Entangled Histories, Catholic Missions and Languages Mapping Amerindian, African and Asian Languages Through Portuguese in Early Modernity

ANGELO CATTANEO
CNR – National Research Council of Italy

The Space of Languages

This essay focuses on a set of metalinguistic and multilingual documents, mostly in print, which for the first time brought together, described, and translated a vast set of languages unknown in Europe prior to Portuguese expansion and the missions, particularly the Jesuit ones, associated with it. Throughout the missions in the Portuguese Empire and under Royal Patronage (*Padroado*), the Portuguese language, Latin, and, to a more limited extent, Spanish and Italian, served as the first European translational languages for Tamil and Malayalam (Dravidic languages); Konkani, Marathi and Bengali (Indo-Aryan languages); Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese; three Brazilian 'general languages' (Tupi and Tupi-Guarani); Kimbundu, Kikongo, and Sena (Bantu languages), among others. To get a sense of the extent of this phenomenon, let us consider that in 1595 the Jesuit press published a grammar of Tupi-Guarani, printed in Coimbra, but prepared and edited in São Paulo, Brazil, by the Spanish Jesuit José de Anchieta SJ (1534–1597) in collaboration with several local students.[1] In contrast, in the same year it published, in Amakusa, in the Kyushu region of Japan, a trilingual Latin–Portuguese–Japanese dictionary, with approximately 27,000 entries for each of the three languages.[2]

The majority of linguistic studies dealing with the corpus of documents that use Portuguese as the translational language describe specific bilingual contacts, generally

---

[1] *Arte de Crammatica* (*sic*) *da lingoa mais usada na costa do Brasil. Feyta pelo padre Ioseph de Anchieta da Cõpanhia de IESV* (Coimbra: António Mariz, 1595); (2nd ed., Julio Platzmann, Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1874; 3rd ed., 1876; 4th ed., Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Nacional, 1933; 5th ed., São Paulo, 1946; 6th ed., Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1980; 7th ed., São Paulo: Loyola, 1990). See ANDREA DAHER, 'The "General Language" and the Social Status of the Indian in Brazil, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,' in *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, ed. FRANCISCO BETHENCOURT (London: British Academy, 2013), 255–67.

[2] *DICTIONARIUM LATINO LUSITANICUM, AC IAPONICUM EX AMBROSII CALEpini volumine depromptum: in quo omissis nominibus proprijs tam locorum, quàm hominum, ac quibusdam alijs minùs usitatis, omnes vocabulorum significationes, elegantioresque dicendi modi opponuntur: in usum, & gratiam Iaponicae iuuentutis, quae Latino idiomati operam nauat, nec non Europeorum, qui Iaponicum sermonem addiscunt. IN AMACUSA IN COLLEGIO IAPONICO SOCIETATIS IESU cum facultate Superiorum. ANNO M.D.XCV* [1595]. See EMI KISHIMOTO, 'The Adaptation of the European Polyglot Dictionary of Calepino in Japan: *Dictionarium Latino Lusitanicum, ac Iaponicum* (1595),' in *Missionary Linguistics II / Lingüística misionera II*, eds. OTTO ZWARTJES and CRISTINA ALTMAN (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005), 205–23.

from a one-direction linguistic perspective (e.g., Portuguese–Tamil, Portuguese–Japanese, Portuguese–Tupi, etc.). Within this intellectual landscape, the important documentary value of these corpora has all but gone unnoticed in terms of the history and periodisation of early modern culture, and not only with regard to the history of linguistics, lexicography, and grammatology. The implications of this shift in analysis perspective are strong in three main areas: the relationship between empires and languages; the current debate on the periodisation of connected histories; and the formation, in early modernity, of a new concept of spatiality, which clearly and explicitly included the spatiality of languages, in connection with and overlapping political, trade and religious spaces.

In the light of the valuable methodology contributed by area studies[3] and my own research in the exploratory project 'The Space of Languages. The Portuguese Language in the Early Modern World (15th–17th centuries),' conducted at the New University of Lisbon between 2014 and 2016,[4] it is possible to design a comprehensive geography of the languages first described and translated through Portuguese in early modernity. Examination of the sources supports the research hypothesis of a global emergence of new multilingual spaces, communities, and identities in the heterogeneous contexts of the missions within the territories of the Portuguese Empire in 1500–1700. Comprising primers for learning basic literacy skills through short Christian catechisms (*cartilhas*), Christian doctrines outlining the precepts of the Christian faith, the message of the Gospel, the revelation, the dogmas and the sacraments, sometimes in dialogue form (*Doctrina Christãa* or *Doutrina Christam*), grammars (*artes da língua*), and dictionaries (*vocabularios*), these sources provide a key framework for an analysis with an original contribution to make to early modern global cultural history, its periodisation and its spatialisation.

The documents considered refer to highly differentiated contexts of missionary and political interaction. In some cases, as in Brazil, on the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent, missions existed within the framework of Portuguese military occupations and conquests. In Japan, China, and the Tonkin region, missionaries found themselves operating in rather asymmetrical contexts, outside or, at most, on the margins of the Portuguese military and mercantile presence. Despite these contextual differences, analysis of this documentation indicates, for all

---

[3] URS APP, *The Cult of Emptiness. The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Rorschach & Kyoto: UniversityMedia, 2012); ANDREA DAHER, *L'Oralité perdue. Essais d'histoire des pratiques* lettrées *(Brésil, XVIᵉ-XIXᵉ siècle)* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016); INES G. ŽUPANOV, *Missionary Tropics. The Catholic Frontier in India (16th-17th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005); ANTJE FLÜCHTER and ROUVEN WIRBSER, eds, *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures. The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); JOAN-PAU RUBIÉS, 'Ethnography and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern Missions,' *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017): 272–310; OTTO ZWARTJES et al., eds, *Missionary Linguistics / Lingüística misionera I–VI* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001–2021).

[4] *O espaço das línguas. A língua portuguesa no mundo do início da Idade Moderna (séculos XV a XVII) / The Space of Languages. The Portuguese Language in the Early Modern World (15th-17th Centuries)*, P.I. ANGELO CATTANEO, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2014–2016, https://run.unl.pt/bitstream/10362/21224/1/file_001479.pdf.

the contexts considered, that the times and spaces of accumulation of cultural and linguistic processes and practices are inherently extensive. They require a broad periodisation, to be traced in documentary form, and a look at extended spaces, for the dynamics to become clear in a comparative and connected form. As an example, analysis of linguistic practices in the Jesuit missions in Japan, China, and Brazil reveals that the emergence of bilingual or trilingual lexicons or grammars took no less than forty to fifty years on average, from the beginning of the missions with the first word lists, during which time more complete documents were gradually drawn up. For these specific structural reasons, the present essay considers a time span from circa 1540 to 1700 and a plurality of locations. This period and the extensive spatiality of missions related to the Portuguese Empire allow us to capture in documentary form the sedimentation of cultural, linguistic, and translation practices that would otherwise remain invisible. Below is a select list of these documents, mainly in print, divided by macro geographical areas, following an internal chronological order, starting with India, followed by Japan, China, Tonkin, Brazil, and sub-Saharan Africa.[5]

INDIA

[Henrique Henriques SJ], *Arte malavar*, 1549.[6]

Cartilha que contè breuemète ho q[ue] todo christão deue aprẽder pera sua saluaçam. A qual el rey dom Joham terceiro deste nome nosso senhor mandou imprimir em lingoa Tamul e Portugues cõ ha declaraçam do. Tamul por cima de vermelho, Lisboa, Germão Galhardo, 1554.[7]

Doctrina Cristaã tresladada em lingua Tamul pello padre Anrique Anriquez da Cõpanhia de IESV, & pello padre Manoel de Saõ Pedro. Com approuaçaõ do Oridinario, & Inquisidor: & cõ licẽça do Superior da mesma Companhia: Impressa em Coulam

---

[5] For a more complete and detailed review and analysis of works that translate through Portuguese numerous Amerindian, Asian, and African languages, and their historical contexts, see ANGELO CATTANEO, *Tradurre il mondo. Le missioni, il portoghese e nuovi spazi di lingue connesse nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 2022), 17–33 (chap. 2, 'Le missioni, il portoghese, nuove traduzioni').

[6] Manuscript Tamil grammar, based on Latin syntax, but conveyed in Portuguese, authored by Henrique Henriques SJ (1520–1600), a Portuguese Jesuit missionary. Accepted into the Society of Jesus by Ignatius de Loyola himself in 1546, he was a companion in Goa of Francis Xavier SJ, who sent him in 1547 to the Pescheria Coast Mission in south-eastern India, of which he became Superior for twenty-five years. He compiled the first grammar and dictionary of the Tamil language, and wrote catechisms, the lives of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, and prayer books in this language, leaving an important epistolary, edited and printed in the *Documenta indica*, 2 vols. (Rome: IHSJ, 1958–1960). On Henriques's grammar, see OTTO ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars in Asia, Africa and Brazil, 1550–1800* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 23–44.

[7] This is the English translation of the title: 'Primer that contains briefly what all Christians should learn for their salvation. Which was sent to be printed by order of our King John III in both Portuguese and Tamil, with the [literal Portuguese] translation of Tamil printed in red above [the Tamil].' See INES G. ŽUPANOV, *Missionary Tropics*, 238–43.

[Kollam, close to Madurai, in Kerala] no Collegio do Saluador: aos Vĩte de Octubro de M.D.LXXV [20 October 1575].[8]

Doctrina Christaã, a maneyra de Dialogo: feyta em Portugal pello padre Marcos Iorge da *Companhia de* IESV:[9] *Tresladada em língua Malauar Tamul, pello padre Anrique Anriquez da mesma Cõpanhia.* Impressa cõ approuação do Ordinario, & Inquisidor, & cõ licença do Superior. Em Cochim, no Collegio da Madre de Deos. aos quatorze de Nouẽbro, do Anno de M.D.LXXIX. [1579].

Doutrina Christam em Lingoa Bramana Canarim. Ordenada amaneira de Dialogo, pera ensinar os mininos, Colégio de Rachol da Cõpanhia de IESVS, 1622.[10]

Declaracam da Doutrina Christam, collegida do Cardeal Roberto Belarmino da Cõpanhia de IESV & outros autores Composta em lingoa Bramana vulgar pello Padre Diogo Ribeiro[11] da mesma Companhia portugues natural de Lisboa, Rachol, Colégio de Santo Inácio, da Companhia de IESV, 1632.

