

December 2022

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Recommended Citation

Frei, Elisa (2022) "Minds and Hearts and Digital Data. Collaborative Learning With Jesuit Manuscripts & Databases," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53309/2164-7666.1413>

Available at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol11/iss2/13>

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Minds and Hearts and Digital Data: Collaborative Learning with Jesuit Manuscripts and Databases

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Abstract

In a conversation with Emanuele Colombo, John O'Malley explained his historical method in eight points. In describing them, he noticed how “sources are mute” and how “to make them speak I must ask them questions,”¹ that “the continuities are stronger and deeper than the discontinuities,”² and “if I really understand what is going on, I can explain it to an intelligent ten-year-old.”³ This article presents the strategies and outcomes of a public history project that carries on John O'Malley's legacy, involving Jesuit sources of the early modern period and non-professional historians who had never studied the history of the Society of Jesus.⁴

The *Digital Indipetae Database (DID)* is being developed by the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies (IAJS) at Boston College in collaboration with the Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) in Rome.⁵ The *DID* project develops students' awareness of early modern manuscripts, demonstrates how history can be studied using primary sources, and shows how students' work can contribute to digital repositories of Jesuit sources.

In the last few years, the *DID* has involved dozens of students from universities in Europe and the Americas, whose activities are used here as case studies. The students are assigned *Litterae indipetae*, which are petitions written by Jesuits who wanted to be sent on overseas missions,⁶ and have to transcribe them: this means that they must accurately and entirely copy (in Microsoft Word) the documents, without changing the words to their modern spellings or translating them. The only interventions in the original text allowed are the expansions of abbreviated words, with the letters added in italics. This way, every user of the *DID* will know which letters appear in the original document and which were added by the transcribers. In doing this kind of activity, students have the chance to develop paleographic, philological, and historical skills. Moreover, this project tries to realize what O'Malley recognizes as something that no book can easily teach: “to empathize with and understand a culture not one's

own, whether those were cultures of the sixteenth or of the twentieth century.”⁷

As O'Malley noted, “history is the story of human experiences” and “emphasizing the relationship between the past and the present” is fundamental.⁸ There is no better source than ego documents—letters, diaries, autobiographical accounts—for non-historians to dive into history. *Litterae indipetae* are mostly written in clear handwriting and they come in a variety of languages, so it is very likely students will find one they are able to understand. With a direct reading of *Indipetae*, the human experience of these early Jesuits comes alive through their own words. It is necessary, however, not to be too ingenuous in the interpretation of this fascinating source. The present essay also reflects on the most common mistakes and misunderstandings that such projects inevitably involve, such as applying our interpretative methodology to documents written in a very different context, especially those penned from a spiritual point of view.

Introduction to the *Digital Indipetae Database Project*

From the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Jesuits wrote directly to superiors general of the Society of Jesus to request missionary assignments abroad. As a whole, these petitions have become known as the *Litterae indipetae*, which comes from the Latin *Indiam petens*, meaning “asking for the

Indies.” The term “Indies” was understood to include both Asia and the Americas. The Roman archives of the Society of Jesus hold over 25,000 *Indipetae* letters written by European Jesuits before the suppression of the order in 1773 and after its restoration in 1814.⁹

The *Digital Indipetae Database* aims to publish online, in an open access and critical edition, the whole *corpus* of petitions for the Indies. Borne of an idea of Professor Emanuele Colombo (DePaul University, Chicago), this digital database is being developed by the IAJS at Boston College in collaboration with the Jesuit archive in Rome. From 2019 on, the *DID* has been collecting transcriptions in ever greater numbers thanks to hundreds of collaborators from all over the world. This public history project would never have been possible without students, researchers, teachers, and professors who have been enthusiastically contributing to it and keeping it alive. One of the fundamental aspects of this project is its inclusivity; working with the *DID* puts into execution O’Malley’s wish: history should not be just for “authorized personnel,” and “we professional historians should not leave reaching a popular audience to non-professionals.”¹⁰

