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Love Transposed in Silence. Wojciech (Albert) Męciński's Vocation to Japan

ABSTRACT

The article presents Wojciech (Albert) Męciński, S.J., (ca. 1598-1643), a Jesuit martyr and the first Pole to reach Japan through the prism of his vocation to the country. The outlined historical background of Męciński's travel was supplemented by references to his letters, from which there emerges an image of a man deeply convinced about the necessity of a personal testimony of faith. The stability of Męciński's decision – twenty years passed from the moment of making it to its realization – becomes clear after an analysis of deep religious motivation. Męciński is almost silent about the country which is the objective of the journey of his life, stressing his devotion to Christ. On his way to Christ, he is heading to Japan, and thus combines the love of Christ with his willingness to give up his life in the country he did not know.

KEYWORDS: Wojciech (Albert) Męciński, Jesuits, Japanese missions, martyrdom

STRESZCZENIE

Miłość przeniesiona w milczeniu. Wojciecha (Alberta) Męcińskiego powołanie do Japonii.

Artykuł przedstawia postać Wojciecha Męcińskiego SJ (ca. 1598-1643), jezuity męczennika i pierwszego Polaka, który dotarł do Japonii, przez

pryzmat jego powołania do tego kraju. Zarysowane tło historyczne podróży Męcińskiego zostało uzupełnione odniesieniami do jego listów, z których wyłania się obraz człowieka do głębi przekonanego o konieczności osobistego świadectwa wiary. Trwałość decyzji Męcińskiego – od momentu jej podjęcia do zrealizowania minęło około dwudziestu lat – staje się zrozumiała po analizie głębokiej motywacji religijnej. Męciński niemal milczy o kraju, który jest celem jego życiowej wędrówki, podkreślając przy tym swoje oddanie dla Chrystusa. Podążając ku Niemu, zmierza do Japonii i tym samym łączy miłość do Chrystusa z wolą oddania życia w kraju, którego nie zna.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Wojciech (Albert) Męciński, jezuici, misje japońskie, męczeństwo

Each nation tries to commemorate their representatives, who had the courage to get to places nobody from their community had been to before. Of course, the most valued are those who arrive in a place simply as the first human beings, or are the first to describe it. But it is even more important that the country which they visit is far away from the native country, and in order to reach it, one must face considerable difficulties. Hence, the Polish memory has preserved such figures as, Benedict the Pole, who reached the center of the Mongol Empire with John Piano di Carpini in the 13th century, or Paweł Edmund Strzelecki, a post-November Uprising exile explorer of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. In present times, the contribution of Krzysztof Wielicki, a winter conquerer of eight-thousanders or Marek Kamiński, who reached both Earth's poles in the same year. Therefore, it is the more puzzling that the first Pole who set foot on Japanese ground, Wojciech Męciński, a Jesuit priest and martyr, has not remained in the national memory. When one thinks about Polish-Japanese contacts, it is natural to think about the regaining of Polish independence in 1918 as setting the framework.¹ The horizon of our imagination, however, stretches beyond that, to the beginnings of the 20th century and to the famous diplomatic rivalry between the two makers of Polish independence – Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski. Driven by their concern for the rebirth of a free homeland they set out for Japan independently in 1904, with opposing missions, as their visions of achieving this goal were

1 Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska, *Polityka Japonii wobec Polski 1918-1941* (Warszawa: Nozomi, 1998).

different.² The Japanese episode of St. Maksymilian Maria Kolbe in the 1930s and his organization work in Nagasaki is widely known, too.³

The blurring memory about the first Pole in Japan

It was the very same city – the main one on the Kyushu island – which became the last stop of the journey of Wojciech Męciński three centuries earlier. Modern mentions about him can be found in travel dictionaries, books on missionary history, or detailed scientific articles that appear from time to time. However, he is not a figure that would be currently known and widely remembered. But it was not always that way. His mission was so spectacular and ended so dramatically that it echoed around contemporary Europe. Męciński as an individual and a participant of the Antonio Rubino's expedition emerged on the pages of Jesuit books issued in Europe shortly after their death and during the next century.⁴ His compatriots drew information about his last way from these books and from

