



Archives of Antwerp for the history of the relations between Europe and the Far East (16th–18th centuries)

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Introduction

Since the passage to the Indian subcontinent, South China and Japan had been opened by the *Carreira da India* in the middle of the 16th century, Lisbon and the via *Lusitana* got a primary part in the exchange of goods, objects, and knowledge between Europe and the Far East. In the 17th century, other tracks arose, such as the *Via Batavica* and the *Via Gallica*, each with their own port bases, namely Amsterdam / Batavia and Brest / L'Orient / Port St. Louis respectively. The Jesuit mission was totally depending on these commercial routes for its logistics; however, the Jesuits preferred other geographical centres for the «depots» of their administration and their centres of archiving, and had their own Jesuit organisational structures. This explains, for example, why Rome – far from direct overseas connections with the Far East, but at the centre of the centralized Jesuit world – probably houses Europe's largest archival collection of documents from the Far East, while there are rather poor archive materials in the maritime city of Lisbon. This also explains why several other European cities situated far from the maritime routes (such as Paris and Munich) have, or had, such important collections, and a port city as Amsterdam does not.

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Among these European cities is Antwerp in the Southern Low Countries: until its fall for the Spanish troupes of Alexander Farnese in 1585, Antwerp had been one of the most important port cities of Europe. Its position as a prominent Atlantic port city ended around 1600; yet, during the next two centuries, it periodically played an important part in the communication between both ends of the Eurasian continent. This has been almost forgotten in the relevant research literature so far, as it focusses especially on the role of Portuguese, French, and Dutch «Indian» trade companies. This contribution intends to fill this gap. In order to make this historical portrait of Antwerp's position in the field as complete and reliable as possible, I extend my scope to documents presently conserved in other archives outside Antwerp but which were originally in an Antwerp collection.

Before starting this survey of collections, I will shortly refer to an interesting aspect, namely to the presence of a prominent Portuguese «colony» in this important port city, before and also after the capture of the city in 1585. Although there are no specific archives of this Portuguese colony, the Portuguese presence in Antwerp has been studied in detail. Eduardo Brazão, Karel Degryse, Hans Pohl, and Jan Parmentier focused exclusively on its «economic» or mercantile aspect (cf. Brazão 1969, Degryse 1974, Pohl 1977, and Parmentier 2002), but this presence also had a cultural aspect. For example, it was in Antwerp that information on the «*smilax Chinae*» was first spread through Europe (cf. Schmitz / Tek Tiong Tan 1967), as Portuguese physicians and other professionals such as the physician Amatus Lusitanus (1511–1568), the merchant-banker Manuel Ximenes (1564–1632), and the physician Luis Nuñez (Ludovicus Nonnius; 1553–1645) were temporarily or permanently practicing here. In addition, the first information on the shape of the Chinese coast expressed in Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, was printed in Antwerp in 1571.¹ Some members of Antwerp's Portuguese community also had a particular interest in the Jesuit's China missions: such was one Bartolomeo de Andrade, a not further identifiable member of the well-known Portuguese family de Andrade in Antwerp, who apparently collected documents on the Jesuit mission of China between

¹ That the Portuguese colony in Antwerp had been the intermediary in the circulation of advanced knowledge on the Far East between Portugal and Antwerp (in this period both part of the Spanish Empire) emerges also from other indications: one example concerns the improved cartographical image of Japan and China in the Ortelius atlas thanks to information from Portugal and Spain (cf., among others, Bernard 1935).

1684–1693 in his private collection, some of which I could trace in Belgian libraries.²

This has probably only been the «prelude» for more systematic and direct contacts with the Far East in Antwerp in the 17th and early 18th century, in focus here. These contacts basically turned on two historical institutions, to be extended with a third one in the actual time: the *Officina Plantiniana*, the Jesuit residences, and the actual General State Archive («Algemeen Rijksarchief») in Antwerp. I will overview each of them, with main attention to their archival remnants.