All the projects described in this article took place under my supervision and coordination as a project assistant of the *DID*. The focus of this article is collaboration with higher education institutions, but the high school *Indipetae* projects have proved to be very successful as well, as more than 500 secondary school students have been involved thus far.¹¹ Schools and universities showed a growing interest in the project during the lockdown periods of 2020–22, because it is very versatile and also works well online. The collaboration starts with an opening class on the history of early modern missions. It follows an introductory class on paleography and early modern documents, and then a collective activity (a sort of “oral transcription”) in which students try to read what they see on the screen, and their classmates participate by helping them. At the beginning, the examples are easy in order to keep students from being discouraged, but they are challenging nonetheless and the participation of more students increases competitiveness. After everyone has understood the content, students learn the criteria of the edition adopted for the

DID. Each student receives a group of letters written by the same Jesuit. Because the sources are quite long and complex, publishing a critical edition of *Litterae indipetae* in print is unimaginable. But similar results can be easily imagined online in a fully searchable database where anybody anywhere can access multiple kinds of data. Moreover, an online database is the only way to manage such a large number of documents.

When the project ends, every student will have become the “authority” on their transcriptions, and the *Indipetae* will appear online with their initials. This makes the students feel like they are real historians in the context of this project, the best experts on “their own” Jesuit: his life, requests, and destiny. Students like to see their work recognized and are proud of the results: at the beginning they see a letter they perhaps cannot make sense of, and by the end of the process the document is entirely transcribed and ready for scholars from all over the world to access.

Only at the end of this process is the transcription published in the database. The main aim of the *DID* project is of course to have the entire *Indipetae* collection online, but this work inspires different results as well. For instance, one high school student created an e-book on what she learned during the project containing the transcriptions and her personal research on the topic, including images, events, links, and clickable items. Other students recorded short videos and interviews, talking about the archival experience or the similarities they saw in the lives and aspirations of the Jesuits assigned to them. It is not easy to have students “visit the historian’s lab,” and it is even more difficult to allow them to act as one. The *DID* projects, true to O’Malley’s spirit, use primary sources and treat historical subjects—namely Jesuits of the early modern period who wanted to leave for the most remote and exotic missions—as human beings. These side projects are often the only chance for students to engage with historical sources, and are a very different way of doing history. Unfortunately, for many of them this subject is nothing more than just the passive learning of facts and dates. For historians, this is a precious chance to change their minds, to plant the seeds of historical curiosity into the hearts of new generations, and to follow

O'Malley's footsteps in making history available (and interesting) to non-professionals.

Higher Education Case Studies

This section reports some of the most productive experiences with *Litterae indipetae* and academic institutions.¹² All of the university students involved up to now have been undergraduates and were not experts on Jesuits; in fact, some had no prior knowledge of the Society of Jesus. As O'Malley noticed, undergraduates can be “livelier, more honest, and they usually do not pretend they know. They tell you when they don't get it.”¹³ This was certainly the case for the *DID* project.

In 2020, Prof. Sabina Pavone started a Digital History Lab at the University of Macerata, available to students of Cultural Heritage and History.¹⁴ This course was a success because it took advantage of the pandemic situation, which forced both students and professors to work remotely, and studying *Indipetae* gives students the extraordinary opportunity to act as if they were in actual archives. The first two classes were introductory, with the project assistants giving an introduction on *Litterae indipetae* in general, and on transcription methodology for this particular database. Each student received a group of *Indipetae* written by the same Jesuit, and at the end of the course sent the professor the transcriptions once they were revised by the project assistants. This allowed students to work directly on the biographies of the early modern religious: they “dug up” all the data they could on them (becoming familiar with repertoires, books, and other online databases) and ultimately composed a short essay on their assigned Jesuit, effectively working as real historians.