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- 2 Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska, 'The Russo-Japanese War and Its Impact on Polish-Japanese Relations in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Analecta Nipponica*, no. 1 (2011): 12-22; Michiro Yasui, 'Ex Oriente Lux Roman Dmowski w Japonii', *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, no. 6 (2014): 241-254.
 - 3 Ryszard Zajączkowski, 'Literatura polska w Japonii', *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 7, no. 3 (2016): 150; Iwona Merklejn, *Brat Zeno Zebrowski. Polski Misjonarz w Japońskich Mediach* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2006), 34-44.
 - 4 Francisco Rosini, trans., *Breue Relatione Della Gloriosa Morte Che Il P. Antonio Rubino Della Compagnia Di Gesu Sofferse Nella Città Di Nangasacchi Dello Stesso Regno Del Giappone, Di Marzo Nel 1643* (Roma: Typis Heredum Corbeletti, 1652); Alexandre de Rhodes SJ, *Histoire de La Vie et de La Glorieuse Mort de Cinq Peres de La Compagnie de Jesus Qui Ont Souffert Le Martyre Dans Le Japon, Avec Trois Séculariers, En l'année 1643* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1653), 88-119; Matheus Tanner, *Societas Jesu Usque Ad Sanguinis Et Vitæ Profusionem Militans in Europa, Africa, Asia Et America Contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judeos, Haereticos, Impios, Pro Deo, Fide, Ecclesia, Pietate: Sive Vita, Et Mors Eorum, Qui Ex Societate Jesu in Causa Fidei, & Virtutis Propugnatae Violentâ Morte Toto Orbe Sublati Sunt* (Praga: Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandæ, 1675), 417-420; Fillipo Alegambe, *Mortes Illustres et Gesta Eorum de Societ. Jesu Qui in Odium Fidei Ab Haereticis Vel Aliis Occisi Sunt* (Roma: Typographia Varesii, 1657), 582-586; Jan Morawski, *Palaestra Pietatis: Continens Documenta Sancte Vivendi, & Moriendi Athletis Marianis Aperta*, 3rd ed. (Olomouc: Convictus Olomucensis, 1728), 165-167; Josephus Juvencius SJ, *Historia Prześladowania Wiary Chrześcijańskiej w Japonii w Dziejach Towarzystwa Jezusowego*, trans. Franciszek Rzepnicki (Poznań: Drukarnia Jezuitów, 1763), 191-204; Rafał Skrzynecki SJ, *Żywoit Wielebnego Księdza Wojciecha Męcińskiego Societatis Jesu Męczennika Japońskiego z Różnych Pisarzy Zebrany* (Kalisz: Drukarnia J.K.M. y Rzeczypty Kollegium Soc. Jesu, 1781).

the annual letters of the Society of Jesus, which were published as collections.⁵ The latter especially allowed to discern the background of his mission, which the Jesuits decided to take up despite the existing dangers.⁶ Before Poland lost its independence at the end of the 18th century, Męciński was mentioned also in Polish historical works and hagiographical books. Among the first-class writings about him, one can mention an important part of *Klimaktery* by Wespazjan Kochowski, a work which was a synthesis of the history of the seventeenth century Poland. Kochowski, despite making a few mistakes, presents an outline of Męciński's story without coloring it excessively.⁷ Especially one text, published a little earlier, is still interesting due to the diligent documentation of the facts described.⁸ It has remained nameless, however, it is usually attributed to Kasper Druźbicki, a proficient author who knew the Polish martyr personally.⁹ Others suggest that the creator of this biography (or its translator) could be Ignacy Tłuczyński.¹⁰ An important work was also *Żywot Wielebnego Xiędza Wojciecha Męcińskiego* published by Rafał Skrzynecki at the end of the 18th century, including a collection of earlier works and some of the missionary's letters.¹¹ Kasper Nieciecki, an outstanding genealogist of the epoch, tells the story of the dramatic mission of Wojciech-Albert while discussing the Męciński family in his armorial.¹² Also in the Partition

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- 5 Michał Juniewicz, *Listy Rozne Ku Chwalebney Ciekawosci Y Chrzescianskiemu Zbudowaniu Sluzące. Z Azji, Afryki, Ameryki, Niedys' Od Missyonarzow Societatis Jesu W Rozmaiitych Językach Do Europy Przeslane Teraz [...] Polskiemu Swiatu Językiem Oyczystym Kommuniķowane Roku 1756* (Warszawa: Drukarnia J.K.M. y Rzeczypty Kollegium Soc. Jesu, 1756), 47-59.
 - 6 Przemysława Matuszewska, 'Drukowane Zbiory Listów w Polsce XVIII Wieku', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, no. 70 (1979): 7.
 - 7 Wespazjan Kochowski, *Roczniki Polski. Klimakter Czwarty (1669-1673)*, ed. Leszek Andrzej Wierzbicki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2011), 170-173.
 - 8 Ignacy Maciej Tłuczyński, *Vita et Mors Gloriose Suscepta R.P. Alberti Mencinski e Societate Jesu in Odium Sanctae Fidei Catholicae apud Japonos Una Cum Aliis Quatuor Ex Eadem Societate Patribus Interempti A.D. 1643. 23 Martii*. (Cracovia: Franciscus Cezary S.R.M., 1661).
 - 9 Wiesław Pawlak, 'Erudycja humanistyczna w literaturze religijnej XVII wieku', in *Humanitas i christianitas w kulturze polskiej*, ed. Mirosława Hanusiewicz-Lavallee, Humanizm Syntezy 4 (Warszawa: Neriton, 2009), 252.
 - 10 Jerzy Bandrowski, *Szkarlatna Róża Raju Boskiego. Świątobliwy Ks. Wojciech Męciński* (Poznań-Warszawa-Wilno-Lublin: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1937), 1; Iwona M. Dacka-Górzynska, 'Korona polska' *Kaspra Niesieckiego.: Pomnik staropolskiego piśmiennictwa heraldycznego* (Wydawnictwo DiG, 2004), 92.
 - 11 Stanisław Cieślak, 'Jezuickie Ośrodki Badań Historycznych w Polsce Do 1939 Roku', in *Kościół w Polsce. Dzieje i Kultura*, ed. Jan Walkusz, vol. 6 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2007), 77; Skrzynecki SJ, *Żywot Wielebnego Xiędza Wojciecha Męcińskiego Societatis Jesu Męczennika Japońskiego z Różnych Pisarzy Zebrany*.
 - 12 Kasper (1682-1744) Niesiecki SJ, *Herbarz polski Kaspra Niesieckiego S.J.*, vol. 6 (Lipsk: Breitkopf i Härtel, 1841), 360-366.

