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ASIA AND THE PRESENCE OF THE FRANCISCANS FROM NEW SPAIN: A COMMENTARY ON SOME MEXICAN SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some sources from Mexican archives which can be of interest for the study of Franciscan missions in Asia. We will focus on documents related to the Province of San Gregorio, which had an intense relationship with New Spain; and on the correspondence between the Bishop of Puebla and individuals in the Philippines as well as missionaries in China.

Keywords: Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz; New Spain; Order of Saint Clare; Philippines; Province of San Gregorio

PREAMBLE

The attention of Mexican historiography given to the Hispanic dominions in continental Asia, focusing on their intended integration of those territories to the Crown or winning them over to Catholicism, is acquiring a new stimulus, following decades of important studies that mainly focused on commercial relations in the Pacific Ocean between New Spain and the Philippines. Historians today should realize that Asian missions were the subject of careful consideration in New Spain—more so than what we might believe—which points to the need to review in greater detail archival collections in Mexico to find the traces of connections between both territories, beyond the scope of the much studied commercial and artistic relationship, and beyond the political arguments in defense of the Crown of Castile's rights over Asian territories. What gave rise to these Franciscan documents found in the Mexican archives?

The aim of this article is to highlight the need for a more careful search in Mexican archives concerning missionary activities in Asia, particularly that of Franciscan missions, on which some relevant sources can be found in different archives and libraries of Mexico. First, we will present some historiographic references concerning such missions. Then, we will discuss the most important antecedents of the sixteenth century that laid the foundation for the interest concerning Asian affairs in New Spain throughout the three colonial centuries. Following this discussion, we will address in detail the issue of the sources themselves: firstly, emphasizing that many of the known chronicles were also part of the repertoires of the libraries in New Spain; and secondly, by highlighting those testimonies of the Franciscan action in Asia that remain unpublished. The point of showing the latter is to underline that the relations between New Spain and the East and Southeast Asia, especially through the Philippines, was wide and intense, as exemplified by the case of the Discalced Franciscans and their own complexities.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

In the last decade scholars have focused on some of the projects undertaken by the Franciscans in Asia, which contributed to defining research possibilities by providing greater clarity in the information provided by the chronicles of the different religious orders and by Anglo-Saxon historiography. The works of José Antonio Cervera Jiménez, Jessica Ramírez and Marina Torres, are opening the way to understand the stages and structures articulated by the Franciscans in their

Asian missionary projects from New Spain.¹ The first groups of Franciscans sent by the Spanish Crown, already with a mission plan, arrived in the Philippines under the direction of Friar Pedro de Alfaro,² who shortly after made the first attempt to enter China in contravention of the provisions of the authorities of the archipelago. This enterprise failed in its attempt, but the account written a century and a half later by Friar Francisco de San Antonio reveals various aspects of the principles that guided the spirit of several friars to make incursions among the Chinese.³ According to Torres Trimállez, the history of Franciscanism in East Asia has been studied around the controversy concerning the Chinese rites, “within the framework of Filipinism,” and especially during the period that encompasses the end of the seventeenth century and the entirety of the eighteenth century; where there have been further approaches to certain particular characters such as Friar Antonio de Santa María Caballero.⁴

For the Franciscans, the viceroyalty of New Spain became a point of passage, formation, refurbishment and even acquisition of experience, something more than a bridge between Europe and Asia within the scope of the Spanish crown.⁵ As Jessica Ramírez and Alba Espinosa have pointed out, this circumstance led to the foundation of establishments such as hospices and convents in New Spain with the objective of supporting the missionaries that came from the Iberian Peninsula with the intention of entering the missions of China, Japan and other lands whose bases of operation were in the Philippines.⁶ The provinces of San Diego (in New Spain) and San Gregorio (in the Philippines), corresponding to the discalced branch of the Order were linked by the desire to extend Christianity in continental Asia.

The cultural exchanges resulting from the Spanish Franciscan presence in the Philippines and its advances, experiments and setbacks in the different Asian territories, such as China, Japan, Korea and others, went beyond the exchange of ivories, silks and spices.⁷ From the representation of territoriality,⁸ the forms of

¹ José Antonio Cervera Jiménez, “Los intentos de los franciscanos para establecerse en China, siglos XIII–XVII,” *Sémata. Ciencias Sociais e Humanidades* 26 (2017): 425–46.

² This missionary went as far as Canton and Macao. On some data of the Franciscans mentioned in this article, I follow Eusebio Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico de los religiosos franciscanos de la Provincia de San Gregorio Magno de Filipinas* (Manila, Impr. del Real Colegio de Santo Tomas, 1880): 13–14.

³ Friar Francisco de San Antonio, *Desatinos y zozobras de los primeros castellanos que fueron a la China a pisalla y conquistalla para la Feé...* 1738, ed. Gustavo Vargas Martínez, (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1989).

⁴ Marina Torres Trimállez, “Misioneros franciscanos y redes locales en Oriente: visiones, identidades y estrategias de evangelización,” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, accessed October 5, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.73095>.

⁵ Jessica Ramírez Méndez y Alba Sofía Espinosa Leal, “Las provincias franciscanas descalzas en Nueva España y Filipinas,” in *La Iglesia y sus territorios, siglos XVI al XVIII*, ed. Ma. del Pilar Martínez López-Cano (México: UNAM / BUAP, 2020), 151–81.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Rei Arimura, “Las misiones católicas en Japón (1549-1639): análisis de las fuentes y tendencias historiográficas,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 33, no. 98 (2011): 55–106.

⁸ Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez, “Los franciscanos y la representación del territorio en Filipinas entre los siglos XVII y XIX,” *Anales del Museo de América* 19, (2011): 122–39.