Professor Miriam Turrini of the University of Pavia has always showed an interest in *Indipetae* and Jesuit vocations.¹⁵ Students who choose her as a supervisor for their dissertations are given the chance to work on *Indipetae*, with a tailored group of letters based on their interests and on the gaps that still exist on this topic. One of her students, Donatella Oliani, wrote her dissertation based on a dozen of *Litterae indipetae* sent by six different Jesuits, all of whom were members of the Neapolitan Mastrilli family during the 17th century.¹⁶ The most famous member of this family

was Marcello, who was the only petitioner who became a missionary and who died as a martyr in Japan in 1637.¹⁷ Another student, Chiara Bombeccari, transcribed the *Indipetae* of three early modern period petitioners who applied ‘successfully’—that is, obtained permission to leave for the longed-for East Indies.¹⁸ The three southern Italians were Giuseppe Chiara, who died as a martyr in Japan in 1685, Girolamo Gravina, who passed away in China in 1662, and Stanislao Malpica, who worked in Goa until 1675. Through this selection, the student had the unusual opportunity to study the history of the missionary longing for Asia that three Jesuits had and fulfilled.¹⁹

The *DID* can assist in the teaching of multiple subjects, not only history but also languages. Many *Indipetae* are written in Latin, thus the collaboration with the Institute of Classical Philology at the University of Poznań, Poland, is particularly important. Prof. Monika Miazek-Męczyńska started studying *Indipetae* written from the Jesuit Polish province for her own research a few years ago. As soon as the *DID* was launched, she continued transcribing and revising *Indipetae* originally from her geographic area, which she periodically submits to enrich the *DID* resources. At the University of Toronto, Prof. Andreas Motsch is working with his graduate assistants on Latin and French *Indipetae*, focusing especially on early modern Jesuits who left Europe for New France. Not only Jesuits from the French territories, but also Jesuits from northwestern Italy in the nineteenth century, sometimes used French to communicate with the generals. The *DID* published most of the post-restoration (1814) *Indipetae*. This gave Thomas Santa Maria of Yale the opportunity to propose to his students accessory work on *Indipetae* that had not been done until that point: translation.

The Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World of the University of Padua promoted an internship in collaboration with the *DID* starting in 2020.²⁰ The coordinator is Prof. Lucio Biasiori, and the collaborators are students who are required to complete an internship to obtain a Master's in Mobility Studies. These interns are not aspiring historians—they come from heterogeneous backgrounds (information science, geography, cultural

integration studies), are international students, and often do not understand Italian. They are interested in migration and digital tools so for them, the *DID* is a way to collect and digitize multiple pieces of information through a crowdsourcing project and integrate them with metadata with a very concrete outcome. The *DID* is a digital humanities model from which they can learn and is useful for their future careers, as internships should be. All of these outcomes show on the one hand how the *DID* can be employed in very different ways according to the interests of those who consult it, and on the other how each of these projects has contributed to making the database a better resource for future scholarship.

Teaching with the *Indipetae*: Challenges and Opportunities

It is worth noting the challenges we encountered in the first few years of this project and the solutions we identified to make it more accessible for students.²¹ Even before approaching the documents, it is not to be taken for granted that students know what the Society of Jesus is and, more generally, how a Catholic religious order works. University courses on early modern history cannot ignore the topic: “Jesuits were into everything,” as O’Malley ironically noticed.²² Sometimes, historiography focuses on them so much that ‘Jesuitism’ almost becomes a religion of its own, disconnected from the other religious orders and most of all from Rome. It is not easy for students today to understand why petitioners for the Indies begged not the pope, but the superior general for the opportunity to go. Also, from a political point of view, it is not clear why Jesuits did not appeal to the authorities of the countries they wanted to be sent to, such as the Portuguese and Spanish kings. There is also the question of what opportunities there might have been for Jesuits from German countries, which had no overseas empires or colonies during the early modern period. The introductory classes, the Q&A sections with the speakers, and the bibliography we share with students always try to fill these general knowledge gaps.

The sources themselves are challenging even for experienced historians; for those who see them for the first time it can be even harder. The main, most predictable problem comes with the practical

difficulties in reading all the different kinds of handwriting. The best way to minimize this obstacle is the solution we usually practice: assign groups of *Indipetae* written by the same Jesuit, to help acquaint the student with his style from a graphical, but also grammatical and linguistic, point of view.²³

Another way of dealing with this issue is to divide groups of letters based on the difficulty of their handwriting and/or their length. This method is very successful, because many *Indipetae* are easy to read, short, and clear. Assigning these letters to the students who are struggling allows them to make a decent contribution to the *DID* without disadvantaging the students themselves. It is, however, very time consuming for those who assign the letters since it requires checking the handwriting and attributing levels of difficulty and length on a scale from 1 to 5. For a small number of letter groups, it can be easily done, but for the hundreds of students with whom we are collaborating, it becomes practically impossible. Secondly, teachers and professors also have to spend time on this, classifying their students based on their zeal and skills.