Period (1795-1918), biographic publications appeared about him, the greatest achievement in research on Męciński was the biography by Fr. Michał Czermiński.¹³ Despite these efforts, the central hero of the mission remains poorly known, and even the most popular history of Japan by a Polish author does not mention him at all.¹⁴ Męciński is, therefore, present in dictionary entries, listed along with Polish travelers and missionaries, and in scientific articles about him or on missionary work in Eastern Asia.¹⁵ In more general texts, he is sometimes mentioned briefly.¹⁶ Thus, he is virtually unknown to the wider public in the country of his origin.

The Polish priest and the Japanese missions

Wojciech Męciński's activity must be considered against the background of the Jesuit missions to Japan as it was a particular expression of their last phase in the modern era. The Jesuits encountered the Japanese outside the Empire, in Malacca, where Anjirō, an exile, was the first guide to the customs and specificity of the country for Francis Xavier.¹⁷ This first meeting had fundamental meaning to the imagination of the intrepid

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- 13 Marcin Czermiński T.J., *Życie x. Wojciecha Męcińskiego T.J. Umęczonego Za Wiarę w Japonii* (Kraków: Drukarnia 'Czasu' Fr. Kluczyckiego i Spółki, 1895).
 - 14 Jolanta Tubielewicz, *Historia Japonii* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1984).
 - 15 Bronisław Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', ed. Romuald Gustaw OFM, *Hagiografia Polska. Słownik Bio-Bibliograficzny* (Poznań-Warszawa-Lublin: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1972); Bronisław Natoński, 'Wojciech Męciński. Jezuita, Męczennik (1598-1643)', in *Z Polskiej Gleby* (Kraków: WAM, 1972), 446-462; Bronisław Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków: Wydawnictwo PAN – Ossolineum, 1975); Bronisław Natoński SI, 'Wojciech Męciński Jezuita, Męczennik w Japonii', in *Gdy Europa Szukała Azji* (WAM, 1975), 303-316; Waclaw Ślabczyński and Tadeusz Ślabczyński, 'Męciński Wojciech', *Słownik Podróżników Polskich* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1992), 222-223; Dorota Zołądź-Strzelczyk, "'Praca w Winnicy Pańskiej": Dwaj Polscy Jezuita-Misjonarze XVII Wieku', in *Jezuicka Ars Historica. Prace Ofiarowane Księdzu Profesorowi Ludwikowi Grzebieniowi SJ* (Kraków: WAM, 2001), 655-667; Duc Ha Nguyen, *Polscy Misjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku* (Warszawa: Neriton, 2006), passim; Monika Miazek-Męczczyńska, 'Indipetae Boymianae on Boym's Requests to the Jesuit General for a Missionary Appointment to China', *Monumenta Serica* 59, no. 1 (1 December 2011): 232, <https://doi.org/10.1179/mon.2011.59.1.011>; Robert Danieluk SJ, '„Milczenie” Po Polsku: Wojciech Męciński SJ (1598-1643) i Jego Długa Droga Do Japonii', *Studia Bobolanum*, no. 2 (2017): 5-31.
 - 16 Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska and Andrzej Romer, *Historia stosunków polsko-japońskich 1904-1945* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Fundacji im. Takashimy, 2009), 23, 31; Łukasz Krucki, 'Misje katolickie w Japonii. Historia i współczesność', *Kościół w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura*, no. 13 (2014): 47.
 - 17 Robert Richmond Ellis, "'The Best Thus Far Discovered": The Japanese in the Letters of Francisco Xavier', *Hispanic Review* 71, no. 2 (2003): 158-159, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3247185>.

missionary as he arrived in Japan in 1549. His visit and encounter with the well-organized society, the elaborate etiquette in addition to the aesthetic and spiritual sensitivity fueled his enthusiasm for the result of the mission. The enthusiasm was, however, soon replaced by skepticism in some of the Jesuit fathers, who came to spend most of their lives in Japan and to fathom its culture. Luis Fróis, S.J., or João Rodrigues, S.J., and above all, the superior of the Jesuits, Francisco Cabral, S.J., had doubts whether it was possible to reach the hermetic Japanese soul with the Christian message.¹⁸ Senior visionaries in the order – Alessandro Valignano, S.J., inspector for the East Indies¹⁹ and Antonio Possevino, S.J. – refused to give up their enthusiasm.²⁰ The latter outlined a vision of evangelizing the world, expanding it in his *Bibliotheca Selecta*.²¹ Japan was intended to have a key role in this program, as evidenced by the *in extenso* incorporation of Valignano's catechism for the Japanese missions into the Possevino's collection!²² Both the skepticism and the enthusiasm had to face the ordeal of the Japanese Christians with the onset of religious persecution. The first decree of 1587 aimed against missionaries and the 1597 crucifixion of 26 of them in Nagasaki heralded the Tokuwagas' policy taken up while enforcing their control over the country.²³ However, this did not happen right away. The analysis of Christian activity shows that the peak of institutional development of Christianity in Nagasaki took place a decade after the crucifixion of Paulo Miki and his companions. It was then that a number of buildings were erected for religious purposes (e.g. the new college), and in 1601,