Portuguese and Hispanic musical production that crossed from the Philippines to Japan,⁹ and of course the debates around missionary strategies, knowledge of languages and pastoral policies, such as the famous controversy over Chinese rites. Although this article deals with the specific case of the Franciscan Order, there are some advances in research on other religious orders such as the Dominicans in China and Japan,¹⁰ including their intellectual transfers.¹¹ In spite of everything, the dialogue with Portuguese historiography is a pending topic, much more significant for this subject due to the large and influential presence of Portuguese missionaries who maintained relations and conflicts with the Spaniards who, having had their formative and experimental base in New Spain, entered via the Philippines.

THE FIRST CENTURY OF RAPPROCHEMENT

Asia was always in the horizon of the Castilian expansion; that yearning survived in those who conquered and colonized New Spain. Even during the conquest campaigns and later, once the Crown's administration of the territory was consolidated, the desire of its inhabitants to reach the Asian continent did not cease. When Asian merchandise began to arrive through the port of Acapulco, expectations, and strategies to expand contact with Asia grew. The "Spanish insistence" on Asia, in terms of incorporating its kingdoms to the Crown's sphere of influence and to the Iberian colonial system had different strategies. The best and most organized was centered in New Spain due to its geographic proximity and navigation possibilities. Attempts were made very early, following the conversations held in 1537 between Pedro de Alvarado and Andrés de Urdaneta in Spain resulting in the expedition led by Ruy López de Villalobos in 1542. From that moment until May 1571, when the Spaniards settled in Manila—the vertex of the structure of domination over the Philippines—the desire to expand Christianity was added to the commercial and political aims.¹² Meanwhile, the kingdom of Portugal had managed to establish quickly a fundamental network of points of contact, expansion and missionaries in Asia, which would lead to the confrontation between the two systems of patronage, since the religious and secular clergy of the

⁹ David Irving, "En los confines de la tierra: influencia ibérica e intercambio musical entre Japón y Filipinas en los siglos XVI y XVII," in *Concierto barroco. Estudios sobre música, dramaturgia e historia cultural*, ed. Juan José Carreras y Miguel Ángel Marín (Rioja: Universidad de La Rioja, 2004), 173–88.

¹⁰ Anna Busquets Alemany, "Primeros pasos de los dominicos en China: Llegada e implantación," *Cauriensia* 8 (2013): 191–214.

¹¹ José Antonio Cervera Jiménez, "Misioneros en Filipinas y su relación con la ciencia en China: fray Juan Cobo y su libro Shi Lu*," *Llul* 20 (1997): 491–506.

¹² Lotar Knauth, *Confrontación transpacífica. El Japón y el Nuevo Mundo hispánico 1542-1639* (México: UNAM, 1972), 36–48.

Portuguese and Castilians owed allegiance to two different crowns, even during the period of the Iberian Union.¹³

Parallel to these socioeconomic processes, since the founding evangelization stage, as the first three decades of the evangelization of New Spain are called, the Franciscan friars manifested a vested interest in extending their missionary action towards the Asian world. It is known that important friars for the first years of evangelization in New Spain, such as the Franciscans, Friar Martín de Valencia and Bishop Friar Juan de Zumárraga or the Dominican Friar Domingo de Betanzos, shared the firm decision to cross the ocean to dedicate their missionary zeal in China.¹⁴ As part of their spiritual ideals, Asia was from the very first years in the minds of the Franciscans in New Spain and remained so, as Francisco Morales has widely pointed out. There was even a failed and late attempt to create a specific college for the mission in China and Japan, proposed by the Dieguino Mariano López Pimentel in the early years of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

The arrival of the first bishop of the Philippines in 1581, Dominican Friar Domingo de Salazar, marked a turning point in the projection of Catholic evangelization in East Asia when considering the incorporation of the mendicant Orders in the evangelization enterprise, where only the Society of Jesus had advanced with difficulties but with notable achievements.¹⁶ The prelate arrived imbued with the “American experience,” since he had been a disciple of Francisco de Vitoria and of Bartolomé de Las Casas and spent some time as a missionary in Zacatecas. The news of what existed in China arrived by different means. The eagerness of the different members of the Church to know the prevailing circumstances beyond the Pacific Ocean, is noticeable. In this regard, the works of the Jesuit José de Acosta,¹⁷ or the popular book of the Augustinian Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza played a very important role.¹⁸

The experience of evangelization in New Spain was taken up again in some respects to adapt and apply it among the local populations of the Philippine Islands. One of them was the policy of concentration of settlements (*pueblos*), something widely used in New Spain and that the Franciscans themselves sought to replicate in the Philippine archipelago, with success for the colonial system, but to the detriment of the barangays, as happened with many Novo-Hispanic settlements.¹⁹

¹³ Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo, “La Historia de la Iglesia en Asia,” *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 5 (1996): 171–96.

¹⁴ Jerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* (México: Conaculta, 1997), bk. 5, Ch. 8, 280–82.

¹⁵ Francisco Morales Valerio, “De la utopía a la locura. Asia en la mente de los franciscanos de la Nueva España: del siglo XVI al XIX,” in *Órdenes religiosos entre América y Asia*, ed. Elisabetta Corsi (México: El Colegio de México, 2008), 57–83.

¹⁶ Knauth, *Confrontación*, 123.

¹⁷ Joseph de Acosta, *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (México: FCE, 1962), bk. 5, Ch. 16.

¹⁸ Ioan Gonzalez de Mendoza, *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran Reyno de la China...* (Roma: Stampa de Vicencio Accolti, 1585).

¹⁹ Luis Alonso Álvarez, *El costo del imperio asiático* (México: Instituto Mora / Universidad da Coruña, 2009), 34–39.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Catholic evangelization projects in Asia during modern times was the clash between the doctrinal bases that guided the different religious Orders, particularly the profound differences between the Jesuits and the Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans. In the narratives of vindication that their chroniclers elaborated with the purpose of promoting the advances in the conversion of the infidels and the blood shed for the Christian faith, there were conjunctural moments that exceeded their resonance in the Asian scope and reached projection of their ideas and images with a deep impact in the opinion of Europe and Latin America. It was therefore important that this opinion should not be “contaminated” by what many authors called false accounts or inaccuracies in the narrations of the heroic moments in the propagation of Christianity among the gentiles of China and Japan.