Even if the handwriting of the documents does not constitute a problem, another common issue is the interpretation of their content. Most of the students transcribe letters written in their own language: we have assigned Italian letters to Italian students, and so on. However, the vernacular of the fifteenth century is very different from today, which is why we decided to devote some introductory classes to the changes in language in general, and to the language of Ignatian spirituality in particular—for instance, as studied by Prof. Guido Mongini of the University of Padua.²⁴

Indipetae can also be written in a students’ non-native languages, such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, or Latin. The best advice in these cases is to keep an open mind and try not to mentally translate word for word, but to understand the content in general. In the case of Latin *Indipetae*, moreover, there is an added richness because students can experience it as a living language. Jesuits of their age were studying Latin as they do, and their *Indipetae* are fascinating letters in which they expose their dreams, fears, and passions. These documents do not speak

about the habitual topics of Latin translation tests like war, epics, and oratory. Many students particularly appreciated this opportunity.

Aside from the linguistic aspect, as O'Malley noticed, there is another difficulty, or at least a possibility for misleading and “dangerous” interpretations of antiquarian documents.²⁵ This is particularly true in the case of *Indipetae*, which are so enthralling because people talk about themselves in a very intimate way. The risk is going too far in “emphasizing the relationship between the past and the present,” and whoever analyzes these sources must be “very austere ... in that regard,” always “careful not to force this connection with the present.”²⁶

If a skilled historian like O'Malley experienced the ‘temptation’ of “trying to make Giles, a sixteenth-century thinker, answer twentieth-century questions,”²⁷ it is easy to understand the questions twenty-year-old students have tried to answer through an anachronistic interpretation of *Indipetae*. One student asked why Jesuits who really wanted to leave did not simply buy a ticket for Japan; another wondered why aspiring missionaries were convinced their religion was “better” than the one the indigenous population was already practicing; another puzzled over how they could face a journey without being able not only to see, but in general to communicate, with their parents and friends anymore. It is not easy to obtain the “radical shift” wished for by O'Malley—to “climb into the mind” of a person of the past, trying to look not for answers, but for his own questions. It is however a worthwhile effort, because it brings both the historians and the students out of their familiar environments, perspectives, and ways of thinking.

There is another thing scholars experience very often: the solitary, frustrating, difficult condition of those who research and in general do intellectual work. Experience has taught us that this can be solved in an easy and productive way by promoting collaborative teaching and learning modalities. In some cases, we propose that students work on the same document together, one transcribing it, and another revising the draft. This kept their spirits high, strengthened their scholastic relationships, and radically improved the quality of the transcriptions.

Finally, one aspect we always underline is the age affinity between students and the petitioners. Even if youth is a very subjective and historically constructed term, it is undeniable that the desire for finding one's way in life—sometimes even changing environments, friends, and horizons—associates petitioners for the Indies with university students of our time. Moreover, sending *Indipetae* is extraordinarily similar to submitting job applications and *curricula vitae*. Especially in the years when the superiors general issued instructions on “how to apply,” we see great uniformity of content and structure in *Indipetae*. For instance, all applications written during the 1720s meticulously contained the information requested by general Michelangelo Tamburini (1706–30) in his circular letter *About Sending New Workers to the Indies*:²⁸ age, health condition, time spent in the Society of Jesus, and performed tasks. With these very concrete characteristics, students of the 2020s who are looking for their dream job do not find it very hard to compare themselves with young men of four centuries before.

Conclusions

The experiences of the first years of the *DID* project demonstrated its extraordinary potentialities. First of all, it helped to develop students' awareness of early modern manuscripts while explaining the most recent approaches to digital humanities. Secondly, it has shown how history can be studied from a different perspective, not only from a textbook or a lecture, but actively and through primary sources written in the past. Finally, the most evident outcomes are the thousands of *Indipetae* that the *DID* now possesses, entirely transcribed and digitized.