1. The *Officina Plantiniana* and its archives

The printing house *Officina Plantiniana* was founded in 1555 by Christophe Plantin (1520–1589) and was continued by the descendants of his first collaborator Moretus. It had achieved wide international fame and had a wide-ranging network of professional contacts throughout Europe, reflected in the completely preserved «house archive» in the actual *Museum Plantin Moretus* (MPM). Obviously, echoes of the Far East are a rather «marginal» aspect within the total picture, but at the same time, these echoes of the Far East provide several unknown and interesting fragments of evidence for our research field. These are the result of the contacts of the successive members of the Moretus family (esp. Balthasar II, 1615-1674, and Balthasar III, 1646-1696) with the Jesuits in the Antwerp Professed House and their colleagues, who were periodically returning from China and passing by in Antwerp. The relation with the Jesuits were more direct, as several members of the family Moretus had become Jesuits in Antwerp, and at least three of them were (failed) *Indipetae*: candidates for the China mission; these were Theodorus Moretus (1602–1667) and Cornelius Moretus (born 1614), brothers of Balthasar II, and Johannes Moretus (born 1646), brother of Balthasar III; in each of these three cases, the parents could prevent that the desire of the *Indipetae* was accepted by the Jesuit authorities.

The first known contacts of members of the Moretus family with the Jesuit mission in China occurred during the passing by of Nicolas Trigault

² Revealing is the fragment of a personal copy of Verbiest's xylograph letter to the Portuguese King Afonso VI, with an annotation in his hand, known from other book inscriptions: Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek / Bibliothèque Royale [KBR] Inv. 166691-3 = 4096, f° 78 – 79v.; cf. Golvers 2017.

and Johannes Schreck Terrentius in December 1616 – January 1617. These two visits to Antwerp from the Jesuit College in Brussels, where both Jesuits stayed, had a clear target: to buy books for the SJ libraries to be established in China. Apart from some Chinese books donated to the local Jesuit library in Antwerp and Leuven, and the portraits drawn by P. P. Rubens, the main archival relicts of this visit are thus the extensive book lists and orders, dated 7 December 1616 and 7 January 1617, which also continued later, all to be found in the officina's *Grootboek* or *Memorial* still preserved on their original location (Plantin-Moretus archief 94; cf. 128; 223; 224).³ These book lists represent 332 different titles bought in the Plantin shop and destined for the Jesuit libraries to be established in Peking and elsewhere in China.⁴ As such, these lists are an almost unparalleled source of the first days of the Western libraries of the Jesuits in China. Similar visits were paid by successive Procurators, which can be traced in the same archives, though with less abundance.

The most visible and successful among these later procurators certainly was Martino Martini (1614–1661), passing by in the 1st half of 1654: his contacts with the Moretus family were inspired by the intention to offer the manuscript of his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* to the Antwerp firm to be printed. Instead, the manuscript of *De Bello Tartarico* (1st and 2nd ed.) was printed (cf. also Plantin-Moretus archief 134). More important than these book acquisitions and printing projects were the personal relations the Moretus family held with the Flemish *Indipetae* Philippe Couplet (1622–1693) and François de Rougemont (1624–1676), both engaged by Martini to accompany him to China, who would constitute the «new generation» of SJ missionaries. Before leaving Antwerp, both priests had close, direct meetings and conversations about the Moretus context. When having arrived in China in 1658, and thanks to the application of the Batavia-based VOC, a correspondence network was created, which linked the missionaries in China with the *Officina*, which in turn became the European *hub* for correspondence between China and Europe. This situation lasted as late as the turn of the 17th into the 18th century: correspondence sent from China through Macau, Batavia and Amsterdam was addressed to Antwerp, from where it was dispatched over Central and Southern Europe.

³ The Plantin-Moretus archive contains documents from 1550 until 1865 (Vrijdagmarkt 22 – 2000 Antwerp, Belgium).

⁴ Full list published in Golvers 2018; see Golvers 2020 for the wider context.

Archival echoes of this role of the *Officina Plantiniana* as the «mail hub» are always to be found in the Moretus family archives: these represent (1) letters and (2) some typographical «collector's items».

Firstly, the letters represent 25 autographs of mostly «cover letters» written by missionaries such as Filippo de Marini, François de Rougemont, Philippe Couplet, Antoine Thomas, etc., often thanking for the *Officina's* services in forwarding the mail. From internal indications, we can conclude that there once must have been more letters, which are lost now. The items preserved in the archive cover the period from 1669 to 1690. The start and end dates of this correspondence are significant moments; it started in October 1669, after the visit of the Dutch to the Canton fathers in Jan. 1669 (cf. Demaerel 1990), which opened the opportunity to use the shipping line Canton > Macau > Batavia > Amsterdam, an opportunity used by François de Rougemont, with a letter in which he refers to their shared «*amicitia*» in Antwerp, and his emotional farewell to Balthasar Moretus II about 16 years earlier (cf. Golvers 1996, Golvers 2007: 205-248, more precisely 213-214⁵). The last preserved letters were sent by Jean-Baptiste de Maldonado (1634–1699) from Siam, shortly before he was sent to Cambodia and the link with the Moretus house was broken.

