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The Global Latin Research Project: A Foreword

East Asian Latin has become a stable research perspective in the University of Siena thanks to the founder of the Center for Comparative Studies that I have the honour to manage: the medievalist and Koreanist I Deug-Su, born in Pusan in 1938 and deceased in Florence in 2004. Continuing his legacy, the Italian, German, and Korean team of the Center has already digitized, transcribed and studied about 1,000 of the 5,000 pages of the Latin, French, and Korean versions of the Acts of the Korean Martyrs of the 19th century (*Hagiographica Coreana*, Pacini Editore 2007–2017), which we are editing volume by volume in cooperation with the National University of Seoul.

In tune with this project, since 2019 we have been encoding and collecting, first in the *Eurasian Latin Archive*¹ and then in the *S.E.R.I.C.A.*² database, Latin texts concerning East Asia from the late Middle Ages into early Modernity, which were written by merchants, explorers, missionaries, teachers, scientists, most of all Franciscan and Jesuits: a huge heritage consisting of thousands of documents. With these documents we have experimented for the first time with new methods of automatized multi-linguistic analysis. The research focus aims to be the *Latin language as a tool able to illuminate cultural transfer*. Therefore, this second *Global Latin* conference, which aimed at presenting the 2022 state-of-the-art concerning Latin works written in East Asia (and Africa) and the historical relationships between East Asian culture and classical and medieval European culture, represents for us a continuation and a strengthening of a challenging program of research. Through its connection with the *Roma Sinica* series,³ edited by Andrea Balbo of the Turin University since 2017, this project and this volume will hopefully contribute to building new bridges between civilizations which are often thought to have been distant from one another.

1 <https://ela.unisi.it/>.

2 *Sino-European Religious Intersections in Central Asia. Interactive Texts and Intelligent Networks*, awarded by a FISR financing 2020–2022, responsables A. Balbo and C. O. Tommasi, web site www.serica.unipi.it. Now the baton of *SERICA* has been passed to three different National Research Projects, among them *Classica Serica* led by the University of Turin (A. Balbo) in partnership with Siena (me) and Venezia (T. Lippiello).

3 <https://www.degruyter.com/serial/ros-b/html?lang=en>.

In the presentation of the first workshop⁴ I reminded us that Latin is the language through which documents of the history of Europe, and partially Asia, North Africa, and America, were transmitted for centuries. Over a long period, Latin was used in a vast number of forms: Antoine Meillet (1977) reminded us that

Autant le pouvoir a été divisé, émietté, autant a été complète en Occident l'unité de culture. Jusqu'au seuil de l'époque moderne quiconque a pensé n'a pensé qu'en latin. Les mêmes maîtres ont enseigné d'un bout à l'autre de l'Europe, de l'Espagne et de la France jusqu'à la Pologne, de la Scandinavie à la Sicile; les étudiants ont voyagé d'un pays à l'autre; les mêmes livres ont été lus. L'Occident a été pendant plus de mille ans le domaine de l'unité intellectuelle.⁵

Some years ago, Françoise Waquet masterfully demonstrated in *The Empire of a Sign*⁶ to how great an extent Latin was the most recognizable mark of European identity, citing the Polish saying, «Europe ends where Latin ends» and Diderot's assertion that Latin «is the language of European scholars» or, as Leibniz wrote, «*lingua Europaea universalis et durabilis*».⁷

But this is not true only for Europe. Jürgen Leonhardt began to extend the scope of analysis in his 2010 volume, for which he chose the title *Latein: Geschichte einer Weltsprache* ("Latin, the History of a World Language").⁸ And the more recent *Geschichte der neulateinischen Literatur* by Martin Korenjak,⁹ as well as many projects about modern Latin (some of which will be presented here), confirm the fascination and circulation of this immense and neglected heritage, which can in no way be reduced to the mere afterlife of the classics. One of the innovative aspects of his overview is that it enhances the cultural role of scientific and religious literature, including what is known as late or baroque scholasticism, treatises of natural science and scientific theory, Jesuit theatre, and so on. Such an expansion of scope completely changes the panorama of the history of Latin as a cultural language. In particular, research on Latin used for scientific communication in modern times is now in the spotlight of projects like a Canadian one led by Wesley Stevens and the Swiss one planned by Philipp Roelli, and others carried on at the Universities of Freiburg i.B. and Innsbruck.