Arte da Lingoa Canarim, composta pelo Padre Thomaz Esteuaõ da Companhia de IESVS & acrecentada pello Padre Diogo Ribeiro da mesma Cõpanhia. E nouamente reuista, &

---

[8] The *Doctrina Christam en Língua Malauar Tamul* is a Catholic catechism translated by Henrique Henriques SJ and published on 20 October 1575 at Kollam (formerly known as Quilon) on the Malabar coast. It is the first printed work in an Indian language and script. See the digital reproduction made available by Harvard University, Houghton Library, Typ 100 578: https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53909112$7i.

[9] Marcos Jorge SJ (1524–1571), born in Nogueira, in the Bishopric of Coimbra, studied Canon Law at the University of Coimbra; he then received a doctorate in Theology from the University of Evora. He was the first lecturer in Moral Theology at the Jesuit College in Lisbon. In January 1571 he was elected procurator in Rome at the time of the General Francisco de Borja, from where he returned to the University of Evora in December of the same year and died there soon after his arrival. He had a particular genius for instructing children and peasants in the Catechism and in 1561 authored and published a *Doutrina Christã* (Christian Doctrine), which was the first book to be printed in Portugal by the Society of Jesus. Jorge's *Doutrina* was republished several times and translated into Tamil by Henrique Henriques SJ (published in Cochim in 1579) and in the 'language of Congo' (Kongo or Kikongo) by Matheus Cardoso SJ (published in Lisbon by Giraldo da Vinha in 1624). Besides Tamil and Kongo, Marcos Jorge's *Doutrina Christã* was translated into Amharic (Ethiopia), Tupi (Brazil), Konkani, Malabar, and Tamil (India), Japanese, and Chinese. See JOSÉ MIGUEL PINTO DOS SANTOS, 'Illustrations of *Doutrina*: Artwork in the Early Editions of Marcos Jorge's *Doutrina Cristã*,' *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 149–67.

[10] This is the translation of the title: 'Christian Doctrine in the Konkani Language. Ordered in the way of a dialogue, to teach children.' Rachol is a village on the island of Salcete, some thirty kilometres south of Goa. In 1606 the Jesuits founded an important seminary there, which also housed the Jesuit press.

[11] Diogo Ribeiro (1560–1633) was a Portuguese Jesuit missionary in India, active in St. Paul's College in Goa and the Seminary in Rachol. He distinguished himself for his expertise in the Konkani language. See INNOCENCIO FRANCISCO DA SILVA, ed., *Dicionário bibliografico português*, 22 vols., vol. 2 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1859), 172.

emendada por outros quatro Padres da mesma Companhia, Rachol, Colégio de Santo Inácio, da Companhia de IESV, 1640.[12]

Vocabulario Tamulico com a significaçam portugueza. Composto pello P. Antam de Proença[13] da mesma Companhia de IESV missionario da missam de Madurey. Na imprenssa Tamulica da Prouincia do Malabar, 1679.

CHINA, JAPAN AND TONKIN

[*Dicionário Português-Chinês*], Macao, ca. 1578–1580.[14]

DICTIONARIUM LATINO LUSITANICUM, AC IAPONICUM EX AMBROSII CALEpini volumine depromptum: in quo omissis nominibus proprijs tam locorum, quàm hominum, ac quibusdam alijs minùs usitatis, omnes vocabulorum significationes, elegantioresque dicendi modi opponuntur: in usum, & gratiam Iaponicae iuventutis, quae Latino idiomati operam nauat, nec non Europeorum, qui Iaponicum sermonem addiscunt. IN AMACUSA IN COLLEGIO IAPONICO SOCIETATIS IESU cum facultate Superiorum. ANNO M.D.XCV. [1595]**[15]**

---

[12] A copy of the *Arte da Lingoa Canarim* (Grammar of the Konkani language) is held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, shelfmark RES-408-P, and is available in digital open access at the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Portugal: https://purl.pt/31524. The *Arte* was based on earlier manuscript grammars developed at St. Paul's Jesuit college in Goa and the Jesuit Seminary of Rachol. The *Arte* was published in 1640 by the Jesuit press at Rachol after its final editors, Diogo Ribeiro SJ and Tomás Estevao SJ, had already died. The grammar is the result of more than fifty years of work on the Konkani language carried out within the framework of the Jesuit mission in the Goa region. See DIOGO RIBEIRO SJ and THOMAS STEPHENS SJ, *Arte da Lingua Canarim.* With an introduction by FR. IVO COELHO (Goa: CinnamonTeal Publishing, 2012). Tomás Estevão SJ (fl. 1549–1619), *alias* Thomas Stephens, was born in England. After his education at Oxford and at the *Collegio Romano*, he became a Jesuit and was sent to a mission in India. Along with Roberto de Nobili SJ, he adopted local practices and wrote religious books in Marathi and Konkani, including the *Krista Purana* (The Life of Christ). See ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 45–58.

[13] Antem (Antão, Antero) de Proença (1624/25–1666) was a Portuguese Jesuit missionary active in the mission of Madurai, South India. Proença was a pioneer of Tamil lexicography who also knew Sanskrit. See GREGORY JAMES, 'What Antão de Proença wanted to say: An initial look at the manuscript and printed version of de Proença's *Vocabulary tamulico* (1679),' *No:kku* 1, no. 1 (2007): 39–42; GREGORY JAMES, 'Aspects of the structure of entries in the earliest missionary dictionary of Tamil,' in *Missionary Linguistics IV / Lingüística misionera IV. Lexicography,* eds. OTTO ZWARTJES, RAMÓN ARZÁPALO MARÍN and THOMAS C. SMITH-STARK (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009), 273–302; CRISTINA MURU, *Missionari portoghesi in India nei secoli XVI e XVII. L'Arte della lingua Tamil. Studio comparato di alcuni manoscritti* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2010).

[14] Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Jap.Sin. I,198, ff. 32r.–156v. This manuscript Portuguese-Chinese dictionary includes ca. 6,500 entries, attributed, although not unanimously, to Michele Ruggieri SJ and Matteo Ricci SJ, the first missionaries to develop a consolidated knowledge of the Chinese language. Facsimile edition with an introductory essay, ed. JOHN WITEK SJ (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 2001). See also ISABEL MURTA PINA, 'Jesuítas de Macau: Intérpretes e tradutores (séculos XVI-XVII),' in *Para a História da Tradução em Macau*, eds LI CHANGSEN and LUÍS FILIPE BARRETO (Lisbon: IPM-CCCM, 2013), 29–47.

[15] This is the literal translation of the title: 'Latin–Portuguese–Japanese Dictionary, based on Ambrogio Calepino's [dictionary of Latin]: in which, omitting the proper names of both places and persons, as

Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam com a declaração em Portugues, feito por alguns Padres, e Irmaos da Companhia de Iesv […] Em Nangasaqui no Collegio de Iapam […] Anno. M.D.CIII (1603): (& Suplemento deste Vocabulário no ano de 1604).[16]

Arte da Lingoa de Iapam composta pello Padre Ioão Rodriguez Portugues da Cõpanhia de Iesv diuidida em tres Livros […] Em Nangasaqui no Collegio de Iapão da Companhia de Iesv Anno. 1604.[17]

well as other lesser used names, all the meanings of the entries and the most elegant idioms are appended, for the use and benefit of Japanese youth, who are diligently devoting themselves to the Latin language, but also of Europeans learning the Japanese language.' The *Dictionarivm Latino Lvsitanicvm, ac Iaponicvm* was published in Amakusa at the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshy's persecutions, which led to the crucifixion of the so-called 'twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki' in 1596. Based on the *Dictionarium ex optimis quibusque authoribus…* by Ambrogio Calepino (ca. 1440–1510), first published in 1502 and reedited many times during the sixteenth century, the trilingual dictionary aggregates some forty years of mutual linguistic contacts between the Jesuit missionaries and their Japanese students and assistants, with the aim of teaching Latin and Portuguese to Japanese students and Japanese to European missionaries. Digital edition: *Latin Glossaries with vernacular sources* 対訳ラテン語語彙集, ed. TOYOSHIMA MASAYUKI, http://joao-roiz.jp/LGR/. See EMI, 'The Adaptation of the European Polyglot Dictionary of Calepino in Japan: *Dictionarium Latino Lusitanicum, ac Iaponicum* (1595),' 205–23.

[16] In 1603, the Jesuits started publishing a collective dictionary of Japanese with translation into Portuguese, the *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam com a declaração em Portugues, feito por alguns padres e irmãos da Companhia de Iesu* (Vocabulary of the language of Japan, with definitions in Portuguese, written by some fathers and brothers of the Society of Jesus), with ca. 32,000 entries, printed in Nagasaki by the Jesuit press in 1603. Although the title page gives 1604 as the date of the 'Addition,' the colophon indicates instead that the 'Addition' was printed in 1608. The work is also known as *Nippo Jisho* (日葡辞書, literally the 'Japanese–Portuguese Dictionary'). The *Prologue* to the *Vocabulario* explains that almost immediately after the publication of the *Dictionarivm Latino Lvsitanicvm, ac Iaponicvm*, the Jesuits realised that it was a far too complex and difficult tool to use. Therefore, they invested in the preparation and publication of a new Japanese vocabulary translated into Portuguese, which would also explain the multiple contexts of use of the spoken language. Modern reedition: *Nippo jisho: kirishitanban: karā eiinban. Vocabvlario da lingoa de Iapam: Nagasaqui 1603-4*, ed. TSUKIMOTO MASAYUKI (Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2013).

[17] The *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* is the first printed Japanese grammar, based on the Latin syntax, but conveyed in Portuguese, authored by João Rodrigues SJ (also known by the Japanese nickname of *Tçuzu*, 'the interpreter') and printed in Nagasaki by the Jesuit press in 1604. See ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 93–142. João Rodrigues SJ (1562–1633) reached Japan when he was only fifteen years old and became a fluent speaker of Japanese and the official interpreter between the Jesuit missionaries, the Portuguese merchants, and the Japanese daimyos (feudal lords), including Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1593–1598) and the future shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616). After more than thirty years spent in Japan, Rodrigues was forced to leave the kingdom right before the decree of expulsion of 1614. He then lived in China, in the Jesuit missions of Macao, Canton, Nanking, and Peking. Apart from Portuguese and Japanese, he also knew Spanish and Latin. Rodrigues authored two pioneer grammars of the Japanese language and collaborated on both the *Dictionarivm Latino Lvsitanicvm, ac Iaponicvm* and the *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam*. On Rodrigues's description of the Japanese script and language, see JOÃO RODRIGUES, *João Rodrigues's Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, ed. MICHAEL COOPER (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2011), 310–30. On Rodrigues's life and works, see ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 94–111.