After they had been stored in the *Officina* in the private archives of the Moretus family directly after their arrival, the last manager of the *Officina*, Edward Moretus (1804–1880) offered some of these items to the Jesuit College of Our Lady of Antwerp in the late 19th century; others are still on their original location (M 200: «*Epistolae Chinenses*»): from the original collection I could recuperate a «corpus» of 25 items, published in 2007 (cf. Golvers 2007: 205-248). The texts are mostly short, but, apart from the formula of thanks and politeness they contain a series of details from the contemporaneous context, both concerning China and the mission itself.

Some of these letters were not addressed to the Antwerp printer himself but to Jesuit authorities elsewhere in Europe (Paris, Lisbon, Rome, Douai, etc.); before being forwarded, they were transcribed by the correctors of the *Officina Plantiniana*, for curiosity's sake and the information they contained. The local archives preserved two separate files of such transcriptions:

⁵ This one is a first request to forward a series of letters, through the fathers of the Antwerp Professed House, either Franciscus de Cleyn or Godfried Henschenius to Charles de Noyelle, a Jesuit born in Brussels and since 1661 appointed as German Assistant.

- File M 30: with letters by Ph. Couplet, Antoine Thomas (on the capture of the *Insula Formosa*), and F. Verbiest (with unique mathematical details on his mapping of Tartary addressed to Thomas as well); there is also a unique, anonymous text, titled *Demonstratio Iuris Imperatoris Tartari ad possidendum Imperium Sinicum contra Navarretem*, with a «canonical» defence of the position of the Kangxi Emperor and his right to become converted without abdication; the text is signed in Macau on 20 April and its author may be A. Thomas (cf. Golvers 2021).
- File M 221: two long autographic reports on the journey from Lisbon to Goa, one by Ignatius Hartoghvelt, another one probably by François de Rougemont.

Second: Apart from the letters, there were also some typographical curiosities sent: they especially consisted, according to contemporary evidence, of two precious items:

- a. The *titulus honorificus* offered by the Chinese Emperor Shunzhi in 1653 to Adam Schall von Bell (cf. Vaeth 1991: 370): actual shelf number: R 7.5.
- b. A copy of *Innocentia Victrix*: this was a bilingual printing, a product of the Jesuit xylograph press in Canton dated 1671, with Latin text juxtaposed by Chinese characters, and as such a typographical «curiosum» of which many other copies were distributed through Europe (cf. Boxer 1947: 202-203). It was addressed to the printer Moretus to satisfy his professional curiosity and interest. Unfortunately this copy has been lost.

2. The Jesuit residences

As shown above the involvement of the *Officina Plantiniana* in Far Eastern affairs largely relied on the personal relations of the Moretus family with the local Jesuit community, both the *Domus Professa* and the *Collegium*. Especially the Professed House had, on various moments of its history, first hand connections with the Far Eastern mission, as emanates from the actual remnants of their archives, now scattered over varied post-suppression collections.

The first sign of the Antwerp Jesuits' interest in the Far Eastern mission was the systematic translation by the «students» (*rhetores*) of the Jesuit College of the *Litterae Annuae* of 1606 and 1607, sent from Japan.⁶ First inspired by corporative solidarity, this interest was afterwards stimulated by the visiting «procuratores» such as Martino Martini, Filippo de Marini, and Philippe Couplet.

Among the Antwerp Jesuits, the Bollandist fathers – a Society of specialists in critical hagiography («*hagiographi*») played a particular role. They published the results of their archival and critical research in the famous *Acta Sanctorum*. In the 17th and early 18th century, these were Johannes Bollandus (1596–1665), Godefridus Henschenius (1601–1681), and Daniel Papebrochius (1628–1714), all three famous names but also «failed» candidates for the China mission. They supported the China Jesuits with their prestigious writings in the polemics regarding to the Chinese Rites Controversy (cf. Golvers 1998: 39–50).

The last outstanding personality in the relation between the Antwerp Jesuits and the China mission was certainly Pieter Maelcamp (1679–1741), who was procurator of the Prov. Flandro-Belgica between about 1718 and 1730 and lived in the *Domus Professa*. He had become a key figure in the communication between the China missionaries and the Jesuits in Europe, thanks to the connections with the (short lived) *Ostend Company* and the use of the *Via Ostendana*, the commercial route between the Flemish port of Ostend and Canton, and vice versa, abolished around 1728. There even was a direct «link» between this commercial Company and Procurator Pieter Maelcamp, who was the brother of the main shareholders of this Company; the Antwerp Jesuits also had invested their money in this traffic, which was so successful – thanks to its technological qualities – that a series of Central European Jesuits, especially German ones, also used this «Ostend Line» over Antwerp, Bruges, and Ostend.⁷

What is the archival reflection of these connections?