An event related to New Spain, due to the impact it had on its inhabitants, was the martyrdom of the Discalced Franciscans in Nagasaki. From the moment the events took place, conflicting opinions were raised about the role of the different religious agents in the attitude of the Japanese ruler who decreed the sentence. This resulted in reciprocal accusations between Jesuits and Franciscans for the fatal outcome. Knauth describes it as one of the darkest chapters in the Portuguese-Spanish and Jesuit-Franciscan relationship in the context of the evangelization of Asia in the sixteenth century.²⁰ The controversy reached such a level that the Jesuit Alejandro Valignano wrote a defense of his religious institute. In Pedro Lage Reis’ study of Valignano’s text,²¹ he clearly underlines the tone of the rivalry between the Jesuits and the Franciscans, and pointedly establishes the links between Luso-Hispanic commercial interests that were linked to mission strategies, which increased such rivalry since these exogenous factors, added to the demands of the *Padroado* and the *Patronato*, influenced Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s interests and reading of the activities of the Catholic friars and priests to finally decide the execution of the Franciscan friars.²²

For the imaginary of the New Spain this struggle was irrelevant, one of its martyrs was born in Mexico City. With this, the Discalced Franciscans in Asia bestowed in the sixteenth century a seal of glory for those “Spaniards of the land,” the Creoles, who—reacting against the attitudes of undervaluation of American Spaniards by Europeans—sought to demonstrate their equality before the Spaniards born in Europe. Symbolically, the martyrs of Nagasaki contributed to the argument that the New World could also give saints to Christianity; hence Felipe de Jesús became an essential element of the nascent Novo-Hispanic Creole identity. After he was beatified, the city of Puebla adopted him and swore him as one of its patrons and the artistic representation of the martyrs was captured in several sites of the Franciscan Order, as in the conventual temple of Cuernavaca.

²⁰ Knauth, *Confrontación*, 34–140.

²¹ Pedro Lage Reis Correia, *A concepção de missão na Apologia de Valignano* (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2008).

²² *Ibid.*, 25–51.

Fernanda de los Arcos maintains that “the Philippine ecclesiastical organization acquired its specific features in the last years of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century”; particularly during the eighteenth century there were several clashes between the civil authority and the clergy, sometimes leading to the union of regulars and seculars against the Governor and the Royal Audiencia of Manila.²³ The need for an adequate control over the behavior of the regular clergy in the Philippines was evident at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as there were several scandals caused by the disobedience of the mendicants towards their superiors and the metropolitan of Manila in connection with the execution of the Tridentine reform and the decrees of the Third Mexican Council.²⁴ This circumstance added to the fact that the Dieguinos, in order to survive a possible suppression, turned to the support of Philip II, led this Franciscan branch to win over the race to represent their order in the Hispanic missionary enterprise in Asia.²⁵

The establishment in 1571 of the figure of the General Commissioner for the Franciscans opened the door for the organization of this Order in Asia;²⁶ thus, under the direct tutelage of the Crown over the friars, the network of control and communication from Madrid to Manila was woven.

As explained by Ramírez and Espinosa, the Philippine province of San Gregorio emerged with a jurisdiction of its own in 1586, from the province of San José—which had its seat in the Iberian Peninsula; later, due to the growth of its convents in the Philippines and in New Spain, a geographical division occurred, and the province of San Diego was erected in 1599 to agglutinate only the houses of New Spain.²⁷ Both entities were linked to the General Commissariat of the Indies and the Commissariat of New Spain. The convents of the Novo-Hispanic province of San Diego practically abandoned their missionary pretensions in Asia and concentrated their work in the viceroyalty.²⁸ All this system maintained a wide level of relationship and exchange; due to the transit and communication that was carried out in the context of the hierarchical relationship between commissariats, provinces, and convents, it is possible to locate copies under the “system of mountain ranges” (in this case transoceanic). The relationship within the Discalced Franciscan Order structure of government generated documents that are preserved in the archives of Mexico.

²³ María Fernanda G. de los Arcos, *Estado y clero en las Filipinas del siglo XVIII* (México: UAM, 1988), 41–65.

²⁴ Manuela Águeda García Garrido, “Desobediencia y conflicto en el clero de las islas Filipinas (1596-1616),” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, accessed July 22, 2021, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/67689>.

²⁵ José García Oro y María Jesús Portela Silva, “Felipe II y la nueva reforma de los religiosos descalzos,” *Archivo Iberoamericano*, N° 230, (septiembre-diciembre 1998): 217–310.

²⁶ Lino Gómez Canedo, *Evangelización y conquista. Experiencia franciscana en Hispanoamérica* (México: Porrúa, 1988), 26–43.

²⁷ Ramírez Méndez y Espinosa Leal, “Las provincias franciscanas...,” 166–77. The authors explain the whole process of the emergence and organization of both provinces.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOURCES AND REPOSITORIES

Following this historical context and the brief historiographical notes—necessary to understand the sources that are presented below—we will conduct a brief review of diverse accounts found in archives and libraries of Mexico, directly related to the Franciscan action in Asia. As we will observe, the incorporation of these sources into Mexican collections owed, first and foremost, to the role that New Spain played within the Spanish imperial scheme and its insistence to extend its influence and commercial benefits in continental Asia, particularly through the Philippines. The following sources do not comprise all the available material, but they are significant, and there are more documents produced by the other religious orders as well as the result of other commercial and social aspects of the relationship between New Spain and the Philippines and the viceroyalty's interests in the Asian world.

The array of sources is varied but can be grouped in two categories. First, the Chronicles held by some libraries keeping volumes from this period. The list discussed here is not exhaustive because many of them are widely known, as there are copies in several American and European libraries, while some are already available online. Secondly, annotations on manuscripts that rest fundamentally in three libraries: the Biblioteca Nacional de México located in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia under the care of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia and the Biblioteca Palafoxiana located in the city of Puebla. At the end, due to the correlation of the sources mentioned, I will briefly mention the Dominican archives of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary of the Philippines in Avila.