Arte Breve da Lingoa Iapoa tirada da Arte Grande da mesma lingoa, pera os que começam a aprender os primeiros principies delia. Pello Padre Ioam Rodrigvez … Em Amacao no Collegio da Madre de Deos…. Anno M.DC.XX. [1620].[18]

Dictionarivm sive Thesavri Lingvae Iaponicae Compendivm. Compositum, & Sacrae de Propaganda Fide Congregationi dicatum à Fratre Didaco Collado Ord. Praedicatorum, Romae anno 1632.[19]

ARS GRAMMATICAE IAPONICAE LINGVAE. IN GRATIAM ET ADIVTORIVM eorum, qui prædicandi Euangelij causa ad Iaponiæ Regnum se voluerint conferre. Composita, & Sacræ de Propaganda Fide Congregationi dicata à Fr. Didaco Collado Ordinis Prædicatorum per aliquot annos in prædicto Regno Fidei Catholicæ propagationis Ministro. EVNTES IN VNIVERSVM MVNDVM PRÆDICATE EVANGELIVM OMNI CREATVRÆ. Romæ, Typis & impensis Sac. Congr. de Propag. Fide. MDCXXXII. SVPERIORVM PERMISSV [1632].

Dictionarium Annnamiticum Lusitanum, et Latinum ope Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide in lucem editum ab Alexandro de Rhodes e' Societate Iesu, eiusdem Sacrae Congregationis Missionario Apostolico […] Typis, & sumptibus eiusdem Sacr. Congreg., 1651.[20]

---

[18] Abridged and simplified edition of the *Arte* printed in Nagasaki in 1604, edited by João Rodrigues SJ after he left Nagasaki and moved to Macao, where the *Arte breve* was printed in 1620, six years after the Jesuits' expulsion from Japan. See ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 93–142.

[19] Both the *Dictionarium* and the *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* were reedited in Latin and published in Rome by the press of the *Propaganda Fide* and compiled by the Spanish Dominican Diego Collado (*Didacus* in Latin, ca. 1587–1638 or 1641). Collado reached Japan in 1619 and managed to travel and learn the Japanese language, despite the edicts ordering the expulsion of religious orders promulgated by the Tokugawa shogunate already in 1614. In 1622 he was recalled to Rome where he spent his time preparing the *Ars grammaticae Iaponicae lingvae* (Japanese and Latin), the *Dictionarivm sive thesavri lingvæ Iaponicæ compendivm* (Latin and Spanish); and the *Niffon no Cotôbani Yô Confesion / Modus Confitendi et Examinandi* (Japanese and Latin), all published in 1632. These publications, supported by the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, were meant to prepare a new mission in Japan, to be led by the Mendicant Orders. See JAN ODSTRČILÍK, 'Between Languages, Genres and Cultures: Diego Collado's Linguistic Works,' *Medieval Worlds* 11 (2020): 117–51. On the linguistic policies of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, see GIOVANNI PIZZORUSSO, 'Agli antipodi di Babele: *Propaganda Fide* tra immagine cosmopolita e orizzonti romani (XVII-XIX secolo),' in *Roma, la città del papa. Vita civile e religiosa dal giubileo di Bonifacio VIII al giubileo di papa Wojtyla*, eds LUIGI FIORANI and ADRIANO PROSPERI (Turin, Einaudi, 2000), 477–518; GIOVANNI PIZZORUSSO, 'Tra cultura e missione. La congregazione *de Propaganda Fide* e le scuole di lingua araba nel XVII secolo,' in *Rome et la science moderne. Entre Renaissance et Lumières*, ed. ANTONELLA ROMANO (Rome: École française de Rome, 2013), 121–52.

[20] Roland Jacques OMI studied the Jesuit mission in Vietnam and demonstrated that the main sources of the *Dictionarium Annnamiticum Lusitanum, et Latinum*, edited by the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes (1593–1660) were the manuscript works of three Portuguese missionaries, Gaspar do Amaral SJ (1594–1646), António Barbosa SJ (1594–1647), based on the romanisation of Vietnamese or *quốc ngữ* by Francisco de Pina SJ (1585/1586–1625). Alexandre de Rhodes translated the entries into Latin and managed to bring the manuscript copy of the *Dictionarium Annnamiticum Lusitanum, et Latinum* to Rome, where it was published by the press of the *De Propaganda Fide* in 1651. See ROLAND JACQUES, *Portuguese Pioneers of Vietnamese Linguistics / Pionniers portugais de la linguistique vietnamienne* (Bangkok: Orchid Press,

BRAZIL

Arte de Crammatica da lingoa mais usada na costa do Brasil. Feyta pelo padre Ioseph de Anchieta da Cõpanhia de IESV, Coimbra, António Mariz, 1595.[21]

Catecismo. na lingoa brasilica, no qual se contem a summa da doctrina christã […] *composto a modo de dialogos por padres doctos, & bons lingoas da companhia de jesu ; agora novamente concertado, ordenado & acrescentado pello padre Antonio D'Araujo* […]*,* Lisboa, Pedro Crasbeeck, 1618.[22]

Arte da Língua Brasilica, Composta pelo Padre Luis Figueira da Companhia de IESV, Theologo, Lisboa, Manuel da Silva (c.1620).[23]

Vocabulário da Língua Brasílica, ms, Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Ms. 3144, 1621.

Vocabulário das Línguas Brasílica e Portuguesa, ms., London, British Museum, Codex 223, seventeenth century, ca. 5,000 entries.

Catecismo Brasílico da Doutrina Christãa, com o Geremonial dos Sacramentos, & mais actos Parochiaes […] *pelo P. Bertholameu de Leam* […], Lisboa, Miguel Deslandes, 1686.

2002); CARLOS ASSUNÇÃO and GONÇALO FERNANDES, 'The First Vietnamese Dictionary (Rome 1651): Contributions of the Portuguese Patronage to the Eastern Linguistics,' *Journal of Foreign Language Studies* 41 (2017): 3–25.

[21] The Spaniard José de Anchieta (1534–1597) from Tenerife entered the Society of Jesus in Coimbra in 1551 and in 1553 was assigned to the mission of Brazil. Together with Manuel da Nóbrega SJ (1517-1570), Anchieta founded the Jesuit college in São Paulo de Piratininga in January 1554. Taking advantage of the Jesuit António Rodrigues's previous manuscript dictionaries and grammars (ca. 1553) and the linguistic skills acquired by Portuguese orphans who grew up among indigenous children learning native idioms and later taught them to the Portuguese missionaries and priests, Anchieta authored a grammar of Tupi that was later printed in Lisbon in 1595. He also composed numerous literary works in Castilian, Portuguese, Latin, and Tupi and is also credited with editing the manuscript of the *Vocabulario na Lingua Brasilica*, currently held in the Coleção do Departamento de Cultura of the Prefeitura de Sao Paulo. See SERAFIM LEITE, *Breve historia da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil (1549–1760)*, repr. (1965; Braga: Sociedade Grafica, 1993), 215–16; ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 148–62.

[22] Three copies of the *Catecismo. na lingoa brasilica* (Catechism in the Tupi language) authored by António de Araújo SJ (1566-1632) and printed by Pedro Craesbeeck (active 1597–1632) are held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (shelfmarks RES-244-P; RES-245-P; RES-305-V) and are available in digital open access at the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Portugal: https://purl.pt/22940.

[23] Luiz Figueira (ca. 1575–1643) entered the Jesuit College of the Espirito Santo in Evora in 1592 and was assigned to the mission in 1602. After spending almost two decades in the Salvador de Bahia region, in 1622 he founded the Jesuit mission of Maranhão. Although Figueira does not mention Anchieta's *Arte* explicitly, his grammar, conveyed in Portuguese, is arranged according to the model of both the Jesuit Father Manuel Álvares's Latin grammar (*De institvtione grammatica libri tres*, Lisbon, 1573) and Anchieta's Tupi grammar. See ARYON DALL'IGNA RODRIGUES, 'Descripcion del tupinamba en el periodo colonial: el *Arte* de José de Anchieta,' in *La descripcion de las lenguas amerindias en la epoca colonial*, ed. KLAUS ZIMMERMANN (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1997), 371–400; ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 164–68.

CONGO AND ANGOLA

Doutrina Christaã Composta pelo P. Marcos Iorge da Companhia de IESV Doutor em Theologia. Acrescentada pelo Padre Ignacio Martinz damesma Companhia Doutor Theologo. De novo traduzida na lingoa do Reyno de Congo, por ordem do P. Mattheus Cardoso Theologo, da Companhia de IESV, natural da cidade de Lisboa. Ao muito poderoso, et catholico Rey de Congo dom Pedro Affonso segundo deste nome.[24] *Com todas as licenças necessarias.* Lisboa, Por Geraldo da Vinha, 1624.[25]

Arte da lingua de Angola, oeferecida a Virgem Senhora N[ossa] do Rosario, Mãy, e Senhora dos mesmos Pretos, pelo P. Pedro Dias Da Companhia de Jesu. Lisboa, Na Officina de Miguel Delandes, Impressor de Sua Magesade. com todas as licenças necessarias. Anno 1697.[26]

---

[24] The king (*mwene*) of the Kingdom of Congo (*Makikongo*) Pedro II, alias of Nkanga a Mvika (1575–1624), *mwene* from 1622 to 1624.