⁶ Cf. *Litterae Japonicae anni MDCVI, Chineses anni MDCVI et MDCVII* (Antwerp, 1611), translated «a Rhetoribus Collegii Societatis Jesu Antverpiae», and prefaced by 2 Latin poems on the high risks «in via» to China, composed by J. Caterus and C. Gevartius (cf. Standaert 1984).

⁷ For a more comprehensive treatment of this largely overlooked communication route between Europe and China, see Golvers 2017: 761–787.

After the Suppression in 1773, the original archives of the Antwerp Jesuit residences were, in principle, transferred to the newly established *Royal Library* in Brussels (est. officially in 1837). Some items in today's Royal Library can indeed be traced to an Antwerp provenance: e.g. some letter books containing transcriptions of missionary letters, which arrived from the mission in Europe, circulated among the colleges in transcriptions, and were collected for private edification; in this way, those letter books had a strong influence on constituting a «community», which became a fertile ground for new vocations.

A separate archival nucleus within the Professed House was that of the aforementioned Bollandist fathers. Part of its contents, after having been stored in the buildings of the Antwerp Professed House, was moved to the «*Musaeum Bellarminum*» in Mechelen (Mechlin) in the 18th century. This concerned the documents related more in particular with the polemics on the «Chinese Rites Controversy».

These Bollandist papers contained letters, reports, and other manuscripts, which after the Suppression were diffused and arrived in several «new», private, and public collections. I could trace parts of them in various actual Belgian collections, listed here briefly.⁸

1. A large collection, especially 29 autograph letters by Pieter (Petrus) Van Hamme (1651-1727), a Flemish missionary first in Mexico and in China since 1689 (Wuchang & Peking). This collection was bought by the Antwerp secular priest Pieter Visschers, who published a book with transcription and short annotations in 1857 (cf. Visschers 1857), but the original items once in his possession seem to be lost now. They especially cover the period from 1690 to 1720, and the main addressees are Bollandist fathers, such as Conrad Janning (1650-1723), Daniel Papebrochius (1628-1714), and Frans Baert (1651-1714), all three living in the Antwerp Jesuit Professed House.
2. Another collection of letters was bought, between 1778–1780, by Jan-Frans Van de Velde (1743-1823), then librarian of the Leuven University; after a temporary depot in the Great Seminar of Ghent, the collection is now in the Archives of the University of Leuven (BUAR; actual shelf mark: OU/G/D 125-126); it contains 84 autograph letters

⁸ This largely resumes my earlier presentation in Golvers 2012, 272 ff.

mostly signed by Ignatius Kögler, Pieter Van Hamme, João Mourão, Philip Cazier, Pierre de Goville, Karol Slavicek, and Balthasar Miller, all recognized missionaries in the early 18th century China, and all letters addressed to the procurator Pieter Maelcamp (1679-1741) and Conrad Janning (1650-1723), both living in the Professed House. These letters are covering the period 1718-1725 (with one letter of M. Boym as an exception).

3. A third group of 47 letters, bound in a file entitled «*Epistolae de Missione Sinensi Societatis Jesu*» is now in the Royal Library of Brussels (VdG 4096; Ms. 16691-3C): it stems from the gigantic collection of Karel (Charles) Van Hulthem (1764–1832), one of the greatest book and manuscript collectors of the country, who largely supplied himself from ecclesiastical collections after the Suppression. The majority of these autograph letters was also written by Petrus van Hamme, a really prolific letter writer, others by F. de Rougemont, Jean-Baptiste de Maldonado, François Noël, and Willem Vander Beken. They were addressed to Bollandus, Conrad Janning, Daniel Papebrochius, and Franciscus van Callenberghe, again referring to a provenance from the archives of the Antwerp Professed House.
4. In the same Royal Library, shelf number VdG 10550 – 54D; Ms. 4097, there is a compilation entitled: «*Controversiae Sinenses*», including 36 letters written by Jesuits who were in China in the 1st half of the 18th century: Kögler, Miller, João Mourão, Jean-Placide Hervieu, Ehrebert Fridelli, Romain Hinderer, François Noël, and Pierre de Go[u]ville. Most of these letters were addressed to Pieter Maelcamp, too, so it is clear that they have the same archival provenance. An indication on the title page, however, refers to the *Musaeum Bellarminum* in Mechelen; it becomes clear now that they were originally together with the former series, but later on they were selected and filed in the «special» collection of Mechelen, where it received apparently the shelf number «A 102», probably for their common polemic content.
5. The shelf number A 102 leads to another collection of 19 letters, now in the Antwerp Municipal Library (now renamed: *Erfgoedbibliotheek H. Conscience*), with the «new» shelf number «Cod. 21», and the title: «*Litterae et instrumenta circa res Sinenses*». There is the provenance indication: «*Musaei Ven[erabilis] Card[inalis] Bellarmini*» on the title page, and the short title «*Causa Chinensis*» and a call number «A 99» on its spine,