Part of the collections of the Biblioteca Nacional de México and the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia were enriched with books from the former convents of Mexico City. In particular, the two Franciscan collections of these libraries were formed from the archives of the Convento Grande de San Francisco in Mexico City that was plundered during the liberal reform. These included the archives of the convent itself, the archives of the Province of the Holy Gospel (*Provincia del Santo Evangelio*)—the oldest in New Spain—and the archives of the Commissariat of New Spain. The violent way in which the friars were thrown out of the convent and their assets seized caused the order of the archives to be altered. The *Archivo Franciscano* of the Biblioteca Nacional de México (AF-BNM) is mostly made up of what was the archive of the Commissariat of New Spain and some parts of the Province of the Holy Gospel; the Franciscan historian Lino Gómez

noted that it probably passed into the hands of the bibliographer Joaquín García Icazbalceta whose son sold it in 1919 to the National Library, where it remains.²⁹

The *Fondo Franciscano* of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, which is preserved in the facilities of the Museo Nacional de Antropología, is formed mainly by the papers of the former archive of the Province of the Holy Gospel, some books of the Commissariat, and many documents referring to the Province of San Gregorio de Filipinas proceed precisely from it. Details are given below.³⁰ Only in the case of the Biblioteca Palafoxiana, is there an entirely historical collection in terms of its accumulation and conservation since it was part of the seminary of the Tlaxcala-Puebla diocese. This likely includes segments of the Episcopal chancellery because the notaries of some prelates located their office in the Seminary due to its proximity to the Episcopal Palace.³¹

THE CHRONICLES IN THE LIBRARIES

The presence in the conventual libraries and seminaries of the Viceroyalty of New Spain of the chronicles written by the different religious Orders in the Philippines are a testimony that the news of the progress and tragedies of the missionaries in the missions of China, Japan, Cochinchina, and other lands were part of what was read in the cloisters concerning the world. The universal vocation of Catholicism meant that for those involved in the spread of Christianity, the interpretation was always in perspective and in comparison, with what was happening in other “nations and kingdoms of the gentility.” The reading of these chronicles may have helped the friars instill in their novices the spirit of mission, not necessarily in Asia, and at the same time to obtain arguments in the constant quarrels between the different religious families. The friars of New Spain did not know Asia, but in their sermons and speeches they raised their brothers of habit to make an apology for their own family and to make polemic against the rivals. The Biblioteca Nacional de México, the Biblioteca Palafoxiana or the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia hold copies of the *Crónica de la provincia de San Gregorio* written by Friar Juan Francisco de San Antonio and printed in Manila or the *Compendio Histórico* written by Domingo Martínez and published in Madrid

²⁹ On the characteristics of this archival holding, see the Preliminary Study written by Friar Lino Gómez Canedo to the first part of the guide: Ignacio del Río, *Guía del Archivo Franciscano I* (México: UNAM, 1975), xiii–cxv.

³⁰ Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia [hereinafter BNAH]. On the origin, content and characteristics of this archival holding [hereinafter FF], see: Francisco Morales Valerio, *Inventario del Fondo Franciscano del Museo de Antropología e Historia de México*, (Washington, Academy of American Franciscan History, 1978. Vol. 1 and vol. 2 in 2008.

³¹ Jesús Joel Peña Espinosa, “Introducción”, in *Manuscritos de la Biblioteca Palafoxiana. Inventario general*, (México: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla / Fundación Mapfre / Adabi, 2004), 18–25.

in 1756, just to mention a couple of those accounts written by the Franciscan chroniclers. The same is true of a large number of the relations, chronicles and memorials of the Augustinians, Dominicans and Jesuit fathers, such as the Portuguese version of the *Relación de François de Rougemont*;³² in the library 'Elías Amador' of the city of Zacatecas there is a copy of *Maraviglie di Dio ne' suoi santi avventi nella nouva Christianità dell'Indie...*, by the Jesuit Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli in 1698.³³ Online availability of numerous works of this nature by some European libraries as well as through Google Books facilitates their access.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEXICO

There is some documentary evidence of Franciscan activities in Asia in the Biblioteca Nacional de México, most of it in the already mentioned *Archivo Franciscano* holding, but also in other holdings of the same library. For example, the request made by Friar Cristóbal de Salazar asking for a copy of a brief issued by Paul III in 1544 on the spiritual conquest of Siam, Cochinchina and China;³⁴ in the Lafragua collection of the same library there is a series of manuscripts of Dominicans and among them a *Breve relación de las cosas más admirables de la gran China* sent by the sergeant major Juan Silcara "taken from a letter given to him by Friar Juan Bautista de Nieto, Discalced Franciscan and apostolic missionary of China in 1705."³⁵ There are three letters sent by the Provincial Minister (*ministro provincial*) of San Gregorio to the general commissary between 1747 and 1749 reporting on the missions of China and Cochinchina;³⁶ another report with several letters from Friar Alejandro Ferrer,³⁷ Provincial Minister of the same province between 1753 and 1755. In addition, we find a couple of printed works related to the mission in Tibet, one dealing with the situation of those missions, written by the general procurator of the Capuchin nuns and published in 1744; and the other is a *Relación de la conquista espiritual del reino del gran Tíbet*, printed in Mexico City in 1745.³⁸ Precisely, the fact that these works were printed in Mexico demonstrates the permanent interest in New Spain for the situation of the

³² *Relaçam do estado Político o espiritual do imperio da China pellos annos de 1659 a 1666*, Portuguese translation of the Latin work written by Francisco Rogemont [François de Rougemont].

³³ The "Elías Amador" Public Library, located in the Mexican city of Zacatecas, was formed around 1832 with the libraries of the former Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit convents of that city.

³⁴ Biblioteca Nacional de México [BNM], *Archivo Franciscano* [AF], Caja 19, 398, fols. 1–3.