On the latter point, one may think that this requires less work for the project assistants of the *DID*; indeed, it is the opposite. In addition to the time spent on all of the introductory classes on early modern missions and paleography, the preparation work for every class that joins the project is time consuming. First of all, it is necessary to create groups of letters written by the same Jesuit. Then, sometimes the reading difficulty of a specific handwriting must be evaluated. Finally, revising transcriptions requires more attention than transcribing *ex novo*; indeed,

revising someone else's transcription is harder because the reading is inadvertently misled by the interpretation of the non-professional paleographer, so one has to be twice as careful. In the end, therefore, it is not less work but more. Challenges notwithstanding, this is the best way to give a wider scope and impact to this project and its collaborators while bringing Jesuit studies into the public sphere, outside of a closed academic circle.

As for the second point, there is no doubt that students have appreciated the project. They were given anonymous questionnaires to fill out, dealing with different topics, asking what they liked about the method, whether they found it difficult, what they appreciated of the content, which memories this experience would leave them with, and so on. What they particularly appreciated was the freedom of not being forced to do a certain number of letters according to a precise schedule set by the instructor. This has been fundamental to keeping them working unconstrained and with passion. It is for this same reason that their works were not graded; the important thing was for them to do the best they could.

It was also important to give a personal reply to every email, especially the first ones. We also tried to motivate the students, and in some cases, this surely worked: some transcriptions were terrible at the beginning, but after encouragement from the instructor, later ones were of a completely different quality. Moreover, these same students, inept at the beginning, wanted additional letters because they had developed a passion for the activity.

As for teachers and professors, as already highlighted, their intermediary role is fundamental.

Experience has taught that the quality of the transcriptions is good not only if the university or the degree is good or desirable, but if professors find time and energy to commit to the project as well.

Returning to the first goal, students appreciated this innovative way of doing history. Before the students participated in the *DID* project, their view of history mainly consisted of reading books and memorizing the years in which events took place, but thanks to the *Indipetae* they started to study young men like themselves, with similar aspirations, aversions, and hopes. Students became affectionate toward 'their' Jesuits' lives, and some of them tried to find out in every possible way what ultimately happened to them, in this way acting like real historians.

Finally, as O'Malley witnesses, many instructors are thrilled by what they are doing, beyond the prescribed roles of teaching, because "when we see students light up, ... we light up with them. The experience satisfies our souls. Teaching, we realize, is broader than the subject we teach and the purveying of intellectual comprehension."²⁹ This sentence is the best conclusion for the *DID* project as well because, even if most of these students will never work on *Indipetae* again, they will have had the opportunity to become familiar with Jesuit documents. They saw them with their own eyes (even if on a screen) and learned how to transcribe and edit them, which is a great result, even compared with what other professional historians achieve. O'Malley used to say about the students he taught during his long life: "we are dealing with minds and hearts, sometimes with neuroses and psychoses, but always with human beings."³⁰ The same applies to Jesuit petitioners for the Indies. HJE