[25] The work transmits a new edition of the *Doutrina Christã* (Christian Doctrine, first edition 1566) by Marcos Jorge SJ (1524–1571) and Inácio Martins SJ (1531–1598) with an interlinear translation into Kongo by Mateus Cardoso SJ (ca. 1584–ca.1625). A copy of the the *Doutrina Christã* is held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, shelfmark RES-268-V and is available in digital open access: https://purl.pt/29608. The Kongo Christian church mostly developed under the supervision and direction of the Kongo authorities rather than missionaries. As a result, John Thornton writes, 'Christianity and Kongo religion merged to produce a syncretic result.' The translation into Kongo of Jorge's *Doutrina Christã* was probably meant to recall and clarify the basic principles of Christianity in one of the local languages of Congo, to face expanding syncretism. See JOHN K. THORNTON, 'Afro-Christian Syncretism in the Kingdom of Kongo,' *Journal of African History* 54 (2013): 53–77. The *lingoa do Reyno de Congo* (language of the Kingdom of Congo) is Kongo, also known as Kikongo, one of the Bantu languages of sub-Saharan Africa, currently also spoken in creolised forms in the Caribbean and South America by the descendants of slaves transported there from Africa from the sixteenth century onwards. See FRANÇOIS BONTINCK and NSASI NDEMBE, eds, *Le catechisme kikongo de 1624. Réédition critique* (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen/Academie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1978).

[26] The *Arte da lingoa de Angola* (Grammar of the Language of Angola, that is Kimbundu, a Bantu language) was authored in Brazil, at Salvador de Bahia, for the African people deported to Brazil during the transatlantic slave trade and for their descendants. It was penned by the Portuguese Jesuit Pedro Dias (1622–1700) and edited by Miguel Cardoso (1659–1721), a native speaker of Kimbundu, born in Angola, who corrected Dias's work. A native of Portugal, Pedro Dias (1622–1700) moved to Brazil during his childhood. In 1641, he joined the Society of Jesus, attending the Jesuit College in Rio de Janeiro. Dias started to learn 'the language of Angola' in 1663 at the Jesuit College in Rio de Janeiro and resolved to author a grammar of Kimbundu to communicate with Angolan people to meet 'the spiritual need of their souls' (*pela necessidade espiritual em que jazem os angolanos*). Dias added that 'until his time, no grammar of this language had yet been written in Angola, nor in Brazil' (*não se acha nenhuma Gramática desta língua, nem no Brasil nem no Reino de Angola*). As the printing press was still not available in Brazil in the seventeenth century, a manuscript copy of the *Arte da lingua de Angola* was dispatched to Lisbon where it was printed in 1697. See GONÇALO FERNANDES, 'Primeiras descrições das línguas africanas em língua portuguesa,' *Revista do Instituto de Língua Portuguesa* 49 (2015): 43–67 (45–46); EMILIO BONVINI, 'Revisiter trois siècles après, "Arte da lingua de Angola" de Pedro Dias S.I. - grammaire kimbundu, rédigée au Brésil, mais publiée à Lisbonne en 1697,' in *Proceedings of the Special World Congress of African Linguistics: Exploring the African Language Connection in Americas*, eds MARGARIDA PETTER and BELINE MENDES RONALD (São Paulo: Humanitas, 2009), 15–45; ZWARTJES, *Portuguese Missionary Grammars*, 214–20. The John Carter Brown Library in Providence, RI, has made available the digital open-access reproduction of the work: https://archive.org/details/artedalinguadean00dias.

'All major cultural exchanges in history involved translation: be it the rendering of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit and Pali into Chinese during the early medieval period; or the transmission of Greek philosophy into Arabic in the early medieval [period],' thus Peter Burke and Ronnie Hsia describe the seminal relevance of cultural translations.[27] Among these epochal cultural translations, and despite the size of the documentary corpus, the early modern missionary translations based on Portuguese as a translational language have largely been undervalued, outside of the history of linguistics, lexicography and grammatology.

Beyond 'the Companion Languages of Empires'

Looking at the broad expanse stretching from Brazil to Africa, then to Asia, Japan and the Spice Islands—the hemisphere assigned to Portugal by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and Zaragoza (1529)—the traditional research paradigm has mostly focused on Portuguese as a 'companion language of the Empire,' the emblem of a complex identity and a tenacious sentiment to propagate Catholicism worldwide through imperial expansion.[28] This approach is rooted in the *topos* 'la lengua, compañera del Imperio' (language, the companion of the Empire), introduced by the *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (Grammar of the Castilian language) of Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), published in Salamanca in 1492. Nebrija celebrated the expressive virtues of Castilian compared to Latin, while legitimatising its imposition on conquered peoples. Less than half a century later, the discursive register of Nebrija was appropriated in Portugal by João de Barros (1496–1570). In the *Gramática da Língua portuguesa* (Grammar of the Portuguese language) and the *Diálogo em louvor da nossa línguagem* (Dialogue in praise of our language) published in Lisbon by Barros in 1540, Portuguese was celebrated as an instrument of political cohesion for the empire with the task of spreading Christianity throughout the world. The maxim 'the companion language of Empire' has since been accepted as the key to understanding early modern social and cultural practices at the interface of the Portuguese language in the framework of the Portuguese seaborne empire. From Lopes's classical pioneer work *Expansão da língua portuguesa no Oriente nos séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII* (Expansion of the Portuguese language in the Orient in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries)[29] to the works produced in the context of the *Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses* – CNCDP (The National Committee for the Celebrations of Portuguese Discoveries, active between 1986 and 2002),[30] most of the publications addressed the early modern

---

[27] PETER BURKE and RONNIE PO-CHIA HSIA, eds, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

[28] For a comprehensive critical review, see DIOGO RAMADA CURTO, *Imperial Culture and Colonial Projects. The Portuguese-Speaking World from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*. Translated from the Portuguese by ALISON AIKEN (New York: Berghahn Book, 2020) and the extensive bibliography cited. For the Portuguese edition: DIOGO RAMADA CURTO, *Cultura imperial e projetos coloniais (séculos XV a XVIII)* (Campinas: Unicamp, 2009).

[29] DAVID LOPES, *Expansão da língua portuguesa no Oriente nos séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII*, 2nd ed., ed. LUÍS DE MATOS (Porto: Portucalense Editora, 1969).

[30] ANTÓNIO DE OLIVEIRA, 'The Activities of the CNCDP: A Preliminary Assessment,' *E-journal of Portuguese History* 1 (2003): 1–12.

spatial and diachronic evolution of Portuguese in contact with other languages, maintaining the traditional one-directional perspective of 'the companion language of Empire.' The same happened with the various works linked to the CNCDP, such as the *Atlas da língua portuguesa na história e no mundo* (Atlas of the Portuguese language in history and in the world)[31] and the exhibition held at the National Library of Portugal *Caminhos do português. Exposição comemorativa do ano europeu das línguas: catálogo* (Paths of the Portuguese language. Commemorative exposition of the European year of languages: catalogue).[32] An important exception to this approach was provided by the exhibition catalogue *A galáxia das línguas na época da expansão* (The galaxy of languages in the period of expansion)[33] published by the National Library of Portugal in 1992 and, in more recent years, by the works of the lexicographer Telmo Verdelho, who has highlighted the need for a revision of this approach through a digital repository that he has been coordinating at the University of Aveiro.[34] The pervasive influence of these historiographical approaches is evidenced by the fact that the corpus of dozens of wordlists, dictionaries, grammars, primers, and Christian doctrines, mostly compiled by missionaries, which use Portuguese as the translational language, remain scattered and understudied, despite their relevance and the pioneering works carried out by missionary linguists. This situation of severe dispersion and the lack of systematic studies are in stark contrast with the corpus of documents that used Spanish as the vehicular language to translate Amerindian languages. This corpus has been amassed and even made available in open-access digital archives, mostly in the USA.[35]

The language interactions documented by the corpora under consideration emerged in contact with violent imperial projects and in the context of religious proselytism which, when possible, did not disdain violence. Yet, despite the troubled past of conquests, global trade, colonialism and religious proselytism, it is remarkable that a language like Portuguese, spoken by just over a million people in Europe, became a fundamental translation idiom for a very large set of languages that had been ignored by Europeans until the mid-sixteenth century, but were spoken and/or written by peoples who made up a very significant portion of the world's population in the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

---

[31] ANTÓNIO LUÍS FERRONHA, ed., *Atlas da língua portuguesa na história e no mundo* (Lisbon: INCM, 1992).
[32] *Caminhos do português: exposição comemorativa do ano europeu das línguas*, ed. MARIA HELENA MIRA MATEUS, exhibition catalogue (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 2011).
[33] MARIA LEONOR BUESCU, ed., *A galáxia das línguas na época da expansão* (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1992).
[34] TELMO VERDELHO and JOÃO PAULO SILVESTRE, eds, *Dicionarística Portuguesa. Inventariação e Estudos do Património Lexicográfico* (Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, 2007); TELMO VERDELHO, 'Lexicografia portuguesa bilingue - breve conspecto diacrónico,' in *Lexicografia Bilingue. A tradição dicionarística Português - Línguas Modernas*, eds TELMO VERDELHO and JOÃO PAULO SILVESTRE (Lisbon, Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa; Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, 2011), 13–67.
[35] One of the most complete collections is the (Amerindian) 'Indigenous Languages Collection,' John Carter Brown Library, RI, USA https://archive.org/details/jcbindigenous. The Newberry Library of Chicago, the Lilly Library of Bloomington, IN, and Princeton University also hold important collections of Amerindian indigenous language primary sources.

From 'Self-contained Languages' to the Pre-modern System of Connected Languages

Four hundred years of cultural contacts, spanning from the first European travels beyond the space of the Ancients in the mid-thirteenth century, and the formation of the fully encompassed globe from the beginning of the sixteenth century, paved the way and laid the foundations of the premodern system of connected languages that this article analyses.

Notable missionary accounts include the *Historia mongolorum* (History of the Mongols) by the Franciscan Giovanni di Pian di Carpine (1247); the extensive report about the Mongols by the Flemish Franciscan William of Rubruck (*Itinerarium ad partes orientales* or Journey to the eastern lands, 1255);[36] the letters sent by Giovanni da Montecorvino in the first three decades of the fourteenth century from Dadu 大都, known in the West as Khan Baliq; the *Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium Tatarorum* (Report on the wonders of the Eastern Tatars) by the Dominican Odorico da Pordenone (ca. 1330);[37] the travel narratives of the Mongolian patriarch of the Nestorian Church of Baghdad, Rabban Bar Sauma (ca. 1220–1294),[38] of Marco Polo (1254–1324),[39]

---

[36] WILLIAM OF RUBRUCK, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255,* eds PETER JACKSON and DAVID MORGAN (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990). For Rubruck's biography and an historical contextualization, 1–55.