⁴ Stella (2020). Some parts of this welcome speech have been taken up by that Foreword.

⁵ Meillet (1977) 282–283.

⁶ Waquet (2001).

⁷ I take this information from Waquet (2001).

⁸ Leonhardt (2009).

⁹ Korenjak (2017).

Thanks to these new research trends, we are now realizing that the scope of Latin textuality is not limited to Europe, but extends its radius to 6th-century North-Africa, 15th–17th-century America and above all to Asia, both near Asia, with its remarkable Latin production of the 12th-century crusaders State, and (mostly) East Asia.

The history of scientific development in China outlined by Benjamin A. Elman, across many volumes published by Harvard University Press a few years ago, frequently recalls the role of Latin in the transmission of scientific culture and the unimaginable extent of this phenomenon:

previous estimates of Jesuit authors worldwide have suggested that between 1600 and 1773 they wrote more than 4,000 works, 600 journal articles (almost all after 1700) and 1,000 manuscripts dealing with the sciences. More recent estimates indicate that some 450 works were translated or compiled by the Jesuits and their converts in China between 1584 and 1790.¹⁰

Independently from Elman, Michele Ferrero, Professor of Latin at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, compiled a long list of works *about China* published in Latin from 1600 to 1800, which has already been improved by Gong Sunlong Zi (公孫龍: 西班牙文翻譯作者).¹¹ The Austrian project *Sinica 2.0* made accessible a large amount of digitized Western material about China; yet the portion devoted to Latin sources is extremely limited and only includes texts that are digitized but not searchable. The same can be said of newly developed databases such as *Chinese Christian Texts*, promoted by Nicolas Standaert in Louvain, and other projects.

Recent Insights by Haskell, Golvers, Prosperi and Watanabe

In her introduction to the pioneering collection of essays of 2010 intitled *Latinity and Alterity in the Early Modern Period*,¹² Yasmin Haskell reminds us that

¹⁰ Elman (2005) 8: «For Example, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) translated Christopher Clavius' (1538–1612) 1607 *Elementarium* in this manner, as did Sabbathin De Ursis (1575–1620) for his *Taixi Shuiifa* (*Western Tehcniques of Hydraulic*). Jean-Nicholas Smogolenski (1610–1656) and his collaborators introduced the European method for calculating eclipses in an astronomical work of circa 1656, which was also the first to introduce spherical trigonometry and logarithms. Later, Ferdinand Verbiest's (1623–1688) 1672 *Kunyu I shuo* (*Maps and Explanations of the Earth*) furnished further information on world geography beyond Ricci's earlier *mappa mundi*».

¹¹ Ferrero (s.d.).

¹² Haskell/Feros Ruys (2010) 1–18, 4.

the student of Jesuit culture cannot fail to be aware of a Latin presence in Asia from early modern times, at least in tableau: the early Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci translated Chinese classics into Latin; Latin was taught in Jesuit schools, seminaries, and universities in Goa, Macau, China, and Japan, some of which were equipped with their own printing presses; a legation of Jesuits from Goa was entertained by the Mughal emperor Akba (reigned 1556–1605), and a Latin account survives of their spirited debates at court with representatives of other faiths; the Tyrolean Joseph Tiefertaler, S.J. (d. Lucknow, 1785) wrote a treatise in Latin on the language of the Parsees, as well as works on Indian geography, natural history, and religion. I am just skimming the surface. Noël Golvers, an authority on the intellectual culture of the Flemish Jesuits in China, reminds me (*per litteras*) that the whole field of early modern Sinology was born in Latin. He cites treasures in print and manuscript, for the most part untranslated, on geography, geometric cartography, Chinese history and chronology (including recent history), flora and fauna, medicine («first description of acupuncture, pulse diagnostics, moxibustions»), linguistics (first grammars of Chinese and Manchu, «both after the model of Alvarez's and Desauterius' Latin grammars»).

