p. 642 (*HOSTEN* 1998, p. 76); in *MARKHAM*, 1876, p. 305.

<sup>59</sup> *MITN* v, DL.7, p. 37 (DL.6, p. 27). In *HOSTEN* 1938, p. 643 and 632 (*HOSTEN* 1998, pp. 77 and 66); in *MARKHAM* 1876, p. 306.

<sup>60</sup> See *BARGIACCHI* 2007. The author has written a short biography of Ippolito Desideri (see *BARGIACCHI* 2006) as well as various articles in specialist periodicals and is currently working on a more complete biography in Italian and in English.

Many misunderstandings and many Tibet myths would not have arisen if Ippolito Desideri's writings had been published in his lifetime. Instead, the compilers of reference books and other authors had to fall back on considerably less reliable sources, and worse still, they even spread many untruths about Desideri himself.

Why did highly interesting texts, by a scholar who had lived for five years in Tibet and mastered the language himself, disappear into a drawer? It appears that Desideri was far ahead of his time in his sophisticated way of looking at things. Apparently there was no demand for learned explanations with complex ideas, such as 'Emptiness', nor for his astonishingly brilliant attempt at translating the mantra 'om mani padme hum'. It also remains open why Desideri himself was still unrecognized after the discovery of his texts, for example, by the later Theosophists, who constantly referred to Tibetan wisdom but expounded instead many banalities and untruths; or even by Sir Charles Bell and David Macdonald, two Britons who lived a long time in Tibet. We can only conjecture, and after all the assumption cannot be denied, that the Tibet image drawn by Desideri was too subtle and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as two hundred years before, did not fit the current ideas and stereotypes. It appears that the image of Tibet is oriented towards the needs of the public and not to knowledge actually available. This raises the question whether the same still applies today.<sup>61</sup>

For many years I have been involved in Desideri's work, both for the value it holds for academics in various disciplinary areas, and for its potential contribution to an increasingly desirable spirit of peaceful, fruitful dialogue and discussion between different cultures. As Luigi Foscolo Benedetto,<sup>62</sup> author of the prestigious first complete edition of Marco Polo's *Il Milione*, has said, the missionary «overcame easy western and ecclesiastical disdain and felt the attraction of Tibet's philosophical and religious world [...] To a man of his upright, coherent spirit [who «believes in the intrinsic power of truth»], to conquer was to know, and to know was to love».<sup>63</sup> I will end with another quote from Benedetto:

Like everyone who has given their life a purpose and truly lived their dream, Desideri remained loyal to the heroic idea that roused him as a young man. He acted before speaking and speaks now so that others may take up his unfinished work and complete it.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> BRAUEN 2004, p. 9. The excerpt is in the paragraph "White-headed Lama Ippolito", pp. 7-9 [in the original German, *Traumwelt Tibet. Westliche Trugbilder*, Bern, Verlag Paul Haupt, 2000, pp. 18-21: "Der Weissköpfige Lama Ippolito"].

<sup>62</sup> Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (Cumiana, Turin, 24.2.1886 - *Ibidem* 17.4.1966), French scholar, philologist and scholar of comparative literature, combined learning with an interest in formal values. His edition of *Il Milione* is masterly, see: MARCO POLO 1928 and 1931.

<sup>63</sup> BENEDETTO 1928, pp. 12, 14. «Only 25 copies were published of this pamphlet for the happy occasion of Fulvia Casella's marriage to Gualtiero Pastorini. Fiorenzuola d'Arda, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1928»). This is a publication to honour the wedding of the daughter of scholar, historian and Medieval philologist Mario Casella (Fiorenzuola d'Arda, Piacenza, 11.4.1886 - Florence 9.3.1956), colleague of Benedetto at the University of Florence, where he held a professorship formerly held by Pio Rajna (1847-1930). After the introduction (pp. 5-14), the pamphlet presents (pp. 17-29) what Petech calls a "Missionary manual" (*MITN* VII, pp. 186-193), formerly published in an inadequate version by Angelo De Gubernatis (Turin 7.4.1840-Rome 26.2.1913) [see DE GUBERNATIS 1876]; on p. 15 there is a frontispiece with the heading «Ms. 1384, n. 31, Fondo Gesuitico in the Biblioteca Vittorio Emanuele of Rome» (today's Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.



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Ippolito Desideri or Hippolyte Desideri (21 December 1684 – 14 April 1733) was an Italian Jesuit missionary and traveller and the most famous of the early European missionaries to visit Tibet. He was the first European to have successfully studied and understood Tibetan language and culture. Desideri was born in 1684 to a fairly prosperous family in Pistoia, Tuscany. He was educated from childhood in the Jesuit school in Pistoia, and in 1700 was selected to attend the Collegio Romano (Roman College)

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