[37] The most recent comprehensive study on the Franciscans in Mongol Asia is PETER JACKSON, *The Mongols and the West: 1221-1410* (London: Routledge, 2005). See also the classic works: *Sinica franciscana*, 11 vols., vol. 1, *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. ANASTASIUS VAN DEN WINGAERT OFM (Florence: Apud Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929); IGOR DE RACHEWILTZ, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1971).

[38] The Nestorian monk Rabban Bar Sauma journeyed from Khan Baliq to Persia in 1260, together with the future patriarch of the Church in Persia, Rabban Marcos (1245–1317). In 1288, accompanied by two Genoese interpreters, Rabban Bar Sauma visited Constantinople, Sicily, Naples, Rome, Tuscany, the Republic of Genoa, and numerous localities in France, where he was received by the kings of France and England. Returning to Rome, he was received by Pope Nicholas IV (1227–1292) and returned to Baghdad in 1289. Rabban Bar Sauma recounted his voyages in a work composed in the Syriac language, describing specifically the journey from Khan Baliq to Persia, the vicissitudes of the patriarch Raban Marcos, and his peregrinations through Europe. The volume is one of the first Mongol sources to describe the Mediterranean world and Christian Europe, documenting political and geographic interests comparable to those of the travel accounts of the Franciscans and Dominican friars and Marco Polo. See [RABBAN SAWMA], *The Monks of Kûblâi Khân, Emperor of China. Or the History of the Life and Travels of Rabban Ṣâwmâ and Mâr Yahbhallâhâ III*, ed. and trans. E. A. WALLIS BUDGE (London: Religious Tract Society, 1928).

[39] There is an overwhelming historiography on Polo dating back to the nineteenth century, mostly in French, Italian, German, and English: see PAUL PELLIOT, *Notes on Marco Polo*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale & Librairie A. Maisonneuve, 1959, 1963, 1973); GIOVANNI BATTISTA RAMUSIO. *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*. Edizione critica digitale progettata e coordinata da EUGENIO BURGIO, MARINA BUZZONI, e ANTONELLA GHERSETTI (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2014), http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/index.html. For a critical and comprehensive reassessment of the available editions of Polo's text, transmitted in several languages by several textual traditions, see SAMUELA SIMION, MARINA BUZZONI, and EUGENIO BURGIO, 'Edizioni del *Milione*,' in GIOVANNI BATTISTA RAMUSIO, *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*, http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books /Ramusio/main/testimoni.html. On the connections between the numerous redactions of the *Milione*, see CHRISTINE GADRAT-OUERFELLI, *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Âge. Traduction, diffusion et réception du* Devisement du monde (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

Francesco Balducci Pegolotti (ca.1301–1350),[40] and the famous Muslim traveller, Ibn Battuta (1304–1377).[41] These works are all testimonies of the intensity and growing importance of these interactions. Their legacy lasted for at least two hundred years and even held up through fifteenth-century expansion projects.[42] Although very rich in terms of first-hand details that would be defined as 'ethnographic' in contemporary historiography,[43] these medieval accounts provide scant information about the diversity of the languages encountered. Languages that did not fit into the 'multilingual space of the Bible,' beyond the numerous cultures and peoples of the Mediterranean Basin, Central Asia, Persia and the Arabian Peninsula, were defined as 'self-contained languages' (*langajes por soi* or *langajes por elz, linguaggi da per sé* in Italian, or *proprium idioma et propria littera*, in the Medieval Latin of William of Rubruck OFM and Odorico da Pordenone OP), as they were not associated with any language known to the agents (merchants, missionaries, interpreters) involved. Following a similar intellectual model, all religions and systems of belief that did not fit into the Christian, Judaic, Islamic, or pagan cults of Antiquity were simply defined as 'idolatries.'[44]

Although the importance of medieval journeys to the East and descriptions of Mongolia, *Catai* and *Mangi* (the Western medieval names of China) and the importance of multilingualism in medieval Christendom are evident,[45] close examination of medieval mercantile and missionary sources, including Ibn Battuta's travel account, reveals that travel, trade, and religious proselytising in Asia, India, and China at the time of the Mongol Chinese Yuan Empire, under the *Pax Mongolica*, did not lead to cohesive, consolidated, and transmissible knowledge of the many languages spoken

[40] See FRANCESCO BALDUCCI PEGOLOTTI, *La Pratica della mercatura*, ed. ALLAN EVANS (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1936), 21–23: 'Avisamento del viaggio del Gattaio per lo cammino della Tana ad andare e tornare con mercatantia' (Information on the journey to Catai by the way of Tanais [on the Azov Sea] to go and return with merchandise).

[41] See IBN BATTUTA, *The Travels of Ibn Battūta*, trans. HAMILTON A. R. GIBB and CHARLES BUCKINGHAM, 5 vols. (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1958–1994).

[42] Fra Mauro's *mappa mundi*, designed in Venice ca. 1450, and the Korean *Gangnido*, designed in Hanseong (now Seoul) ca. 1480, both rely on cartography and travel accounts from the Mongol period, which explains how Mongol worldviews were framed and conserved long after the Mongol Empire that had spawned them had fallen. See ANGELO CATTANEO, 'Connected Histories. The Mongol Empire and the Creation of New Worldviews in the Fifteenth Century: Fra Mauro's *Mappa Mundi* (Venice, c. 1450) and the *Honil Gangni Yeokdae Gukdo Ji Do* (Hanseong, c. 1480),' in *The Mongol Empire in Global History and Art History*, ed. ANNE DUNLOP (Florence, I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies; Rome: Officina Libraria, 2022), 265–94.

[43] On this, see JOAN-PAU RUBIÉS, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35–84.

[44] EUGENIO BURGIO, 'Marco Polo e gli "idolatri,"' in *Le voci del Medioevo. Testi, immagini, tradizioni. Atti del VII Convegno internazionale* (Rocca Grimalda, 21–22 settembre 2002), eds NICOLÒ PASERO and SONIA MAURA BARILLARI (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2006), 31–62; ROBERT TRENT POMPLUN, JOAN-PAU RUBIÉS, and INES G. ŽUPANOV, 'Early Catholic Orientalism and the Missionary Discovery of Asian Religions,' *Journal of Early Modern History* 24, no. 6 (2020): 463–470 and RUBIÉS, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 213–22.

[45] MARK AMSLER, *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); ALBRECHT CLASSEN, 'Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: The Literary-Historical Evidence,' *Neophilologus* 97, no. 1 (Jan 2013): 131–45.

beyond the 'multilingual space of the Bible,' that is, beyond the spaces of the cultures and peoples of the Mediterranean, Central Asia, Persia, and the Arabian Peninsula.[46]

Companion Languages of the Missionary Church?

The Catholic missions in which linguistic interactions developed over the course of 150 years or so appear, in the eyes of cultural historians, to be an extremely interesting laboratory of cross-cultural, political, linguistic, and religious interactions.[47] During this relatively short period of time, small communities of European Catholic missionaries experienced very heterogeneous forms of cultural interactions with much broader local political, mercantile, military, and religious communities. The mutual codification, teaching, and learning of previously disconnected languages were part and parcel of the foundation and organisation of religious pedagogical institutions like the itinerant Jesuit Colleges and Seminaries, the introduction of new technologies like the printing press using movable type in books (in both romanised and logographic scripts), and the teaching of European music and craftsmanship.[48] These cultural, economic and technological interactions—which entailed constructive forms of cooperation—developed almost concurrently with violent social and political processes of control that included rejection, persecution, and banishment of both European and local peoples.

Conspicuous linguistic interactions were an important constituent part of ambivalent power relations in which cooperation, acceptance, confrontation and rejection, dialogue and imposition, understanding and misunderstanding were in a constant fluid dialogue. Missionaries tried to cope with and negotiate with their local interlocutors regarding the radical asymmetries in the power balance and demographics by adopting and exploring (controversial) strategies of adaptation which, over the course of a few decades, ensured the implementation of important processes of mutual learning. Far from being an *a priori* philosophical position, an ethical or moral choice of (alleged and anachronistic) respect for cultural differences or otherness, or, conversely, a subtle, hidden, premeditated strategy to penetrate and conquer the (otherwise lost) souls of the *gentiles*, the so-called missionary—particularly the Jesuit *accomodatio* or 'adaptation' to local contexts of interactions in early modernity—was above all a reaction to and a consequence of the radical asymmetry

---

[46] On the conceptualisation and definition of the languages beyond the 'space of the Bible' as 'self-contained languages' (*lingue per sé* or *proprium idioma*) in medieval Franciscan travel accounts in Asia, particularly in William of Rubruck OFM and in Marco Polo, see CATTANEO, *Tradurre il mondo*, 17–33 (chap. 1, 'Lingue per sé').

[47] On this, see JOAN-PAU RUBIÉS, 'From Idolatry to Religions: The Missionary Discourses on Hinduism and Buddhism and the Invention of Monotheistic Confucianism, 1550-1700,' *Journal of Early Modern History* 24, no. 6 (2020): 499–536; JOAN-PAU RUBIÉS, 'Comparing Cultures in the Early Modern World. Hierarchies, Genealogies and the Idea of European Modernity,' in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, eds RENAUD GAGNÉ, SIMON GOLDHILL, and GEOFFREY LLOYD (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 116–76.

[48] LUIS SARAIVA and CATHERINE JAMI, eds, *The Jesuits, The Padroado and East Asian Science (1552–1773)* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008).

of power, aimed at securing safer living conditions in the potentially hostile local contexts of the mission.[49]

Well before it was theorised and described in the famous texts by Alessandro Valignano, composed following his first stay in Japan between 1579 and 1582—*Advertimentos e Avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (1581);[50] *Sumario de las cosas de Japón* (1583)[51] and *Historia del principio y progresso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias orientales* (1583)[52]—a reading and analysis of the letters and reports composed as early as the first twenty years of Jesuit presence in missionary contexts in India, Brazil, Japan, and then in China, reveal that the inculturation and acculturation of Christianity to and for the local audiences, later systematised by Valignano, largely depended on the practices that some Jesuits had tried to implement in the early years of the Society of Jesus missionaries. The power imbalance did not merely prevent the development of important cultural interactions, on the contrary, it encouraged some Jesuits to find creative communication strategies and practices and to engage in cultural translation, which later became the broader framework of early modern Catholic global missions.[53]

Cross-cultural interactions through the translation of several previously disconnected languages in missionary contexts, together with linguistic practices developed in Europe within the complex framework of European orientalism[54]—and thus of scholarly and academic linguistic studies which, beginning with the languages

---

[49] For a critical assessment of the *status quaestionis,* see PAOLO ARANHA, 'Gerarchie razziali e adattamento culturale: La «Ipotesi Valignano»,' in *Alessandro Valignano S.I.: uomo del Rinascimento, ponte tra Oriente e Occidente*, eds ADOLFO TAMBURELLO, M. ANTONI J. ÜÇERLER, and MARISA DI RUSSO (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2008), 77–98; ANDRÉS I. PRIETO, 'The Perils of Accommodation: Jesuit Missionary Strategies in the Early Modern World,' *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017): 395–414.