³⁵ BNM, Fondo Lafragua, Miscelánea, 613. Original citation: "[...] tomadas de una carta que le dio fray Juan Bautista de Nieto, franciscano descalzo y misionero apostólico de China en 1705".

³⁶ BNM, AF, Caja 61, 1200.8, fols. 1–9.

³⁷ Active in the middle of the eighteenth century, he lived through the English invasion of Manila and was able to safeguard the nuns of Santa Clara, of whose monastery he was vicar on several occasions. E. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 403.

³⁸ BNM, *Fondo Reservado: Breve relación de la prodigiosa y nueva conquista espiritual del reyno del Tíbet, y otros confinantes que ofrecen unirse al gremio de nuestra santa romana iglesia, por el apostolico celo de los misionarios capuchinos embiados a este fin por la sagrada congregación de propaganda fide* (Mexico: Imprenta de la viuda de Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1745).

Church in Asia; in 1765 a small account was printed on the actions of the Capuchins in the spiritual conquest of Tibet,³⁹ work of a supposed anonymous author, who was a priest, identified by David Lorenzen with Francisco de Ajofrín. Even Tibet, a region as strange as it was far away, was not entirely alien to certain sectors of New Spain.⁴⁰

PAPERS OF THE COMMISSARIAT OF NEW SPAIN

Among the papers of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (BNAH) that belonged to the Franciscan Commissariat of New Spain (*Comisaría Franciscana de la Nueva España*), are documents related to the Asian missions. I will provide some commentary and the context of the information that these sources convey on the subject.

The dynamic of communications and the need to get news and requests over such great distances allowed for a circulation of documentation that today can be used as a source for the history of the missionaries in the Asian missions. For example, the patent of Friar Alonso de Biedma communicating in 1701 his designation as vicar general of the Order, which was copied by the commissary of the New Spain and sent to Manila, is one of a kind in that it was returned with the receipts of acknowledgment on the part of the convents of the Province of San Gregorio—a document that additionally contains notes of some particular matters.⁴¹ A fundamental document is the Constitutions of the Province of San Gregorio written and approved by the provincial chapter of 1625, carried out in the convent of Manila, written in 36 pages, plus the version of the modifications made in 1672. By comparing both, we are able to analyze changes and continuities, but also compare how swiftly these instructions arrived, and their adoption or—if that were the case—refusal.⁴²

Also of interest are the instructions given by the General Commissary of the Indies in 1688 so that the election of the Visitors of the province of San Gregorio would be made among the friars born in the Philippines, dispositions about their actions, resolution of some differences and punishments for some friars residing in the convent of Manila.⁴³ Among the papers of the General Commissariat of New Spain, is a brief inventory of the archives of the province of the Philippines made in 1696 by order of the commissary Friar Manuel Monzaval, consisting of a couple of

³⁹ BNM, *Fondo Reservado: Carta familiar de un sacerdote, respuesta a un colegial amigo suyo, en que le da cuenta de la admirable conquista espiritual del vasto imperio del Gran Thibet, y la misión que los padres Capuchinos tienen allí, con sus singulares progressos hasta el presente [...] (Mexico: Imprenta nueva de la Bibliotheca Mexicana, 1765).*

⁴⁰ On the interest of Tibet for New Spain, see: David N. Lorenzen, "La misión del Tíbet en Nueva España: las limosnas y el cobro del legado de Spínola," *Historia Mexicana* 250, no. 2 (2013): 591–643. The author mainly uses material from the Propaganda Fide Archives (Rome).

⁴¹ BNAH, FF, vol. 120, fols. 56–63.

⁴² BNAH, FF, vol. 130, fols. 238–75.

⁴³ BNAH, FF, vol. 116, fols. 156–59.

pages noting the documents dispatched for the province of San Gregorio.⁴⁴ This may allow future research on the identification of patents, the volume of correspondence, and possible archival holdings where they may yet exist. Among these instructions is the list of offices of the province of San Gregorio, elaborated in 1698.⁴⁵

An internal conflict in matters of discipline concerning the observance of poverty and the relationship with civil power in the Philippines, raised in 1714 by the Vicar Provincial, Friar Pedro Arias de Vinagre, and fought on this point against the jurisdiction of the Visitor Commissary, generated a description in the documents pertaining to the dispositions adopted by the Visitors from 1686 to 1714. The quarrel was harsh and Friar Juan de Valtierra threatened Father Arias with excommunication for his refusal to attend the definitory.⁴⁶ The opinions of several friars are included in the case file sent to the commissariat of Mexico.⁴⁷ An example of the relations of support that sometimes existed between both disalced provinces are the requests of friars to increase the missionaries in the Philippines and the projects in other territories of the continent. In February of 1732 by means of a patent, Friar José de Herizae warned that Friar José de Santaella had requested friars for the province of the Philippines,⁴⁸ after their expulsion from China occurred in 1724.⁴⁹ According to the letter that the commissary in New Spain sent to the provincial of San Diego in June of 1728, the requirement of novo-Hispanic personnel to support the Filipinos was made explicit.⁵⁰ In 1723, two friars from the province of the Holy Gospel were asked to go to Manila to support the collection of alms for the Holy Land.⁵¹

New reports arrived in Mexico in 1760 with news about the failed visit of Father de la Selva and the explorations of the religious from Cochinchina to Cambodia, as well as regarding persecutions.⁵² In May 1764, commissary Friar Manuel Nájera received from Manila a notice in New Spain from Friar Roque de la Purificación⁵³ giving an account of the capture of Manila by the English navy in 1762 and the state of the missions in China.⁵⁴ In the disorder caused by the English incursion,

⁴⁴ BNAH, FF, vol. 39, fols. 91–93.

⁴⁵ BNAH, FF, vol. 98, fols. 194–95.

⁴⁶ Fr. Juan de Valtierra professed in the Province of San Diego, then joined the Province of San Gregorio; he was active during the first third of the eighteenth century. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 310.

⁴⁷ BNAH, FF, vol. 118, fols. 217–36.