18 Neil S. Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity: The Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan* (New York: Paulist Pr, 1991), 73-74; Michael Cooper SJ, *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 172-173; Michael Cooper SJ, ed., *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1995), 42-45.

19 Andrew C. Ross, *Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China 1542-1742*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2003), 43, 65; Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. II: 1500-1900* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 77-79; J.F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth Century Japan*. (Routledge, 2014), 21.

20 Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 161-162.

21 John Patrick Donnelly, 'Antonio Possevino's Plan for World Evangelization', *The Catholic Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1988): 179-98.

22 Paweł F. Nowakowski, 'Wątek japoński w "Bibliotheca selecta" Antonia Possevina SJ i jego związek z sytuacją misji jezuickich', in *Antonio Possevino SJ (1533-1611): życie i dzieło na tle epoki*, ed. Danuta Quirini-Popławska (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum : Wydawnictwo WAM, 2012), 567-784.

23 About the role of the 1587 edict cf. Kawamura Shinzō S.J., 'Communities, Christendom, and the Unified Regime in Early Modern Japan', in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison, 1543-1644*, ed. M. Antoni J. Üçerler (Roma: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 152-153, 159-161.

Japanese priests were ordained. The public celebration of Corpus Christi a few years later was also remembered.²⁴

However, the coinciding political empowerment of the Tokugawas brought along an infringement of liberties. Their concern for the unification of the country and subjecting it to the control of the family was associated with the introduction of a consequent policy which was a blow against missionaries and local Christians alike.²⁵ The last phase was marked with examples of real dedication to the Christian faith from the Japanese, which must have been surprising to the skeptics.²⁶ This did not take place, however, without cases of apostasy, among which the most important were those relating to European missionaries. The loud case of Cristóvão Ferreira, who was tortured in 1633 and renounced the faith, heightened the readiness to provide support for persecuted Christians in Japan.²⁷ There was also a group of priests who were ready for martyrdom, as a counterbalance to the attitude of Ferreira.

Among the Poles, such a man was Wojciech (Albert) Męciński, a Jesuit born in Osmolice about 1598 in a noble family. Coming from a wealthy home, polished and well educated, he soon recognized his vocation and entered the Society of Jesus. Then, ready to give his life for the faith, he started his endeavors to be able to go to Japan, where he was tortured to death in the spring of 1643.²⁸

The uniqueness of Męciński is signified not only in the fact that he was the first Pole who, as far as we know, reached Japan, not only because he died there as a martyr. His tenacity with which he tried to reach out to an exotic country is admirable. According to the findings of Monica Miazek-Męczyńska, 77% of the Polish Jesuits willing to travel to the East missions

24 Diego Pacheco, 'Diogo de Mesquita, S. J. and the Jesuit Mission Press', *Monumenta Nipponica* 26, no. 3-4 (1971): 432.

25 Yamamoto Hirofumi, 'The Edo Shogunate's View of Christianity in the Seventeenth Century', in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison, 1543-1644*, ed. M. Antoni J. Üçerler (Roma: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 255-268.

26 More extensively on the three phases of the reception of the Japanese and their religion in the eyes of the Jesuits, cf. Paweł F. Nowakowski, 'Entuzjizm i rozczarowanie. Refleksje kulturoznawcze nad pierwszymi spotkaniami jezuitów i Japończyków w XVI w.', in *Itinera clericorum: kulturotwórcze i religijne aspekty podróży duchownych*, ed. Danuta Quirini-Popławska and Łukasz Burkiewicz (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2014), 503-516.

27 More on the topic: Hubert Cieslik SJ, 'The Case of Christovão Ferreira', *Monumenta Nipponica* 29, no. 1 (1974): 1-54; On the treatise attributed to Ferreira, aimed against Christianity, cf. Masaharu Anesaki, 'A Refutation of Christianity Attributed to Christovão Ferreira, the Apostate Padre', *Proceedings of the Imperial Academy* 6, no. 2 (1930): 27-30.

28 Ludwik Grzebień SJ, 'Męciński Wojciech', ed. Ludwik Grzebień SJ, *Encyklopedia wiedzy o jezuitach na ziemiach Polski i Litwy, 1564-1995* (Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna 'Ignatianum', WAM, 2004), 417; Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', 1975, 498-500.

did not obtain permission do to so. Those who were successful, were just 3% of all the applicants.²⁹ In the case of Japan alone, it was even more difficult, as the order's authorities did not want to agree on an expedition that were bound to end in capture, torture, on top of mental and spiritual violation of the missionary or his death.