[50] ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO, *Il Cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone. «Advertimentos e Avisos acerca dos Costumes e Catangues de Jappão»*, ed. JOSEF FRANZ SCHÜTTE SJ (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1946; 2nd ed., ed. MICHELA CATTO, 2011).

[51] ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO, *Sumario de las cosas de Japon (1583). Adiciones del Sumario del Japan (1592)*, ed. JOSÉ LUIS ALVAREZ-TALADRIZ (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1954).

[52] ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO, *Historia del principio y progresso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias orientales (1542-64)*, ed. JOSEF WICKI (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944).

[53] See ANGELO CATTANEO and ALEXANDRA CURVELO, 'Introduction,' and ANGELO CATTANEO, 'Spatial and Linguistic Patterns in Early Modern Global History. Iberian and Dutch Merchants, Jesuit Missionaries, Buddhist Monks and Neo-Confucian Scholars and Their Interactions in Japan,' in *Interactions Between Rivals: The Christian Mission and Buddhist Sects in Japan (c.1549-c.1647)*, eds ALEXANDRA CURVELO and ANGELO CATTANEO (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 23–41 and 277–318 (esp. 290–95). The publisher provides open access to both the essay and the book: https://www.peterlang.com/document /1190560.

[54] 'Orientalism' has been a much-disputed concept since Edward Said's eponymous book published in 1978. In Said's conceptual framework, 'orientalism' is defined as a Western imperialist attitude in which the colonised subjects are perceived from a purely Western ideological standpoint. In this context, we refer instead to a reinterpretation of the history of orientalism, which brings the term back to European scholarly and erudite practices—both religious and secular—of researching the Orient through the study of languages and the critical analysis of original sources, in the early modern context, on a different historical and semantic level and preceding Edward Said's albeit important critical conceptualisation. See URS APP, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1–132; RUBIÉS, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 287–300 ('Re-Defining Orientalism'); ROBERT CLINES, 'Edward W. Said, Renaissance Orientalism, and Imaginative Geographies of a Classical Mediterranean,' *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 65 (2020): 481–533.

of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, as well as Arabic and Persian, would gradually come to include the entire body of world languages—are still overlooked as a major periodisation landmark in global history. Historians of culture have largely emphasised the first decades of the fifteenth century to highlight the humanistic rediscovery of and translation into Latin of ancient Greek as a paradigmatic milestone in world history, implicitly highlighting the importance of cultural translation as a major factor in historical periodisation.[55] Yet these highly celebrated events had nowhere near the global impact or the universal breadth claimed by influential and foundational works, such as Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy), published in German in Basel in 1860 (translated into Italian in 1876 and into English in 1878).[56]

Humanistic efforts with classical languages and the erudite European codification of biblical languages, particularly Hebrew, Greek, Arabic and Syriac, have been widely recognised for their contributions to historical periodisation.[57] Yet early modern translations of living languages using Spanish and Portuguese as intermediary and translational languages have, in the broad, heterogeneous and asymmetrical contexts of Catholic missions, been overlooked—outside the field of missionary linguistics—as fundamental contributors to world-history periodisation which, together with European scholarly or erudite orientalism,[58] have helped form the modern global system of connected languages.

Europe's Reception of Missionary Linguistics

To conclude this article, we briefly examine how the multiple linguistic and cultural translations done in missionary contexts were received in Europe. Specifically, we look at a set of works compiled and published in Europe over the course of some seventy years, from the mid-sixteenth century to the early decades of the seventeenth century;

---

[55] Sources like Leonardo Bruni's *Commentaria rerum suo tempore gestarum* (1440–1441), which emphatically praises the advent of the teaching and learning of Greek in Florence as an epoch-making event, marked the transition from Medieval to Renaissance or early modern culture. Within a vast historiography, see ALEXANDER LEE, PIT PÉPORTÉ, and HARRY SCHNITKER, eds, *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1300-c.1550* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), particularly ROBERT BLACK, 'The Renaissance and the Middle Ages: Chronologies, Ideologies, Geographies,' 27–44. For a socio-economic analysis, see JAN LUITEN VAN ZANDEN and ELTJO BURINGH, 'Charting the "Rise of the West": Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, a long-term perspective from the sixth through the eighteenth centuries,' *Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 2 (2009): 409–45.

[56] In 2018, in the bicentenary of Jacob Burckhardt's birth (1818–1897), the British Academy organised the conference entitled 'Burckhardt at 200: The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance reconsidered' (British Academy, 31 May–1 June 2018). Simon Ditchfield, Michelle O'Malley, and Stefan Bauer gathered together twenty-three scholars who carried out an in-depth critical review and contextualisation of both Burckhardt's work and his conceptualisation of the 'Italian Renaissance.' For the complete programme, see https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/184/Burckhardt_at_200_CURRENT_PROGRAMME_JE.pdf.

[57] On the study and teaching of Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic in Florence, see ANGELO MICHELE PIEMONTESE, 'Lo studio delle cinque lingue presso Savonarola e Pico,' in *Europa e Islam tra i secoli XIV e XVI*, ed. MICHELE BERNARDINI (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 2002), 179–202. For the study and teaching of Arabic, see JAN LOOP, ALASTAIR HAMILTON, and CHARLES BURNETT, eds, *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[58] See note 52 above.

thus, before the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, which was founded in Rome in 1622,[59] had become fully operational and before the first attempts to systematise missionary knowledge—such as those made by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and by Martino Martini (1614–1661) on China—had become well-established.[60] Below are the works considered, in chronological order:

Guillaume Postel, *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum introductio, ac legendi modus longè facilimus. Linguarum nomina sequens proximè pagella offeret*. Prostant Parisiis: apud Dionysium Lescuier, sub porcelli signo, vico Hilario, e regione divi Hilarii, 1538.

Theodor Bibliander, *De rationi communi omnium linguarum et literarum commentarius*. Tiguri: apud Christoph Frosch, 1548.

Konrad von Gesner, *Mithridates. De differentiis linguarum tum veterum tum quae hodie apud diversas nationes in toto orbe terrarum in usu sunt.* Tiguri: excudebat Froschoverus, 1555.

Blaise de Vigenère, *Traicté des chiffres, ou Secrètes manières d'escrire*. Paris: Abel l'Angelier, 1586.

Angelo Roccha, *Bibliotheca apostolica vaticana a Sixto V Pont. Max. in splendidiorem commodioremq. locum translata et a fratre Angelo Roccha a Camerino […] commentario variarium artium […] illustrata etc*. Romae: ex Typografía Apostolica Vaticana 1591.

Hieronymus Megiser, *Specimen quinquaginta diversarum atque inter se differentium linguarum*, *et dialectorum*. Francoforti: ex typographéo Ioannis Spiessij, 1592.

Hieronymus Megiser, *Thesaurus Polyglottus: vel Dictionarium multilingue, ex quadringentis circiter tam veteris, quam novi Orbis nationum linguis, dialectis, idiomatibus & idiotismis*. Francofurti ad Moenum: Sumptibus Authoris, 1603.

Claude Duret, *Thresor de l'histoire des langues de cest univers: contenant les origines, beautés, perfections, décadences, mutations, changemens, conversions et ruines des langues*. Imprime a Cologny: par Matth. Berjon, Pour la societé Caldoriene, 1613.

Published in some of the most important European cultural cities, with no direct ties to Catholic missionaries, these works with heterogeneous approaches and purposes aspired to review and map the languages of the world, starting with the primal core of the biblical languages, namely, Hebrew and Greek first, and later Aramaic, Chaldean, Syriac, Coptic, but also Arabic and Persian, and, potentially, to gradually embrace the entire spectrum of the world's languages. Continuing along a path of research mapped out by Stefano Gensini, and, I hope, going further, I will highlight the variety and

---

[59] GIOVANNI PIZZORUSSO, 'Agli antipodi di Babele: *Propaganda Fide* tra immagine cosmopolita e orizzonti romani (XVII-XIX secolo),' 477–518.
[60] From an extensive bibliography, see the more recent ANTONELLA ROMANO, *Impressioni di Cina. Saperi europei e inglobamento del mondo (secoli XVI-XVII)* (Rome: Viella, 2020).

number of languages and alphabets in each of the works examined, for the purpose of verifying and reporting how the news, or at least the awareness, of the widening range of languages emerging from Catholic missionaries was initially received outside those contexts themselves.[61]

French-born Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) was an orientalist, cosmographer, professor of mathematics and languages at the French court of Francis I. He became acquainted with Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac. Relieved and removed from his teaching and assignments in Paris owing to his messianic beliefs, he was later active in Rome, where he tried in vain to be accepted by the Jesuits, but was rejected by Ignatius de Loyola, for the same reasons. He was later in Venice, before being declared insane by the Inquisition in 1555.[62] In his *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum introductio*, published in Paris in 1538, Postel analysed twelve languages, mostly of biblical origin—*Hebraica, Chaldaica, Samaritana, Punica Arabica, Indica, Graeca, Georgiana-Iacobitana, Tzerviana-Poznania, Hieronymiana Illyrica Dalmatarum, Armenica,* and *Latina*—and their respective alphabets. His research on the languages aimed to recognise their connections and derivations, as part of a messianic view of universal peace-making, which had also led him to seek the support of the Ottoman court, after being estranged from the French court and the Society of Jesus.[63] Large part of the alphabets published by Postel had originally been collected by Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi (1469–1540), of the Order of the Clerics Regular of Saint Augustine, who met Postel in Venice in 1537 and shared with him the results of his research on several alphabets. Postel surreptitiously published these materials before Degli Albonesi's *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam atque Armenicam et decem alias linguas* was published in Pavia in 1539, 'robbing' the latter of first place.[64]

Theodor Bibliander (1506–1564), alias of the orientalist Theodor Buchmann, a renowned professor of Old Testament theology in Zurich for about thirty years, lists thirty-three languages in the *De rationi communi omnium linguarum et literarum* (Zurich, 1548), including Tartaric, and transcribes the *Oratio dominica* (*Lord's Prayer* or *Pater Noster*) in fourteen languages, listed below in the order mentioned: *Ebraica, Chaldaica,*

---

[61] STEFANO GENSINI, *Apogeo e fine di Babele. Linguaggi e lingue nella prima modernità* (Pisa: ETS, 2016), 16–26.

