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## Notes and News in Jesuit History

### Marking 440 Years since the Tenshō Mission of 1585, from Japan to Italy

Anniversary Book Project: *Tenshō 天正. Diario di un pellegrinaggio giapponese alla Curia Romana (1585): Fonti manoscritte e a stampa*. Edited by Paolo Giulietti, Olimpia Niglio, and Carlo Pelliccia. Todi: Tau Editrice, 2025.

In 1585, a noteworthy “diplomatic” event unfolded between Latin Christendom and Japan, referred to as the “Tenshō Embassy.” In that year, four youths selected from the Arima seminary in Japan—Mancio Itō, Miguel Chijiwa, Martinho Hara, and Julião Nakaura—made their appearance at the papal court of Gregory XIII. This mission to Catholic Europe represented a critical juncture in early modern East-West relations. The embassy’s audiences at the Roman Curia, its travels through the Italian Peninsula, and the widespread publication of its accounts left a lasting legacy that would resonate for generations. The encounters were shaped by their audiences before the Papal Curia and enjoyed extensive circulation in prominent Italian cities, including Siena, Florence, Bologna, Venice, and Milan.

To mark the 440<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this significant episode, spanning from 1585 to 2025, a large-scale collaboration between almost fifty scholars was devised with the objective to compile a comprehensive and richly illustrated sourcebook titled *Tenshō 天正. Diario di un pellegrinaggio giapponese alla Curia Romana (1585): Fonti manoscritte e a stampa*. This collection presents a carefully curated selection of both printed and manuscript sources.

The Editors, Paolo Giulietti, Olimpia Niglio, and Carlo Pelliccia bring together a range of contributions with detailed and engaging historical reconstruction of the key moments in the interactions that transpired on the Italian peninsula. Developed within the framework of the *Thesaurum Fidei* project, led by the Archdiocese of Lucca, the book brings together a representative corpus of sources to docu-

ment how this mission was scripted, received, and memorialised in Italy, including offering invaluable insights into the concept of “embassy” from an Italian perspective. A further aim of the volume is to enrich the understanding of Christianity’s history in Japan, including the story of the hidden Christians (*Kakure Kirishitan*) who first emerged as a result of persecution under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867).

The contributions reflect how, over the past two decades, scholarship has produced increasingly detailed analyses of the Japanese and Iberian dimensions of the “Tenshō legation.” This volume complements such research by re-centring attention on the Roman phase as an exercise in “translation:” linguistic, ceremonial, and bibliographical alike. Rome’s “script” did not merely display an Asian curiosity; it articulated the universality of the Catholic Church through a carefully structured choreography of “audiences,” “processions,” “indulgences,” and printed dissemination.

Methodologically, the collaborative project integrates archival sources with printed materials. It encompasses documents housed at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) alongside records from state, communal, and ecclesiastical archives, as well as collections in libraries and cultural centres. Sixteenth-century printed accounts are regarded not merely as supplementary but as equal witnesses, engaging in dialogue with curial paperwork, municipal ordinances, ceremonial notes, and Jesuit correspondence.

The editorial purpose is both historical and explicitly documentary-curatorial: to “valorise” and render readily citable the surviving evidence produced in connection with this “diplomatic” event, while simultaneously providing readers with clear and accessible pathways for teaching, exhibition, and further scholarly inquiry.

The project seeks to situate the Roman experience within a broader itinerary across the Italian Peninsula, illustrating how it was integrated into the post-Tridentine practices of ritual and publication. While the Japanese and Iberian contexts are acknowledged, in essence, the catalogue presents a dossier cantered on Rome, and at the same time in relation to the relevant peripheral hubs of this event—offering facsimiles, selective transcriptions, and brief annotations—designed to allow readers to reconstruct the Italian segment of the journey from the original records, while also considering the overarching ecclesial and cultural project that underpinned the anniversary.

Structured chronologically as a “Diary” of the delegation’s complete tour of Italy, the volume’s contents include chapters about each



The editorial architecture is intentionally hybrid, neither entirely a comprehensive critical edition nor solely a synthetic monograph. Instead, it functions as a research-ready sourcebook that compiles essential materials into a cohesive and navigable collection. Importantly, its structure avoids an exclusive focus on Rome; in addition to the Curia and the Roman houses of the Society of Jesus, the volume highlights the so-called peripheries of the itinerary—major cities and secondary centres visited throughout the peninsula. This deliberate decentring enhances the book's value by revealing an extraordinary landscape of Japanese diplomatic visits across the entire region, drawing on relevant sources to illustrate the broad dimensions of the initiative.

The volume's opening presentations by ecclesiastical and diplomatic figures, cardinals and ambassadors, suggest commemorative intent without displacing the archival core. The main body of the volume opens with an introductory essay by the curatorial team, offering a concise contextual overview of the principal events that defined the months the Japanese "envoys" spent on the Italian Peninsula. An additional appendix expands on the historical connections between the city of Lucca and Catholic missionary activity in Japan, tracing how the memory of those early missions was integrated into local religious culture. This section examines the broader network of Jesuit and Dominican initiatives active during the early seventeenth century, illustrating how the Italian experience of the "Tenshō embassy" resonated within subsequent missionary enterprises and their commemoration in both Italy and Japan.