The case of Albert Męciński was even more complex. From the moment of obtaining permission to travel to East Asia, he encountered several obstacles independent of his will. Having completed the preparation for the mission in the Portuguese city of Évora, he was getting ready to go to the East together with Sebastian Vieira, S.J.. It was then when he received information that he needed to return to his country to participate in a judicial process. Męciński's family tried to undermine his powers concerning his property, which he assigned for religious purposes in 1624 (it was used to erect a Jesuit college, which today is Collegium Broscianum, belonging to the Jagiellonian University).³⁰ After successfully solving the case, he returned to Portugal. Meanwhile, Vieira sailed to the East, to die a few years later as a martyr in Japan.³¹ Męciński's second attempt to travel the East also failed due to the storms that carried his ship towards the coast of Brazil. After returning to Portugal, the Polish priest was so exhausted that he required long-term convalescence. The third attempt allowed him to reach Asia, but this time, the ship fell prey to the Dutch, who imprisoned him in Formosa (now Taiwan), where he was assigned the care of pigs. His education acquired in Poland allowed the relaxation of the conditions of his captivity, when Męciński effectively helped the healing of Dutchmen suffering from a disease. Finally, when the opportunity arrived, he escaped from a ship transporting prisoners and he returned to religious work in East Asia. He was assigned various tasks: he stayed in Cambodia and then in the Philippines. It was only then that a possibility appeared for him to fulfill his intention of the Japanese mission.

29 Miazek-Męczyńska, 'Indipetae Boymianae on Boym's Requests to the Jesuit General for a Missionary Appointment to China', 231; Some confusion is introduced by the opinion of Jan Konior, S.J., that 70% of authors of letters asking for permission to go on a mission to the East did travel to China and Japan. The author, basing on the findings by D.H. Nguyen, made a mistake concerning the percentage of the applications with the actual permissions, which was low. Cf. Jan Konior, *Historia polsko-chińskich kontaktów kulturowych w XVII w.: (na przykładzie misji jezuickich)* = The history of polish-chinese cultural contacts in XVII century : (jesuit missions examples) (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2013), 187; cf. Nguyen, *Polscy Misjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku*, 130-133. As found by D.H. Nguyen, most of the applicants never went on a mission (60%).

30 Wiktor Szymborski, *Collegium Broscianum* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2014), 61.

31 Helena Costa Toipa, 'Padre Sebastião Vieira, sob a palma do martírio. A Companhia de Jesus no Japão', *Máthesis* 19 (2010): 38.

The last journey

Męciński's last journey was possible thanks to the fact that the function of the Inspector was taken by Giovanni Antonio Rubino, S.J. (1578-1643).³² This Jesuit with experience on the Eastern missions set out in 1602 from Portugal. He became known as a teacher of mathematics in India and on Ceylon, and a theoretician of missionary tactics.³³ He served in China, Malacca and in the last period of his life in the Philippines. It was there in 1641 when his treatise *Resposta às calúmnias que os Padres de S. Domingos e de S. Francisco impoem aos Padres da Companhia de JESUS que se occupio na conversio do Reino da China* was written on the subject of the so-called Chinese rites. Its co-author, or editor of Rubino's thoughts, was another participant of the expedition, Diego Morales. The fathers proposed concrete solutions to the moral and disciplinary controversy, basing on the examples of China and Japan.³⁴ The last fruit of Rubino's theoretical and organizational work shows his deep engagement in the success of the missions in Asia and explains the basis for his decision. Two groups of Jesuits prepared to travel to Japan a year after writing of the treatise by the inspector with Diego Morales. Rubino personally led the first group, which also included Wojciech Męciński. Due to this, especially outside of Poland, Męciński is often known simply as a member of the "Rubino's group". On the other hand, Rubino has been commemorated similarly to Męciński in historical and religious literature, primarily as a martyr in Japan (first in the Jesuit literature of the 17th century, copied and reprinted in later centuries).³⁵ The last letters that they sent to the Philippines on 2 and

32 Cieslik SJ, 'The Case of Christovão Ferreira', 50.

33 Luis Saraiva and Catherine Jami, *The Jesuits, the Padroado and East Asian Science (1552-1773)* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2008), 177-178; Simon Gregory Perera, *Jesuits in Ceylon (in the XVI and XVII Centuries)* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1941), 163; Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism. Antonio Rubino's Account of the History and Religion of Vijayanagara (1608)', *Archiv Für Religionsgeschichte* 3, no. 1 (31 January 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110234190.210>.

34 Asami Masakazu, 'A Solution to the Rites Controversy Proposed by Antonio Rubino, S.J.', in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison, 1543-1644*, ed. M. Antoni J. Üçerler (Roma: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 127-42.