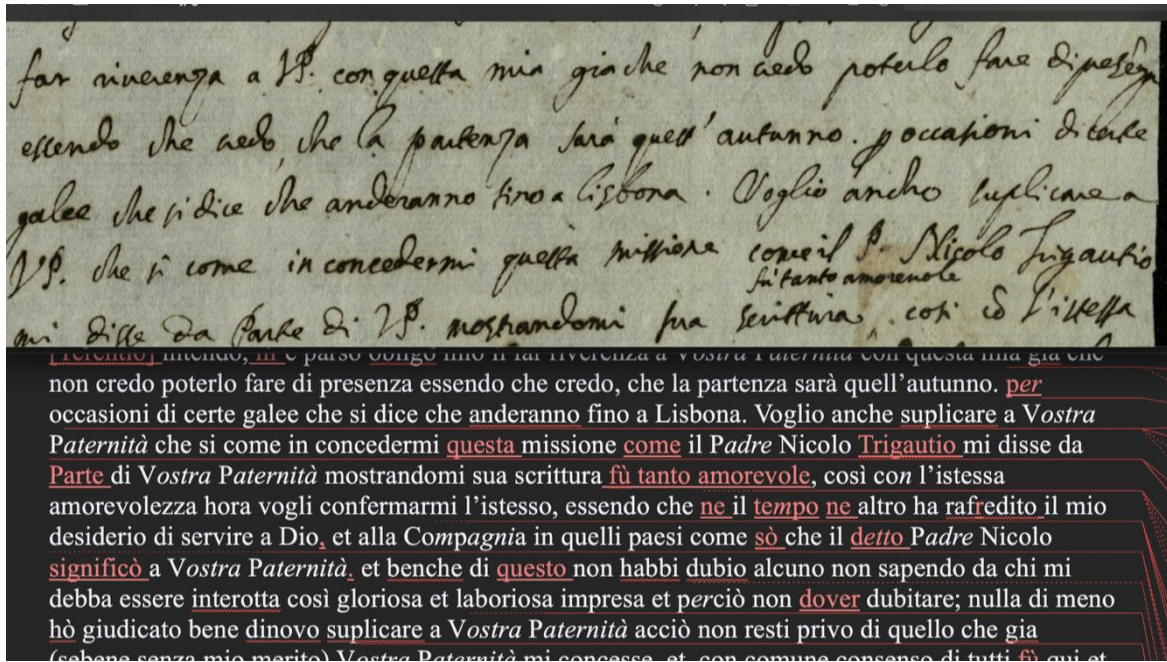


Figure 1. Correction in track changes mode of the transcription of *Litterae indipetae* (in this case, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Fondo Gesuitico 735, 212).