⁴⁸ Fr. José de Santaella, active in the first half of the eighteenth century, held various positions in the Philippine province and in Madrid. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 400.

⁴⁹ BNAH, FF, vol. 64, fols. 65–66.

⁵⁰ BNAH, FF, vol. 121, fols. 138.

⁵¹ BNAH, FF, vol. 146, fols. 59–60.

⁵² BNAH, FF, vol. 145, fols. 307–9.

⁵³ Roque de la Purificación, a professed religious in the Province of St. Joseph, active in the eighteenth century, worked for almost half a century in the Philippine province and was the provincial minister when the British took Manila. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 438.

⁵⁴ BNAH, FF, vol. 130, fols. 209–15.

some friars were denounced for illicit activities and undignified behavior during the occupation.

A case file is preserved with a little more than 300 pages with reports, litigations, petitions, and communiqués that occurred between 1762 and 1766. Among the papers that arrived with the fleet included reports and accounts of the difficulties of making the list of offices, the rotations of friars by the different monasteries, and the fire of the mission of Kalumpong.⁵⁵ In this epistolary relation, there are also lists of the official correspondence received from the commissariat of New Spain between 1761 and 1767. Of special importance is a catalogue of friars that had arrived to the province of San Gregorio around 1765, containing a list organized according to the missions, provinces, and each one's graduations and age.⁵⁶ This case file also includes documents containing accusations of some friars against those coming from the province of Alcántara—in Granada—who were brought to the lands by the Visitor Friar Francisco de Migenes⁵⁷ from the commissary of New Spain, as well as some arguments with said Commissary General. One of the most difficult points was the refusal by the friars of the Philippines to receive friars of the Observance, about which the Visitor Migenes complained at length to Friar Manuel de Nájera, general commissary of New Spain. Meanwhile, those of the opposite party pointed out that an excess of the Discalced friars had been caused in the province, resulting in attitudes of resistance. Therefore, they were accused of pretending to be independent from the general commissariat of New Spain. The content of this correspondence shows the strong tensions that existed in the Province of San Gregorio on the occasion of the visit of Migenes, while also revealing that behind the issue were dynamics and customs adopted by the friars in the Philippines that escaped the control of the commissariat of New Spain and to a great extent the prevalence of the Creoles, replicating a controversy that had reached intense levels of discussion in New Spain and had been solved by means of the “ternativa”.⁵⁸ The dispute was ended, thanks to the intervention of the Dominican Fathers of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary, without the full satisfaction of the Visitor, according to the minutes of composition and agreement between the parties signed in Manila on February 8, 1767. The bulky documentation reveals the innumerable problems, the influence of external agents in the internal life of the Order, such as the case of the *oidor* (judge) of

⁵⁵ BNAH, FF, vol. 130, fols. 209–21.

⁵⁶ BNAH, FF, vol. 130, fols. 209–21.

⁵⁷ Fr. Francisco de Migenes was born in Granada. He traveled from Manila to Spain in 1760 and obtained the commission of the Visit, his performance was so unfortunate that he returned to New Spain and joined the Observants to the Province of the Holy Gospel. E. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 473.

⁵⁸ The dispute over the election of the ministers and priors provincial of the mendicant friars in New Spain became more acute due to prevailing presence of Europeans to such offices, despite the fact that most of the friars were Creoles. The Franciscan solution consisted of the “ternativa”: every three years, they would alternately elect a friar born in the Iberian Peninsula, then another one born in New Spain and yet another election should elect a peninsula-born friar that had professed in New Spain and had spent a large part of his life here. The Dominicans and Augustinians only applied the “alternativa”, which consisted of electing a Peninsular and then a Creole, then another Peninsular who was to be succeeded by one born in New Spain, and so on in succession.

Manila, Simón de Anda y Salazar. Furthermore, the complaints of the friars with respect to the Provincial attest to the parties that divided the province and to the intrigues that permeated it.

There are other documents that refer to specific matters such as the confiscation and destruction in 1742 of a book entitled *Defiéndese el defensorio de la Provincia de San Gregorio*, written by Friar Pedro de Jesús, *custodio* of the Philippines.⁵⁹ Likewise, another book that caused conflict is referred in the aforementioned correspondence, specifically the publication of the work *El devoto de San Francisco*—alluded to in a complaint by an *oidor* of the Audiencia of Manila—in which, according to the Visitor, the authority of the Audiencia was insulted.

POOR CLARES OF MANILA

The Poor Clare monastery in Manila is yet another institution for which references exist in this archive. For example, the permission granted by the commissioner Friar Diego de Otorala in February of 1621 so that the nuns of the monastery of Santa Clara observed the first rule of the Poor Clares; soon after, in June of 1624, Friar Juan Venido, general commissioner of the Indies, by means of a patent dated in Madrid, confirmed the observance of the constitutions and asked the Poor Clares to maintain the house where their first foundation was located—an instruction that was reiterated by the commissioner in New Spain in 1628. The general commissioner of the Indies had indicated a year before that the nuns of the convent of the Immaculate Conception of Manila were subject to the authority of the Provincial of San Gregorio, but who had no faculty to name the abbess. The distance easily generated irregularities, and in 1674 the commissioner of New Spain instructed the provincial of San Gregorio to annul the *tablas de régimen*⁶⁰ that the definitory of the said province had made for the monastery reiterating the disposition that they kept the old rule, with the customs and usual ceremonies—that after the nuns had complained about the intrusions of clergymen and vicars in matters of their government, an issue which they addressed by preparing and presenting memorials and depositions.⁶¹

⁵⁹ BNAH, FF, vol. 121, fol. 58.

⁶⁰ The *tablas de régimen* or *tablas de oficio* were the dispositions in matters of divine cult. They established the days for masses, processions, feasts, fasts, etc. They were put in writing and placed at the entrance to the choir. They were written down and placed at the entrance to the choir. They were prepared according to what was foreseen in the Rule, the Constitutions, the authorities of the Order and the agreements of each monastery. They were also known as *Directorio*.