Haskell remarks on several touch-points concerning the Latin language in Western and Eastern pedagogy, and one can rightly speak about a «cooption of the “New World” into this unitary vision of the Latin pedagogy».¹³ The history of the dissemination of Latin in Asia is first of all a history of a successful pedagogical model, which in some ways is now spreading again over Asia through the models of American and European Universities. Yet Latin extended its globalising function by absorbing elements of local cultures and individual experiences. To quote again Haskell:

Latin and its meanings were for the most part developed and dictated by powerful European patriarchies. But Latin and its meanings were regularly contested, negotiated, locally appropriated, and sometimes cunningly subverted in the early modern period. There are, in short, plenty of *other* stories to be told about Latin since the Renaissance [. . .] First, there are the stories in the Latin voices of *others*, of marginal European, women (European and non-European), indigenous and colonial peoples, and even slaves. These may be fruitful compared and contrasted with stories in Latin *about others*.¹⁴

That is the horizon which we face in approaching this area of studies, and therefore we chose the Latin language as the common ground of research.

The bridging capacity of Latin also emerges in the works of the Jesuits living in Japan in the 16th century, as recently reported by Mayu Fujikawa in *Studies on the Jesuits Japan Mission*¹⁵ and Ichiro Taida in *The earliest History of European lan-*

¹³ Haskell (2010) 7.

¹⁴ Haskell (2010) 7.

¹⁵ Fujikawa (2017).

guage education in Japan: focusing on Latin education by Jesuits missionaries,¹⁶ as well as the 2018 and 2020 articles by Akihiko Watanabe.¹⁷

Thanks to these waves of travellers, who left behind the initial push of commercial or religious interests, we have the first European eye-witness accounts of the history and customs of the Mongolian, Chinese and Japanese peoples and, from the 16th century, the beginning of what Geoffrey Gunn called «first globalisation.»¹⁸ Through the Jesuits, hundreds of Greek and Latin treatises on geometry and mathematics, botany and hydraulics, mechanics, and astronomy (including Galilei), and vice-versa, reached China and Japan, made accessible in Chinese, Japanese or Latin translations. The first reliable information on Chinese culture, on Confucian morality as well as on the history of the Tartars or on local fauna and flora arrived in Europe in the 16th century often by way of Latin texts, giving rise to European sinology. Adriano Prosperi accordingly defined the 16th century of Jesuit missions as «the great century of the Eastern enterprise», the result of the «immeasurable ambition of a religious body determined to bring the Christian faith throughout the world with the sole force of intelligence and dialogue» by building a worldwide network of contacts linked together through a dense epistolary network, in Latin and in modern languages.¹⁹ In his opinion, this process favoured the «discovery of diversity» and the relativization of European conscience, but was viewed with suspicion by the papal curia, triggering the so-called «ritual controversy» brutally concluded with a bull from Benedict XIV in 1742. The institutional stop returned to its isolation the two spaces of civilization that had learned to dialogue and which would meet again in the period of colonial clashes. But thousands of documents remain from the centuries of peaceful interaction, many of which are in a modern Latin, which is not part of the high school curriculum but is responsible for transmitting precious knowledge through a world language about lands and peoples unknown to Europeans.

Digitization of Eastern Latin Texts

My experience in digitizing and digitally analysing Latin texts developed, after starting with the philological pioneering experience of the 2007–2022 *Corpus Rhythmorum Musicum* (<www.corimu.unisi.it>), from the project ALIM (*Archive*

¹⁶ Taida (2017).

¹⁷ Watanabe (2018).

¹⁸ Gunn (2003).

¹⁹ Prosperi (2019, our translation).

of the Medieval Latinity of Italy: <alim.unisi.it>), which I had the chance to direct from 2012 to 2016 and which is hosted and managed by the University of Siena: this is the largest digital archive of medieval and early modern Latin texts *written in Italy* or by Italian authors, encoded in XML-TEI, which embeds tools such as *Lexicon* – a software able to analyse lexical forms statistically and hosting the first semi-automatic lemmatizer based on Medieval Latin.²⁰ Being ALIM devoted to texts and documents from Italy, we limited the first stage of our research to authors from Italy; yet a vast number of key texts must be taken into account, such as John of Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*, the earliest description of China and its neighbouring countries in the 13th century, and the merchant Marco Polo's *Description of the World* (the Latin version of the Z manuscript), as well as Odoricus from Pordenone's *Relatio*, the first European account of East Asia that included Tibet, which concerns a time relating to two generations after Marco Polo.