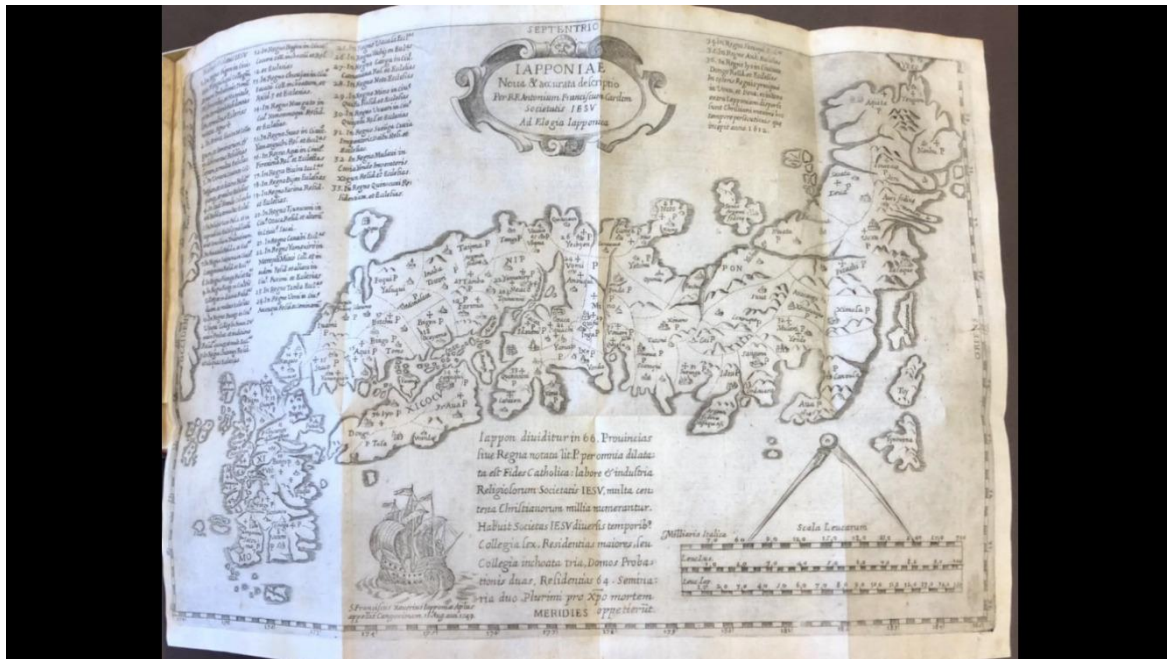


Figure 2. Japan, one of the favorite destinations of petitioners for the Indies, illustrated as *Iapponiae Nova & accurata descriptio* (*New and Updated description of Japan*). In Francisco Antonio Cardim, *Fasciculus e Iapponicis floribus* (...) (Romae: Typis Heredum Corbelletti, 1646), unnumbered (Mainz, Wissenschaftliche Stadtbibliothek, photo by the author).



Figure 3. What to expect from a missionary appointment: incarceration, tortures, suffering, conversations with Buddhist monks, etc. In Francisco Antonio Cardim, *Fasciculus e Iapponicis floribus* (...) (Romae: Typis Heredum Corbelletti, 1646), unnumbered (Mainz, Wissenschaftliche Stadtbibliothek, photo by the author).

Notes

¹ Emanuele Colombo, “*So What?: A Conversation with John W. O’Malley*,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 7 (2020): 125. The author wishes to thank her friend and reader Claude Pavur, S.J., for helping her during the revision, and the guest editor of this special collection in *Jesuit Higher Education*, Mary Kate Holman, for the advice and the encouragement given in the final stage of this article.

² Colombo, “*So What?*” 124.

³ Colombo, “*So What?*” 126.

⁴ For an introduction on Public History and further bibliography, see Thomas Cauvin, *Public History. A Textbook of Practice* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2022).

⁵ The website is open access under <https://indipetae.bc.edu>. On the genesis of the database, see Emanuele Colombo, “From Paper to Screen. The *Digital Indipetae Database*, a New Resource for Jesuit Studies,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 89/117 (2020): 213–30. The *DID* is always looking for new collaborators: those interested can send a message to freie@bc.edu and will receive all the information they need.

⁶ The bibliography on *Litterae indipetae* is constantly and abundantly increasing; for an updated review, see

Emanuele Colombo and Aliocha Maldivsky, “Studi e ricerche sulle *Litterae indipetae*,” in *Cinque secoli di Litterae indipetae. Il desiderio delle missioni nella Compagnia di Gesù* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2022), 43–81, in particular their complete bibliography on *Indipetae*, 62–81. See also the whole collective volume to gain deep insight into this extraordinary source.

⁷ As O’Malley explains when remembering one of his most difficult experiences, the year he spent in Austria: “I realized in a depth no book could ever teach me how difficult it is to empathize with and understand a culture not one’s own, whether those were cultures of the sixteenth or of the twentieth century” (John W. O’Malley, S.J., “My Life of Learning,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 93/3 (July 2007): 579).

⁸ Colombo, “*So What?*” 127.

⁹ On the *Indipetae* of the nineteenth and twentieth century, see Emanuele Colombo and Marco Rochini, “Le lettere *indipetae* italiane del generalato di Jan Philip Roothaan (1829–53),” in *Cinque secoli di Litterae indipetae. Il desiderio delle missioni nella Compagnia di Gesù* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2022).

¹⁰ Colombo, “*So What?*” 127.

¹¹ Teachers of history, religion, Italian, and Latin actively collaborated with the *DID* team, and their students contributed to the database with transcriptions in Italian, Latin, and Spanish that can withstand full professional scrutiny.

¹² Some of the experiences were summarized in the “*Digital Indipetae Database Newsletter. A Year After the Launch*,” published in spring 2021 and available online at https://www.academia.edu/49043155/Digital_Indipetae_Database_Newsletter.

¹³ Colombo, “*So What?*” 132.

¹⁴ A short presentation of the project is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEz18qUZk3o>.