35 Rosini, *Breve Relazione Della Gloriosa Morte Che Il P. Antonio Rubino Della Compagnia Di Gesu Sofferse Nella Città Di Nangasacchi Dello Stesso Regno Del Giappone, Di Marzo Nel 1643; Breve Memoria Della Vita Del V.P. Giovanni Antonio Rubino Della Compagnia Di Gesu, Martire Del Giappone* (Torino: Tipografia G. Derossi, 1898); Filippo Alegambe, *Mortes Illustres et Gesta Eorum de Societ. Jesu Qui in Odiurn Fidei Ab Haereticis Vel Aliis Occisi Sunt* (Roma: Typographia Varesii, 1657), 570-581; Mathews Tanner, *Societas Jesu Usque Ad Sanguinis Et Vitae Profusionem Militans in Europa, Africa, Asia Et America Contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judæos, Haereticos, Impios, Pro Deo, Fide, Ecclesia, Pietate : Sive Vita, Et Mors Eorum, Qui Ex Societate Jesu in Causa*

4 July announced the journey to Japan, overshadowed by the perspective of martyrdom.³⁶

It was a particularly dangerous time to organize a mission. It should be remembered that Japan was not only bound by the 1614 prohibition of the dissemination of the Christian religion and the rule of isolationism in force since 1636. Effective implementation of the shogunate's policy, a special office was appointed in 1640 to specialize in tracking and fighting Christianity.³⁷ Its name "(Kirishitan) Shūmon aratame-yaku" contains a certain ambiguity. The word *aratameru* can be understood both as a change, improvement, and as an investigation. Thence, by a certain analogy, which will certainly arouse some reservations among the researchers of the European Middle Ages, it is often referred to in the literature as an inquisition office.³⁸ At the same time, some studies also contain such translations of the name as the Office for the persecution of Christians.³⁹

Fidei, & Virtutis Propugnatae Violentâ Morte Toto Orbe Sublati Sunt (Praga: Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandea, 1675), 412-422.

- 36 Antonio Rubino SJ, 'The Letter of Antonio Rubino to Macao from Manila, 4.07.1642', in *Breve Relazione Della Gloriosa Morte Che Il P. Antonio Rubino Della Compagnia Di Giesu Sofferse Nella Città Di Nangasacchi Dello Stesso Regno Del Giappone, Di Marzo Nel 1643*, ed. Pedro Marques (Roma: Typis Heredum Corbeletti, 1652), 57-58; Antonio Rubino SJ, 'The Letter of Antonio Rubino to Macao from Manila, 4.07.1642', in *Breve Memoria Della Vita Del V.P. Giovanni Antonio Rubino Della Compagnia Di Gesù, Martire Del Giappone* (Torino: Tipografia G. Derossi, 1898), 28; Wojciech Męciński SJ, 'The Letter of Albert Męciński to Cracow, from Philippines, 2.07.1642', in *Vitae Praesulum Poloniae Magni Ducatus Lithuaniae Res Praecipuae Illorum Temporibus Gestae Ad Annum Mdcclx.: Origo Ecclesiarum Cathedralium Quatuor Libris Comprehensae*, ed. Franciszek Rzepnicki, vol. 2 (Poznań: Typis Posnaniensibus Clari Collegii Societatis Jesu, 1762), 51-53.
- 37 Gustav Voss, 'Early Japanese Isolationism', *Pacific Historical Review* 14, no. 1 (1945): 15.
- 38 Masaharu Anesaki, 'The Extermination of the Japanese Catholics in the Last Half of the Seventeenth Century and Their Survivals', *Proceedings of the Imperial Academy* 2, no. 3 (1926): 95; Masaharu Anesaki, 'Prosecution of Kirishitans after the Shimabara Insurrection.', *Monumenta Nipponica* 1, no. 2 (1938): 294, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2382669>; Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), 164; John Whitney Hall and James L. McClain, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Reprinted, vol. 4: *Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 370; Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden; Boston: Neriton, 2001), 148.
- 39 Louis G. Perez, ed., *Japan at War: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 50; Ann M. Harrington, *Japan's Hidden Christians* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 27; combines these two aspects quite fortunately as 'anti-Christian inquisition office' C.R. Boxer, cf. C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 391-397; J. Dougill was translated quite incorrectly (as centralized prosecution office) in his historical journalist book on the persecution of Christians in Japan, cf. John Dougill, *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival* (Hong Kong: Graphicraft Limited, 2016), https://nls.lids.org.uk/welcome.html?ark:/81055/vdc_100041500665.0x000001; also the Polish translator followed this path, replicating Dougill's

The previously used procedure was institutionally reinforced and in the following decades, it worked at full power, capturing and detecting Christians to force them to renounce the Christian religion. The specific objective was clergy (including missionaries), as their apostasy would be treated as an example to weaken the morale of the faithful losing their leader. The *Shūmon aratame* office should be treated as one of the elements of a specific policy of the Tokugawas, who wanted to achieve and maintain the unity of the country through full social control. The implementation of the next stage of this policy was faced with the missionaries setting out from the Philippines in the summer of 1642.