[62] On Postel's intellectual and biographical trajectory, see INA BAGHDIANTZ MCCABE, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism and the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).

[63] CHRISTINE ISOM-VERHAAREN, 'Sixteenth-century French travelers to the Ottoman Empire. The impact of travels in the Ottoman Empire on Guillume Postel's and Philippe Canaye's views of Reformation,' *The Muslim World* 107, no. 4 (2017): 698–713.

[64] See J. F. COAKLEY, *The Typography of Syriac. A historical catalogue of printing types, 1537–1958*, (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2006), 29–30, 155; RICCARDO CONTINI, 'Gli inizi della linguistica siriaca nell'Europa rinascimentale,' in *Italia ed Europa nella linguistica del Rinascimento: confronti e relazioni*, ed. MIRKO TAVONI, 2 vols., vol. 2, *L'Italia e l'Europa non romanza: le lingue orientali* (Modena: Panini, 1996), 483–502. For Degli Albonesi's work, see *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam atque Armenicam et decem alias linguas. Characterum differentium alphabeta, circiter quadraginta et eorundem invicem conformatio. Mystica et cabalistica quam plurima scitu digna. Et descriptio ac simulachrum Phagoti Afranii.* Theseo Ambrosio ex Comitibus Albonesii I.V. doct. Papien. Canonico Regulari Lateranensi, ac Sancti Petri in Coelo Aureo Papiae Praeposito, Authore. Pavia: excudebat Giovanni Maria Simonetta, 1539.

Arabica, Aethiopica, Graeca, Armenica, Germanica e Gothica, Latina Illyrica, Gallica, Hispanica, Italica, Islandica, Anglica, Polonica.[65]

Konrad von Gesner (also spelled Gessner, 1516–1565), a physician and professor of natural sciences, also from Zurich, considered both the languages of the ancients and current languages. In *Mithridates. De differentiis linguarum tum veterum tum quae hodie apud diversas nationes in toto orbe terrarum in usu sunt* he names at least ninety languages and examines twenty-two of them.[66] Gesner devotes one paragraph entitled 'De variis linguis, praesertim in remotissimis terris imperii Tartarici et orbis novi' to the languages of the remotest Asian regions ruled by the Great Khan and to those of the 'New World.' For Asia he lists fourteen idioms, accompanied by brief geographical descriptions, but without providing any linguistic indications. The only exception concerns the 'Provincia Cataia,' ruled by 'King Cham, who speaks a very difficult and "self-contained" language' ('habet autem linguam propriam et difficilem,' 70v). In the following section, entitled 'De linguis in Orbe novo,' he alludes to the great variety of languages spoken in the New World and describes the event of ten copyists being sent from the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean to Nueva España to transcribe the languages of all the Caribbean islands in the Latin alphabet, 'sine ullo discrimine.' Gesner was also the first scholar to mention the *Lingua Utopiensis*, that is, the language invented and codified by Thomas More for the Utopians, modelled on Greek (72v–73r).[67]

Blaise de Vigenère, a diplomat, linguist, and cryptographer, published in Paris in 1585 a *Traicté des chiffres, ou secrètes manières d'escrire*, for which he is recognised as one of the most important cryptographers. The *Traicté* lists and describes numerous alphabets, however, interestingly, the pages devoted to the Japanese and Chinese 'alphabets' are left blank. In fact, Vigenère had been promised these alphabets by the French Jesuit Edmond Auger (1530–1591)—who was active in France, first in the mission to the Calvinists, then as a preacher at the French court (1569–1588)—but did not receive them in time for printing.[68]

Angelo Rocca (1545–1620) was a scholar and a passionate collector of fine editions. His bequest of circa 20,000 books led to the founding of the Angelica Library

---

[65] BRUCE GORDON, 'Theodor Bibliander,' in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, ed. DAVID THOMAS, 20 vols., vol 6. *Western Europe (1500-1600)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 643–53; HAGIT AMIRAV and HANS-MARTIN KIRN, 'Notes on the Reformation, Humanism and the Study of Hebrew in the Sixteenth Century: The Case of Theodore Bibliander (1505-64),' *Church History and Religious Culture* 87, no. 2 (2007): 161–171.

[66] GEORGE J. METCALF, 'Konrad Gesner's Views on the Germanic Languages,' *Monatshefte* 55, no. 4 (1963): 149–156.

[67] THOMAS MORUS, *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus* […] (Basileae: Frobenius, 1518), 13: 'Utopiensum alphabetum' (beside the map of Utopia, engraved by Hans Holbein).

[68] LUCA DINU, *The Chinese Language in European Texts: The Early Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 97–98.

in Rome, one of Italy's first public libraries.[69] In charge of the Vatican typography during the pontificate of Sixtus V, he oversaw the setting up of the new Vatican Apostolic Library, under construction from May 1587, to which he dedicated the *Commentarium variarium artium* (1591) and described the languages of the library holdings. The *Commentarium* lists some eighty languages, including an 'African language' (308), an 'Asiatic language' and a 'Tartaric language' (362–63), although he does not include specific alphabets or specimens, and merely lists the *auctores* who mention these languages in their works. The languages surveyed by Rocca are mainly *linguae antiquae*; he ignored new living languages encountered in the context of the Iberian expansions and missions.

Hieronymus Megiser (1554–1618), traveller, connoisseur and philologist of Slovenian and Slavic languages, Ordinarius Historiographus in Graz, later rector at the Collegium Sapientiae et Pietatis in Klagenfurt, and professor of history at the University of Leipzig,[70] reports approximately fifty languages in the *Specimen quinquaginta diversarum atque inter se differentium linguarum* (for our purposes, the Frankfurt edition of 1603, printed by Joachinum Bratheringium). Megiser transcribes them via the Latin alphabet by translating phonetically the *Oratio dominica* (the Lord's Prayer). He also provides other Christian orations in a few languages, including Hebrew, Syriac-Chaldaic, Greek and the 'Turkic language,' (§ 1; § 2; § 6; § 42, respectively). Only Hebrew and Greek are also presented in their original alphabets. Significantly, Megiser also romanises the Lord's Prayer in the 'Tartaric language' (§ 44), in the 'Chiniaca or Sinensium language' (§ 46), and in a New World idiom that he calls '*lingua americanorum silvestrium*' (language of the American savages, literally 'Americans of the wilderness,' § 47).

In 1603, Megiser published a dictionary in two volumes, the *Thesaurus Polyglottus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1603) in which there is a most notable increase in the systematisation of new languages, news of which reached Europe through missionary networks. Megiser surveys some 400 languages and, for the first time in the history of linguistics and of culture tout court, presents them in ten plates (*tabulae*) placed at the beginning of the first volume. The *tabulae* are divided into three groups, arranged spatially and geographically, and establish derivations between languages through graphic devices. In the first group, consisting of five plates, the first is devoted to the Hebrew language and its derivations, the second to the Greek language and its derivations, the third to the Latin language and its derivations, the fourth to the Germanic language and its derivations and, finally, the fifth to the 'Slavonic language.' In the second group, consisting of three plates, the first (*Tabula sexta*) concerns European languages, the second (*Tabula septima*) Asian languages, and the third (*Tabula*

---

[69] PAOLA MUNAFÒ and NICOLETTA MURATORE, *Bibliotheca Angelica Publicae commoditati dicata* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2004); ELISABETTA SCIARRA, 'Breve storia del fondo manoscritto della Biblioteca Angelica,' *La Bibliofilia* 111 no. 3 (2009): 251–82.

[70] In a bibliography, mostly in German, see NATALIE ROTHMAN, 'Disciplining Language: Dragomans and Oriental Philology,' in NATALIE ROTHMAN, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 140–82.

octava) African languages, excluding the Arabic and Ethiopian languages, for which Megiser refers the reader to the *Tabula prima*, dedicated to Hebrew. The *Tabula nona*, dedicated to *America vel India occidentalis*, and the *Tabula decima*, dedicated to the *Novi orbis insulae*, include geographical representations in the form of diagrams of the main regions of the New World and the main islands of Europe, Asia, and Africa, respectively. The rest of the work is a huge multilingual dictionary, spread over two volumes, with thousands of lemmas translated into many languages, with cross-references to the last two geographical plates, in the case of the New World languages or those spoken on the main islands of the four continents known at the time.

Ten years later, in 1613, the *Thresor de l'histoire des langues de cest univers* by French polygraph and botanist Claude Duret (1570–1611) was published posthumously in Cologny, a municipality in the Canton of Geneva, near the French-Swiss border. Duret reports more than fifty modern and ancient languages, contextualised geographically, illustrated with letters of the alphabet carved on wooden plates, including several Chinese and Japanese characters, as part of a description of China and Japan. Continuing the work begun by his cousin Vigenère, whose preparatory materials he had inherited, Duret published the Chinese and Japanese 'alphabets' that the Jesuit Edmond Auger (1530–1591) had promised but failed to get to Vigenère.[71] He also provided a translation of numbers into Chinese and gave examples of how some European words are written in Japanese, using *kanji*, the Japanese logographic characters (913–16). The *Thresor* also includes a bilingual copy in (corrupted) Japanese and French of a document issued by the 'King of Bungo'—Ōtomo Yoshishige, the daimyo of Bungo, on Kyushu Island—in 1557 granting the Jesuits the right to build a church in the city of Yamaguchi (917–21). Duret's edition of the document adapted a letter by the Jesuit Gaspar Vilela, previously printed and translated into Portuguese in Évora in 1598.[72] Finally, one section focuses on Canada and American languages, before ending with a history of language and a chapter dealing with the language of animals.[73]

In summary, from the last decade of the sixteenth century, there was an exponential increase, in European scholarly circles, in the number of languages listed and, in some cases, described and even accompanied by their scripts generally exemplified by the *Oratio dominica* in various non-European languages and scripts. In the last part of the sixteenth century and the first years of the seventeenth century, beginning with the efforts of Megiser and Duret, the collation and systematisation of the languages encountered and described in missionary letters and reports, then learned and translated in missionary settings through grammars and lexicons, reached

---

[71] DINU, *The Chinese Language in European Texts: The Early Period*, 127.
[72] *Gaspar Vilela a los Jesuitas de Portugal, Hirado, 29 de Octubre de 1557*, in *Cartas qve os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreuerão dos Reynos de Iapão & China aos da mesma Companhia da India, & Europa des do anno de 1549. até o de 1580 […] Impressas por mandado do Reuerendissimo em Christo Padre dom Theotonio de Bragança, Arcebispo d'Euora […]*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Évora: por Manoel de Lyra, 1598) ff. 177–182.
[73] CLAUDE DURET, *Thresor de l'histoire des langues de cest univers*, chap. 89, 'Des sons, voix, bruits, langages, ou langues des animaux et oyseaux,' 1017–30.

and were incorporated into orientalist and scholarly studies aiming to map the languages of the world.