¹⁵ Miriam Turrini authored, among others: “Poco oltre la soglia: Racconti autobiografici di aspiranti gesuiti a metà Seicento,” *Studi Storici. Rivista trimestrale dell’Istituto Gramsci* 3 (2014): 585–614; “Il fine di aiutar giovani non è perché si facciano religiosi. Istruzioni per una guida spirituale gesuita della prima Compagnia,” in *Università e formazione dei ceti dirigenti. Per Gian Paolo Brizzi, pellegrino dei saperi*, ed. Giancarlo Angelozzi, Maria Teresa Guerrini, and Giuseppe Olmi (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2015), 187–98; and “La vita scelta? Appunti per una storia della vocazione in età

moderna,” in *Dai cantieri della storia. Liber amicorum per Paolo Prodi* (Bologna: Clueb, 2007), 145–59. I wish to thank Prof. Turrini not only for the enthusiastic and year-long collaboration with the *DID*, but also for her meticulousness in revising her students’ transcriptions.

¹⁶ Donatella Oliani, *Immagini, scritture e desiderio di missione nella prima Et` Moderna. Litterae indipetae di gesuiti della famiglia Mastrilli (1616-1627)* (supervisor: Prof. Miriam Turrini).

¹⁷ On the Jesuit martyr and for a complete bibliography see Ines G. Županov, “Passage to India: Jesuit Spiritual Economy between Martyrdom and Profit in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 16, no. 2 (2012): 1–39.

¹⁸ Chiara Bombeccari, *Desiderij grandi d’andare all’Indie. Le Litterae indipetae dei gesuiti Giuseppe Chiara, Girolamo Gravina e Stanislao Malpica (1623-34)* (supervisor: Prof. Miriam Turrini).

¹⁹ On what has been called “spiritual Orientalism” see the recently published monograph by Camilla Russell, *Being a Jesuit in Renaissance Italy. Biographical Writings in the Early Global Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022). The author analyzes *Indipetae* of the first century of the Society of Jesus, with a special focus on those aiming at Asia as a geographical, but also spiritual destination. The book also shows how *Indipetae*, when well contextualized, can constitute a good basis for a prosopography of early modern Jesuits, whose document trails are often very scarce.

²⁰ Furthermore, *Indipetae* were one of the topics of the course of *Digital Tools for Mobility Research*, coordinated by Lucio Biasiori and Federico Mazzini.

²¹ All of the following examples come from direct experience with university students. High school students have different backgrounds and interests, but often the situation is not that different; in some cases, they even seemed more familiar than university students with early modern history and the translation of texts from Latin.

²² O’Malley, “My Life of Learning,” 586.

²³ The exceptions are several cases in which it was decided to assign *Indipetae* written during a certain year (for instance, the centennial of the foundation of the Society of Jesus), or by groups of natural brothers or relatives with the same family name. Both cases of course still present an array of different handwritings.

²⁴ Guido Mongini extensively studied Ignatian spirituality and its vocabulary: see, for instance *Maschere*

dell'identità. Alle origini della Compagnia di Gesù (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2016) and *La differenza gesuitica. Religione e politica tra Ignazio di Loyola e Claudio Acquaviva* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2019).

²⁵ Colombo, "So What?" 127.

²⁶ Colombo, "So What?" 127.

²⁷ The full quotation is as follows: "I had my breakthrough and saw what my problem was. I was trying to make Giles, a sixteenth-century thinker, answer my twentieth-century questions. I needed to make a radical shift: I needed to climb into his mind and learn what his questions were. A simple and obvious idea, but I had not employed it. This was a turning point" in John O'Malley, S.J., *The Education of a Historian: A Strange and Wonderful Story* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2021), 73.

²⁸ At the beginning of 1722, superior general Michelangelo Tamburini addressed to all provincials the circular *De mittendis ad Indias novis operariis* (ARSI, *Epistolae Nostrorum* 9, 3). The communication was to be publicly read in the Jesuit residences, to promote the vocations for the Indies. After the circulation of this document, there was a peak in *Indipetae* among the Italian assistancy: there were 37 in 1721, and had almost tripled a year later (see ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 750 and 751). For more on the subject, see Claudio Ferlan, ed., *Eusebio Francesco Chini e il suo tempo. Una riflessione storica* (Trento: Fondazione Bruno Kessler, 2012), 31-58.

²⁹ O'Malley, "My Life of Learning," 588.

³⁰ O'Malley, "My Life of Learning," 588.