The Asian collection of ALIM was moved to the ELA library in 2019, which can rely on more sophisticated and, I would say, cutting-edge tools of linguistic analysis, developed by Emmanuela Carbé and other scholars;²¹ ELA was implemented until 2021 with about 70 texts, also by non-Italian authors, and the encoding plan includes all the 300 works listed in the Census page.²² It comprises the many Franciscan travellers of the 14th century whose letters and reports are printed in the first two volumes of the *Sinica Franciscana*, and is on the way to being extended to texts of Jesuit authors, such as Francis Xavier's Latin letters, Nicolas Trigault's *Regni Chinesis descriptio*, Niccolò Longobardi's *De amplissimo regno Chinae*, Giovanni Pietro Maffei's *Rerum in Oriente gestarum volumen*, Martini's *Sinicae historiae decas*, and Prospero Intorcetta's large production and documentation, as well as documents drawn from the *Monumenta Historiae Iaponica* of the Jesuit congregation and texts from the Korean collection gathered by Juan Ruiz de Medina in a book which had no circulation.²³ Further additions may include many of the documents hidden, so to speak, throughout the 18 volumes of the *Monumenta Indica*, given that what Europeans called *Indiae* in the first centuries of the modern era encompassed some parts of Thailand, Vietnam, Goa, and Korea.

The topics range from the description of countries, peoples, customs, food, fauna, and climate to handbooks of Western scientific work, geometry, mathematics, optics, hydraulics, and medicine, and to the Latin translations of literary monuments to Eastern wisdom such as the Confucian *Four Books*, which have been the subject of investigations published in the proceedings of the conference *Confucius*

²⁰ www.lexicon.unisi.it.

²¹ Carbé/Giannelli (2020).

²² Provisionally address <http://212.110.20.141:86/dasmemo/>.

²³ De Medina (1994).

and Cicero.²⁴ This is the evidence of a great circulation of knowledge in both senses and a widespread globalization of Latin language and Eurasian culture.

Now the ELA library, still under development in itself, is on the way to being further extended in the S.E.R.I.C.A. platform, including also *non-Latin* texts such as those Greek and Sanskrit. This platform's alpha version, with 38 documents, is ready to be deployed under the direction of Chiara Tommasi and Andrea Balbo. Our aim is to make accessible to corpus-linguistic search and semantic search functions – that is, social and scientific keywords, a large part of the textual heritage documenting the Europe-East Asia relationship in the late medieval and early modern centuries – which we hope will be a significant and permanent contribution to the knowledge of this extended movement of civilizational interaction.²⁵ Some of those texts will also be printed, translated and provided with a commentary in Italian in the brand new series that Andrea, Chiara and myself have launched with the publisher Pacini and which started in May 2023 with Giovanni de' Marignolli's amazing *Relatio* in the new edition of Irene Malfatto and the translation and commentary by Paola Mocella.²⁶

Working on this project has opened to us a continuous discovery of exchanges on philosophical, mathematical, religious, astronomical, zoological, botanical topics which were written by men that we usually classify, by simplification, as merchants or missionaries but who have to be labelled as conscious cultural mediators, vectors of a great knowledge enlargement. By reading their texts, it emerges that knowledge, including religious knowledge, was their main and real purpose, beyond the official motivations of their travels. Recent research, including Adriano Prosperi's studies and many of the publications listed in Eucha's reports, has shown that cultural purposes often prevailed over the alleged political or economic goals. This gave rise to a production whose dimension, ambition, scope, breadth, and depth are unimaginable even today. Despite this, many literary works from both sides remain unknown and will continue to be overlooked in both the East and the West, where the relationship is currently hindered by political obstacles and ideological prejudices. We work towards a time which will again open the doors of mutual interest beyond economic benefits and political alliances between East Asia and its socio-linguistic contexts and the Western European world and its languages.

²⁴ Balbo/Ahn (2019).

²⁵ A first attempt has been made and presented by Stella/Paccara (2025).

²⁶ Malfatto/Mocella (2022).

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