⁶¹ BNAH, FF, vol. 100, fols. 58–72. [2218] [2228–31]

THE PALAFOXIANA LIBRARY

In the Palafoxiana Library, in addition to the chronicles and other printed works are some manuscripts concerning Franciscan missions in Asia. These papers are part of the correspondence addressed to Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, one of the most notable prelates of the bishopric of Tlaxcala-Puebla during the colonial era, whose episcopal government took place between 1676 and 1699. The prestige enjoyed by this bishop of Puebla placed him in contact with diverse personalities of the Hispanic world, with whom he maintained correspondence, exchange of ideas, information, and opinions. His predecessor, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, had already maintained contact with some agents of the missions in Asia and was involved in the matter of the controversy over the Chinese rites. He even conversed at length with the Dominican Friar Juan Bautista de Morales when he passed through New Spain, and from there he formed an adverse idea about the strategy of the Jesuits regarding the matter of the rites and compared them with the Franciscans as an example of true missionary zeal.⁶² It is not superfluous to remember that Father Morales was a companion of the Franciscan Friar Antonio de Santa María Caballero in the 1633 journey that once again placed the mendicants in Asian continental territory.⁶³

Don Manuel Fernández had a genuine and wide interest in all issues concerning the Church in Asia, whether regarding the presence of the Spaniards or the Portuguese.⁶⁴ The traveler Gemelli Careri noted in his work that when he met with the bishop they had a long conversation about the Empire of China.⁶⁵ The manuscripts that are in the Palafoxiana Library, not only reveal that the Franciscans of the Province of San Gregorio communicated their matters to him; but that the archbishop of Manila, Friar Felipe Pardo and the auxiliary bishop, Don Ginés Barrientos also did the same: the former to give him details of his conflicts with the Cathedral Chapter, the latter to send him a report on the situation of the archdiocese. In 1687, the Augustinian Friar Diego de Aguilar, bishop of Cebu, also wrote to him, informing him particularly of the judicial conflicts of Archbishop Pardo with the Royal *Audiencia* and with the Jesuits.⁶⁶ Aguilar added a canonical dissertation on the apprehension and banishment of the Philippine Primate and his jurisdiction. Don Manuel Fernández had previously received in 1683 the account prepared for him by the Dominican Friar Cristóbal de Pedroche, Prior of the

⁶² Eva María St. Clair Asegurado, "El obispo Palafox y la cuestión de los ritos chinos en el proceso de extinción de la Compañía de Jesús," *Studia Historica Historia Moderna* 22, (2000): 145–70.

⁶³ One of the most outstanding missionaries of the second third of the seventeenth century, he developed an intense activity in China and maintained permanent communication with Manila. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 216–218.

⁶⁴ On the interest of the Bishop of Puebla in Portuguese authors, see: Jesús Joel Peña Espinosa, "Autores portugueses del siglo XVII para un obispo de Nueva España," *Lusitania Sacra*, Tomo 25 (enero-junio 2012): 33–51.

⁶⁵ Gemelli Careri, *Viaje a la Nueva España*, bk. 3, ch. 1.

⁶⁶ On the conflict of the archbishops of Manila with the Jesuits over the Indian doctrines, see: Alexandre Coello de la Rosa, "Los conflictos jurisdiccionales entre los arzobispos de Manila y los jesuitas por las doctrinas de indios (siglos xvi al xviii)," *Boletín Americanista* 67 (2013): 105–24.

hospital of San Gabriel in Manila, and the pressure that the Audiencia exerted on the Franciscans and the Dominicans in such a scandal.

There is a copy of a treatise that was sent to him by the Franciscans, of which at least another copy sent to Spain still exists in another repository, published a century ago by Friar Otto Maas.⁶⁷ The document consists of two parts, one under the title of *Relacion de el permiso que se dio a nuestra santa ley en el Imperio de China a 22 de Marzo de 1692*. It consists of six folios written on both sides. The copy contains the transfer of the signature of Friar Agustín de San Pascual and gives news of the Edict of Tolerance promulgated in 1692 that allowed public preaching, construction of churches and conversions to Christianity. The second part, which coincides with a letter also published by Friar Otto Maas, is entitled *Descripcion de las casas y iglesias, que la Mission serafica de Nuestro Padre San Francisco tiene el presente año de 1695 en este Imperio de China. De los Religiosos que tiene, y frutos que haze. Por orden de nuestro hermano Fray Jaime Tarin Comisario Provincial de la Mission*. The whole document was drawn up by Friar Bernardino de las Llagas, secretary, under the instruction of the Commissary Visitor, Father Friar Jaime Tarín,⁶⁸ whose autograph signature is on the manuscript, and the date is fixed in Canton on October 28, 1695.⁶⁹ This second part sometimes differs from the one published by Maas in the second series of the *Cartas de China*, whose original is located in the Archives of Pastrana.

It is not a simple copy that fortuitously arrived in Puebla. This handwritten copy was sent on purpose to Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz because the treatise is accompanied by a letter signed by Friar Juan de Jesus, in the convent of Manila in 1696, probably on January 20, shortly before shipping it on the vessel destined to traverse the Pacific Ocean from the Philippines to New Spain. The friars noted that he was a fellow disciple of Friar Francisco de Santa Inés, one of the chroniclers of this province. In the letter the bishop is asked for help for the missions in China; in particular he requests two things: that the clergymen of New Spain send pictures with paintings of the Virgin Mary “of such a Majesty that only with her sight she will charm those Gentiles”; with this purpose in mind he provides the measurements preferring that they be of half body, but if they are of full body that they be “very honest, the dress well-adjusted to the neck, the hair tied up and with headdress, without the feet being seen, and all should have the Child with a dress or a transparent tunic and it does not matter if the bare feet can be seen. But everything [regarding the images] should be of very nice features, because the Chinese are very faint-hearted and dislike too much seriousness.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Otto Maas, *Cartas de China (segunda serie). Documentos inéditos sobre misiones de los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Seville: Antigua Casa de Izquierdo: 1917).