apparently referring to the same classification as the former series; it contains a series of copies of letters from the same missionaries, viz. Kögler, Mourão, Pedrini, Hervieu, Miller, again mostly addressed to P. Maelcamp. Additionally, it contains a series of manuscripts, printed items and documents regarding the Jesuit mission in China.

This overview shows clearly that these five «groups» of letters originally belonged together, as they all were part of the archives of the Antwerp Professed House. Chronologically they are complementary, a bit overlapping but mostly consecutive, all together covering a period from 1683 to 1740, with a clear numerical concentration between 1720-1726, corresponding to the apogee of the activities of the Ostend Company / via Ostendana.

- Royal Library, Ms. 4096: 1683–1702/3
- P. Visschers collection: 1690–1720
- Louvain collection: 1717/8–1725
- Antwerp, Municipal Library: 1721–1727 (transcriptions)
- Royal Library, Ms. 4097: 1725–176/7; 1731–1734; 1737–1740

This chronological distribution requires an explanation: the start in 1683 can be linked to the journey of Philip Couplet to and through Europe; precisely in 1683, early 1684, he had arrived in Antwerp; 1740 is the year before Pieter Maelcamp died.

A first division of these documents originally belonging to the Antwerp Jesuits – to one and the same collection – was made, when a series of them were selected due to their relation with the Chinese Controversies and were stored in the «*Musaeum Bellarminum*» in Antwerp, receiving the call numbers «A 99» and «A 102»; The items «A 100» and «A 101» remain unknown. Concluding from organizational logics, they could have contained documents with the same contents, but so far not one trace of them has been found. After the Suppression, this archive was divided further, and one series of items arrived in the Royal Library of Brussels, others in the Municipal Library of Antwerp, under unknown circumstances.

Other groups of documents from the same Professed House collection were publicly sold and bought by three different, well-known book and manuscript collectors of the late 18th early 19th century: viz. P. Visschers (whose originals are now lost but the text of which is known thanks to

Visschers's publication); Jan-Frans van de Velde, now in the Archive of the University Library in Leuven, and by Karel Van Hulthem, now in the Royal Library of Brussels.

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3. The actual General State Archive («Algemeen Rijksarchief») in Antwerp: ARA

The third nucleus of documents is not a historical collection, but mentioned here because it received the former Archives of the pre-Suppression *Provincia Flandro-Belgica*, first preserved in Brussels, since 2002 in Antwerp (temporarily moved to Beveren). A detailed and well-indexed inventory has been made by Hendrik Callewier in 2006 (cf. Callewier 2006). This collection has several heterogeneous materials on the Jesuit missions, listed on pp. 402-411, not necessarily linked to Antwerp, among them a series of loose items on China, all contemporary transcriptions, from A. Thomas (copies), Couplet, Hervieu, Cazier, van Hamme, Verbiest (printed).

Conclusion

As *membra disiecta* of one original collection, these letters – all in all about 180⁹ – illustrate the prominent position of the Jesuits of the Antwerp Professed House regarding connections with the Antwerp printers and their contribution to the Chinese Rites Controversy; furthermore, it illustrates also a so far overlooked «cultural» impact of the less known *Via Ostendana*. Closely related to the position of the nearby Jesuit Professed House, a second collection of letters and related documents arrived in the *Officina Plantiniana*. Both collections illustrate that – even in a period of economic stagnation due to the effects of the Thirty Year War and the cut-off by the Dutch republic of the Scheldt and the commercial activities with the outside world – the city of Antwerp was still quite attractive even for the Jesuits in the Far East. Therefore, the rich contents of many of these letters deserve a better integration in the actual research on the China mission, starting with a detailed inventory, which is in preparation.

⁹ Cf. a detailed and full list of these letters in Golvers 2016: 17-31.

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