A central achievement of this collaboration is to showcase the Roman Curia's art of celebration. The document attributed to Francesco Mucanti, who served as the papal master of ceremonies under Gregory XIII, details events that transformed novelty into a Catholic narrative. It includes the public reading (in Latin translation) of letters from the Christian *daimyō*: Ōtomo Yoshishige (Francisco, "King of Bungo"), Arima Harunobu (Protasio, "King of the Arima"), and Ōmura Sumitada (Bartolomeu, "Prince of the Ōmura"), as well as the oration delivered by the Portuguese Jesuit Gaspar Gonçalves during the public consistory. The rubrics, sequence, speech and gesture are not mere decoration; they are the means through which the essence of Catholicism was sought to be made visible. It allows us to understand the importance of the "diplomatic gesture" which took place during the visits.

Equally telling is the text of indulgences issued by Pope Sixtus V for rosaries, crosses, and medals associated with the envoys and

their supporters. It is shown that Rome converted a “diplomatic episode” into a portable devotional economy: grace by touch and repetition, not only by preaching and print (Fig. 2 and 3).

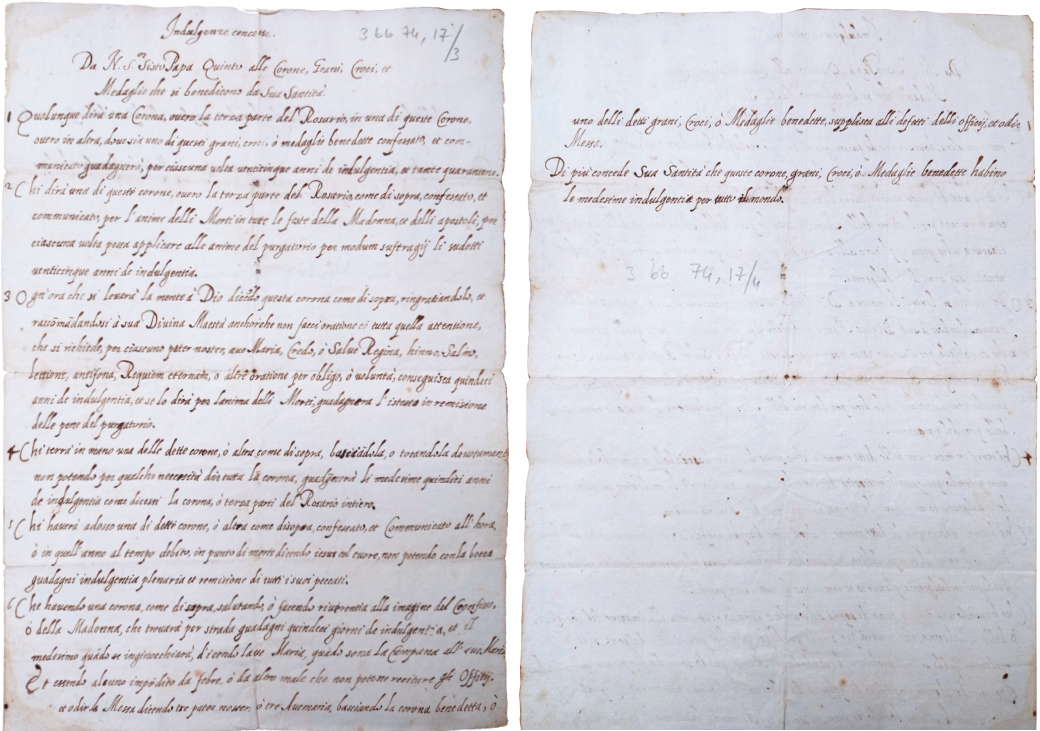


Fig. 2 and 3. ‘Indulgenza per Ambasciata Tenshō’ (Rome, 2 June 1585): Lucca, Biblioteca Statale del Monumento Nazionale di Santa Scolastica, Carteggio Ascanio Colonna, III BB 74, 17/4. Reproduced with Permission.

This process effectively “popularised” the encounter and ensured its lasting presence within “confraternities,” “sodalities,” and domestic devotion. The editors rightly assign these documents a central role, as they recover the devotional technologies by which the “curial spectacle” was disseminated and amplified well beyond the confines of the papal palace.

The volume editors also offer a necessary terminological clarification. When modern readers encounter the term “embassy,” they often envision a fully formal early-modern diplomatic mission. While Jesuit Visitor to the Indies Alessandro Valignano designed the Tenshō enterprise to function as an embassy—in both organisation and presentation—it did not meet the formal criteria established by

later diplomacy. In fact, no autonomous sovereigns were serving as sending authorities (as the three *daimyō* were not), and there was only partial adherence to the norms and ceremonial conventions that governed early modern diplomacy, thus providing crucial context to terms used in the volume, such as “embassy,” “ceremonial acts,” and “oration,” revealing—as Antonella Romano and Maria Antonietta Visceglia have argued—how the mission was effectively rendered legible as an “embassy” in practice.

This project, finally, situates the “embassy” within Jesuit operations at the time, specifically Superior General Claudio Acquaviva’s broader logistical apparatus: the embassy was not an isolated initiative, but rather part of a sustained and integrated strategy. At the centre of this strategic vision stood Valignano, who was appointed Visitor to the East in 1573, and who was part of a carefully orchestrated Jesuit undertaking, embedded in a familiar institutional landscape of classrooms, chapels, ceremonial venues, and printing presses.

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