⁶⁸ The missionary Jaime Tarin worked in China from 1672 to 1719, where he adopted the name Lin-Siang-Kung. He wrote several works, including a method of evangelization. Gómez Platero, *Catálogo biográfico*, 299.

⁶⁹ Biblioteca Palafoxiana, *Cartas varias*, no. 32386, exp. 5.

⁷⁰ Biblioteca Palafoxiana, *Cartas varias*, no. 32386, exp. 5, Carta de fray Juan de Jesús al obispo Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, Manila, [January] 20, 1696.

The other petition pertaining the need of ornaments and liturgical trousseau: corporals, albs, amyttres, purificators, for which he requests the help of the nuns' monasteries. The friar insists on the need of economic aid for the missions of Asia by the Church in the New World. As an example, he refers to how tragic it was that the ships that sailed to the Philippines in 1693 and in 1694 had not returned, the latter being the biggest vessel that had been built, shipwrecking with 320 people and almost two million pesos in commodities; for that reason they ask the "peruleros and Mexicans" to take pity on those lands, because they could be decently conserved with only 100 pesos of annual contribution for each church. He underlines that in China they rapidly become poor, because the rich Chinese "idolize money and say that we are going to China to satisfy our hunger because there is nothing to eat in Europe, as they say that we are going to look for souls in China to take to Europe."⁷¹

In the last rows of his letter, the friar affirmed that he did not have anyone else to turn to in New Spain other than the Bishop of Puebla. He had met Don Manuel Fernández in 1678 when he passed through the viceroyalty, coming from the Iberian Peninsula and on his way to the Philippines. They met on two occasions: one at the initiative of the Franciscan himself and the other at the invitation of the bishop to talk about the city of Segovia, where the friar came from. In the letter he confesses to the bishop that he had sent the report twice, but that the vessels carrying it shipwrecked on both occasions and clarifies that he also sent copies to Spain. This missive reveals the missing parts of this correspondence, since he adds in his text that he sent the edict of tolerance written in Chinese characters and a map. Friar Juan de Jesús also mentioned that the Chinese writing consists of more than three thousand signs and made some brief comments on that language.⁷² With this, it can be affirmed that the Spanish Franciscans of the missions in China sought the mediation of the prelate of Puebla so that the clergymen of the viceroyalty would come to the support of the Church in Asia.

Summarizing the report sent to Bishop Santa Cruz, the first part narrates the attitude of the emperor towards the Discalced Franciscans; then the background of the prohibition dictated in 1668; finally, it relates a series of events, from the repression against the Christians to the edict of tolerance. He then adds a brief description of the five provinces as announced in the title.

⁷¹ Biblioteca Palafoxiana, *Cartas varias*, no. 32386, exp. 5, "Descripción de las casas y iglesias que la misión serafica [...] tiene el presente año de 1695 en este Imperio de la China...", undersigned by Fr. Jaime Tarín, Provincial Commissary, Manila, October 28, 1695.

⁷² Pascale Girard, "Estos nominativos no son concertados. Los religiosos y la lengua china. Miradas cruzadas de dos misioneros en China, Matteo Ricci y Pedro de la Piñuela (siglos XVI-XVIII)," *Relaciones*, (verano 2012): 43-76.

SOME REPORTS IN THE DOMINICAN ARCHIVES OF AVILA

With regard to the letters transcribed and published by the Franciscan Otto Mass in 1917, I would like to take this opportunity to refer to a copy of the report made by Father Antonio de Santa María Caballero, concerning his voyage from Manila to China, in the company of the Dominican Friar Juan Bautista de Morales. According to Maas, Father Civezza in his *Saggio de bibliografía sanfrancescana* affirmed that the fathers of Manila had sent him the original manuscript, an undated and unsigned account that consisted of nine pages;⁷³ there is a copy of this same text with some variations in the Archive of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary of the Philippines, dated October 21, 1649. It consists of 19 pages in 10 folios and 21 numbered chapters. Immediately there is another shorter copy, which seems to be a fragment. There are some differences between both versions because some data and curious details of that original voyage were added in the manuscript of Avila.

CONCLUSION

The historical reality of the interrelationship between the friars, either those who were subjects of the Crown of Castile or of Portugal, demands a greater dialogue with Portuguese historiography when analyzing the role of New Spain and the Philippine connection in the Christianization projects in Asia. It is clear that there were numerous moments of collaboration and conflict that require a more complex explanation. The Mexican archives are likely to hold important material on the Franciscan missionary action in Asia, as some studies have already evidenced. We now require an effort to move beyond the Castilian context and consider it in a broader perspective.

In this article, we specifically mentioned three collections. However, it is certain that in the other libraries of ancient funds, the archives of the colleges of Propaganda Fide and other repositories, hold documents referring to the subject of this article and to the actions of the other religious families. For the moment, the documents of the archive of the commissariat in New Spain deposited in the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia are of interest because they provide information not only on the Philippines, but also on the Franciscan activities in continental Asia. I believe they can complement the data of the friars sent under the Portuguese patronage, and can also help understand the perception of New Spain with respect to evangelization in Asia.

The structures of the religious Orders, as in the case of the Province of San Gregorio of the Discalced Franciscans, is not only a way to revisit the collections of New Spain, but also provides an opportunity to think about the personal

⁷³ Otto Maas, *Cartas de China. Documentos inéditos sobre misiones de los siglos XVII* (Seville: Est. Tip. de Santigosa: 1917), 28n1.

relationships among friars, among bishops, among lay people, as well as to keep in mind how much interest in the missions of Asia in New Spain came to generate. Therefore, it is still necessary to identify those sources that inform us about individual and daily perceptions—in crossing the ocean to build an image of otherness in the world of the first globalization. The case of Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz also leads us to reflect on those still unidentified networks between Hispanic American clergymen and missionary agents in Asia, relationships based on economic and intellectual interests and even kinship relations. There is still a wide sea of papers to explore.