Rubino's first group landed in the Satsuma province (a peninsula or island of the same name was often referred to later) and was quickly captured. After being taken to Nagasaki, the Jesuits were subjected to interrogation and torture. Some biographers of Męciński, followed by many websites, state that he was tortured 105 times. Of course, this detail must pose some questions, especially related to the capture of the Jesuits by the Japanese and the lack of access to any Japanese sources on the matter during the isolation. So, there are no certain grounds on which European biographers could base making such calculations. It can be assumed that this figure was established based on the applied method of torture and the length of its application. These included forcing water down the throats until the prisoners fainted. This type of torment was impossible to be withstood daily, therefore, it was inflicted every other day, to give the prisoner more time for regeneration.⁴⁰ The investigation conducted for 7 months, which gives approximately the number of 210 days. If you divide the result by two, the resulting number is 105, which was indicated by biographers.⁴¹ It was often repeated without the awareness of how it was

term literally, cf. John Dougill, *300 lat milczenia: w poszukiwaniu ukrytych japońskich chrześcijan*, trans. Janusz Ochab (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2017), 155.

40 Alegambe and Tanner state: 'alternis fere diebus', i.e. Almost every second day, cf. Alegambe, *Mortes Illustres et Gesta Eorum de Societ. Jesu Qui in Odium Fidei Ab Haereticis Vel Aliis Occisi Sunt*, 1657, 587; Tanner, *Societas Jesu Usque Ad Sanguinis Et Vitae Profusionem Militans in Europa, Africa, Asia Et America Contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judeos, Haereticos, Impios, Pro Deo, Fide, Ecclesia, Pietate : Sive Vita, Et Mors Eorum, Qui Ex Societate Jesu in Causa Fidei, & Virtutis Propugnate Violentâ Morte Toto Orbe Sublati Sunt*, 1675, 420; while Hazart writes 'fast täglich', i.e. almost daily, cf. Cornelius Hazart SJ, *Kirchen-Geschichte, Das Ist: Catholisches Christenthum, Durch Die Ganze Welt Ausgebreitet* (Wien: Leopold Voigt, 1678), 258; similarly to Kasper Niesiecki, cf. Niesiecki SJ, *Herbarz polski Kaspra Niesieckiego S. J...* T. 6, 6:364, while de Rhodes states only: 'du feu pendant sept mois', i.e. that the tortures lasted for seven months, cf. de Rhodes SJ, *Histoire de La Vie et de La Glorieuse Mort de Cinq Pères de La Compagnie de Jésus Qui Ont Souffert Le Martyre Dans Le Japon, Avec Trois Séculiers, En l'année 1643*, 118.

41 Natoński, 'Wojciech Męciński. Jezuita, Męczennik (1598-1643)', 460; Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', 1972, 133-134; Natoński SI, 'Wojciech Męciński Jezuita, Męczennik w Japonii', 315;

calculated, and in any case, without proper explanation.⁴² The exact course of the investigation or the behavior of the captured in its key moments is therefore unknown. Many details, starting with the place and exact time of arrival in Japan, are provided in approximation. They deserve detailed considerations in a separate, thorough study.⁴³

Information about the capture of Rubino's group and their captivity in Nagasaki is certain, as it is based on a Dutch report. It was written by Jan van Elseracq, the head of a trading post on the Dejima island in Nagasaki. Elseracq served this function twice there. The first period, from November 1641 to the end of October 1642, coincided with the period of imprisonment of the Jesuit missionaries.⁴⁴ Elseracq's records contain some inconsistencies (Męciński is described as "Romeyn jesuyt", while he says that there are two Poles, Albert and John). These evident mistakes, however, make his account more believable. The main information is correct and the Dutchman heard the news "in the streets", and he made notes regarding a matter in which he was not involved. It was also he who reported on the frequent (almost daily) torture. Cases of this type were of interest to him, especially due to the fact that his trading post was only starting its operation and the isolationist policy was only at the stage of precedent-setting. During the same year when the case of Rubino's first group was playing out, the Dutch were informed that every time their ship reaches Japan, the local authorities must be informed about the number of the crew and provided with a list of their names.⁴⁵ It was Elseracq who received this decision, and he also participated in solving diplomatic questions.⁴⁶ These events happened simultaneously with rumors of the Japanese willingness

Léon Pagès, *Histoire de La Religion Chrétienne Au Japon, Depuis 1598 Jusqu'à 1651*, vol. 1 (Paris: Charles Douniol, 1869), 874-875.