At the same time, missionary linguistics led to considerable expansion of orientalist linguistic geography, which stemmed from and rested on the 'spaces of the Bible' integrated with the 'spaces of classical antiquity.' The pioneers of this change in scale, Megiser and Duret, explicitly incorporated languages into a spatial vision that encompassed the entire globe and laid the ground for an explicit global geography of languages, as a possible form of global spatiality. Their works show how the linguistic practices developed in missionary contexts in Asia, America, and Africa were progressively incorporated into scholarly and academic orientalist linguistics.

It is important, however, to be aware of the differences in the ways new languages were integrated in missionary settings and among scholars or orientalists in Europe. Whereas in 1603, Duret published in his *Thresor de l'histoire des langues de cest univers* the first rudimentary examples of Japanese characters, compiled by the first Jesuits in Japan around 1555–60—which they in turn had taken from the volumes published by the Jesuits in Coimbra and Évora in 1570 and 1598—in the same year, the Jesuits published a bilingual Japanese–Portuguese dictionary in Nagasaki, with about 32,000 entries and over 100,000 contexts of usage.[74]

Although the previously analysed cultural and linguistic interactions taking place in missionary contexts were very heterogeneous, they did share the characteristic of occurring outside of Europe; in other words, away from and disconnected from European academic and humanistic circles. At the same time, tools like dictionaries and grammars, adapted and transformed in missionary contexts, were originally prepared in humanistic educational circles for teaching and studying Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.[75] An interest in language coding and learning, coupled with an awareness and belief that translation practices were not only possible but desirable, were also rooted in the way languages were engaged with, which emerged with humanism.[76] The humanist influence on the formation of a missionary linguistic consciousness is paradigmatically evidenced by the importance attributed to learning and teaching classical languages in missionary orders. It is particularly evident in the Jesuit *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*, published in Rome in 1599 as a result of nearly fifty

---

[74] *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam com a declaração em Portugues*. See above the section 'Japan,' 22–24.

[75] PAUL F. GRENDLER, *Jesuit Schools and Universities in Europe, 1548-1773* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). ANTONIO ROLLO, 'Study Tools in the Humanist Greek School: Preliminary Observations on Greek-Latin Lexica,' in *Teachers, Students, and Schools of Greek in the Renaissance*, eds FEDERICA CICCOLELLA and LUIGI SILVANO (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 26–54; PAUL BOTLEY, *Learning Greek in Western Europe, 1396-1529: Grammars, Lexica, and Classroom Texts* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2010); ROBERT BLACK, 'Italian Education: Languages, Syllabuses, Methods,' in *Language and Cultural Change: Aspects of the Study and Use of Language in the Later Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. LODI NAUTA (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 91–112.

[76] For the humanistic teaching and translation of Greek, see DAVIDE BALDI BELLINI, 'L'insegnamento del greco a Firenze da Leonzio Pilato a Pier Vettori (1360-1583),' in *Studium florentinum: l'istruzione superiore a Firenze fra XIV e XVI secolo*, ed. LORENZO FABBRI (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2021), 83–146. For an in-depth study of Pico della Mirandola and the learning and translation of Hebrew and Arabic, see GIOVANNA MURANO, *La biblioteca arabo-ebraica di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2022).

years of internal debate on the teaching practices to be pursued in the schools of the Society of Jesus, where great emphasis was placed on the pedagogy, study and practice of Latin, Greek and Hebrew.[77] The *Ratio studiorum* prescribed the use of Álvares's *De institutione grammatica libri tres*, dedicating an explicit reference to it in the 'Rules of the Provincial Superior.'[78] Regarding this, it is important to remember that missionary grammars (*artes*) were mostly based on or adapted from Manoel Álvares's Latin grammar first published in Lisbon in 1572;[79] whereas Ambrogio Calepino's dictionary of Latin (*Dictionarium ex optimis quibusque authoribus*), originally published in 1502, was translated and printed in Japanese (Amakusa, 1595, along with Portuguese), Vietnamese (Rome, 1650, along with Portuguese), and Mayan (seventeenth century, in manuscript form).[80] At the same time, a research hypothesis might also consider the extent to which orientalist research on biblical languages may have permeated and changed the way languages were thought of and related to, and influenced the pedagogy of the orders involved in missions, thereby helping to form, or at least encourage, an awareness for recognising and learning Amerindian, Asian, and African languages.

The Time and Space of Connected Languages

When stressing the importance of connected histories in their introduction to the edited volume *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840,* David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam mention at least two possible ways of conceptualising connected histories:

> A first would suggest that connections did exist and were known to past actors but have for some reason been forgotten or laid aside. The task of the historian would then be to rediscover these lost trails. A second view would instead posit that historians might act as electricians, connecting circuits by acts of imaginative reconstitution rather than simple restitution.[81]

The same can be argued about the documents and phenomena analysed in this essay, where lost trails are rediscovered and linked circuits are imaginatively reformed,

---

[77] See ANGELO BIANCHI, 'Introduzione,' in *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*, ed. and trans. ANGELO BIANCHI (Brescia: Scholè, 2021), 19–82; MARIO ZANARDI, 'La *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*: tappe e vicende della sua progressiva formazione (1541-1616),' *Annali di storia dell'educazione* 5 (1998): 135–164.

[78] 'Rules of the Provincial Superior. 23. Father Emanuel Álvares's *Grammar*. He will ensure that teachers use Father Emanuel's *Grammar*. If then, in any place, his method proves too analytical for the young pupils to understand, adopt the Roman edition, or have a similar one composed, after consulting the Superior General, provided that it maintains the same force and precision as all the rules of Fr. Emanuel,' cf. *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*, ed. BIANCHI, 102–03 (this is my translation from the Latin and Italian version).

[79] [Manuel Álvares], *Emmanuelis Aluari e Societate Iesu De institutione grammatica libri tres* (Olyssippone: excudebat Ioannes Barrerius, 1572).

[80] On the translation and transformation of Calepino's *Dictionarium* into Japanese and Vietnamese, see above 22n15. On the 'Mayan Calepino,' see RAMÓN ARZÁPALO MARÍN, *Calepino de Motul: Diccionario maya-español*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995).

[81] DAVID ARMITAGE and SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM, eds, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), XXXI.

attesting to the presence of various kinds of border-crossing networks—linguistic, religious, cultural—and a history that is in every respect transcultural and transnational. The different typologies of documents taken into consideration—primers, grammars, dictionaries, and doctrines—offer a polycentric and complementary look at a plurality of interactions which, over the course of two centuries or so, characterised the relations between Catholic missionaries, particularly the Jesuits, and their local interlocutors, including the military, political, and religious elites, but also more numerous commoners, with ties to the agents of the Portuguese expansion.

The macro spaces where these interactions emerged—India, Japan, China, Brazil, sub-Saharan African coastal territories—were clusters of numerous, heterogeneous micro spaces, like the Christian missions themselves. Regardless of their scale, all these spaces emerge as linked areas of contact that were the stage for processes with varying degrees of permeability, often resulting in adaptations, exchanges, and translations. Moreover, characterised by both linguistic and cultural translations, these processes were frequently marked by misunderstandings, incompatibilities, tensions, disputes, and rejections. Nevertheless, awareness of possible mutual translatability—and sometimes untranslatability—between a plurality of languages that had come into contact with each other for the first time contributed, along with humanism and orientalism, to the emergence of a new conception of spatiality that also included the global space of languages.

Traditional 'spatial' scholarship is mostly concerned with the process of constructing geographical space, accompanied by the notion of constructing commercial and political space; for example, representation of the main commercial routes in the Atlantic or the Indian Ocean; the space of empires.[82] From a re-examination of early modern primary linguistic sources dealing mostly with the global projection of Christianity from the beginning of the sixteenth century, it is clear that the construction of geographical space tout court appears to be just one layer in a much more complex process of mapping out places and peoples that were beginning to be seen as important culturally, and at the interface of trade, proselytism, and conquest. This process includes the overlooked topic of linguistic contacts and the complex path-breaking process of describing, learning, and translating Amerindian, African, and Asian languages that had been ignored or unknown to Europeans before the age of expansion.

The multilingual documents we have considered tell specific stories of interconnection that took place from around the mid-sixteenth century and whose main protagonists were some previously disconnected languages. Viewed from a distance and from the perspective of connected histories, these events, which we have observed through the lens of the linguistic dynamics that took place in the hemisphere

---

[82] See the essays in DAVID WOODWARD, ed., *History of Cartography*, 6 vols., vol. 3, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, 2 parts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). The publisher provides open access to the entire series of the *History of Cartography*: https://press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/index.html.

between Brazil, Africa, and Asia, stand out as relevant forms of interconnectivity, specific to the history of early modernity and with no comparable equivalents in previous times, although not because people did not travel. About three hundred years apart, Medieval Franciscan friars, Marco Polo, and Matteo Ricci SJ and his confrères all travelled to China. Whereas the former only recognised 'self-contained languages,' the latter recognised, learned, and translated the Chinese language. As we have seen, this happened with a very large cluster of language families. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, a new space of interconnected languages was formed at the interface of Catholic missions and orientalism, a periodisation factor that is still not fully recognised.