- 42 Kazimierz Kapitańczyk, *Udział Polaków w Dziale Misyjnym. Szkic Historyczny* (Poznań: Rady Krajowe Papieskiego Działu Rozkrzewiania Wiary, 1933), 88; Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', 1975, 500; Jerzy Pertek, *Polacy Na Morzach i Oceanach*, vol. 1 (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1981), 467; Nguyen informs about torture which was inflicted 'more than a hundred times', cf. Nguyen, *Polscy Misyjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku*, 67, while the website of the manor house in Osmolice, in a short biographical note of Wojciech Męciński states that he was tortured 'in 105 ways', cf. <http://dworosmolice.pl/dwor-osmolice/> (access 10.01.2018). Grzebień SJ, 'Męciński Wojciech', 417.
- 43 To some extent, such an attempt was made by D.H. Nguyen, cf. Nguyen, *Polscy Misyjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku*, 66-67.
- 44 University of Tokyo Historical Institute, 'Overseas Section. Volume 6 of Diaries (Jan van Elseracq) – Summary', accessed 27 January 2018, <http://www.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/tokushu/kaigai/Diaries/Volumes/768F3C3F-FA9F-43E9-8515-299EF1546796.html>.
- 45 James Murdoch, *A History of Japan*, vol. 3 (London: Psychology Press, 1926), 270.
- 46 Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 185-187.

to hand over Rubino's second group, who were also captured, interrogated and tortured, to the Dutch. Elseracq was surprised with this suggestion, however, it is currently believed that the Japanese authorities were merely testing how the Dutch would react.⁴⁷ In any case, Elseracq's role was not limited to commercial affairs, and his interests went beyond this area, also out of sheer need.

At the beginning of March 1643, as attempts to bread the Jesuits through water torture failed, the most gruesome method was resorted to. The captives, with one of their hands free (to make it possible for them to make a gesture meaning they give up), were tied and hanged with their heads down in specially prepared pits filled with putrid water. In contrast to earlier methods such as burning at the stake or beheading with swords, the torture of the pit prolonged torment and agony. It also gave the possibility to opt out of the uncompromising attitude in the face of such an extended process of dying by the victim. Rubino's and Męciński's biographers state unanimously that the inspector died after six days of torture.⁴⁸ Wojciech Męciński died on the next day, on the seventh day of the torment of the pit, on 23 March 1643.⁴⁹ Three last captives from the group made it to the ninth day, after which they were pulled up from the pits and executed by beheading.

47 Reiner H. Hesselink, *Prisoners from Nambu: Reality and Make-Believe in Seventeenth-Century Japanese Diplomacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 97-98.

48 Alegambe, *Mortes Illustres et Gesta Eorum de Societ. Jesu Qui in Odium Fidei Ab Haereticis Vel Aliis Occisi Sunt*, 1657, 578; Tłuczyński, *Vita et Mors Gloriose Suscepta R.P. Alberti Mencinski e Societate Jesu in Odium Sanctae Fidei Catholicae apud Japonos Una Cum Aliis Quatuor Ex Eadem Societate Patribus Interempti A.D. 1643. 23 Martii.*, 175; Tanner, *Societas Jesu Usque Ad Sanguinis Et Vitae Profusionem Militans in Europa, Africa, Asia Et America Contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judaeos, Haereticos, Impios, Pro Deo, Fide, Ecclesia, Pietate : Sive Vita, Et Mors Eorum, Qui Ex Societate Jesu in Causa Fidei, & Virtutis Propugnatae Violentâ Morte Toto Orbe Sublati Sunt*, 1675, 417; Kochowski, *Roczniki Polski. Klimakter Czwarty (1669-1673)*, 173.

49 Czermiński T.J., *Życie x. Wojciecha Męcińskiego T.J. Umęczonego Za Wiarę w Japonii*, 221; Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', 1972, 134; Natoński SI, 'Wojciech Męciński Jezuita, Męczennik w Japonii', 315; Natoński, 'Wojciech Męciński. Jezuita, Męczennik (1598-1643)', 460; Bronisław Natoński, 'Męciński Wojciech', *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków: Wydawnictwo PAN – Ossolineum, 1975), 500; Waclaw Ślabczyński and Tadeusz Ślabczyński, 'Męciński Wojciech', *Słownik Podróżników Polskich* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1992), 222; Żołądź-Strzelczyk, "Praca w Winnicy Pańskiej": Dwaj Polscy Jezuici-Misjonarze XVII Wieku', 662; Robert Danieluk SJ, '„Milczenie” Po Polsku: Wojciech Męciński SJ (1598-1643) i Jego Długa Droga Do Japonii', *Studia Bobolanum*, no. 2 (2017): 23.

Testimony of vocation expressed in letters

Wojciech Męciński after having obtained consent to go on the mission to Japan until its tragic end struggled with a variety of obstacles in getting to the purpose of his journey for several years. His journey was significantly interrupted a few times, and the missionary was forced to retreat and it seemed (like after the unfortunate event when the ship was carried away to the coast of Brazil or during his Dutch captivity) that he would not fulfill his commitment. Each time, he was able to find the strength and wait for the opportunity to continue the mission. He did not know the country he was heading to. Although the biographers state that he did learn Japanese, his education in this respect took place already at the time of his stay in Asia, where he arrived with the intention of getting to Japan. His motivation was clearly religious: he was going where the Christian faith was persecuted. But in what way did it influence his attitude to the country which was the purpose of the journey and at the same time, the last station of his life, remains a question to ask. A partial answer seems to be found in Męciński's letters which allow us to trace the Japanese motives that appear in them over the years.

Męciński's letters are scattered, a good portion of them published in print by inclusion in biographies (especially those by Skrzynecki) or as separate publications. Some, however, remain unpublished. In the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*, there are fourteen of them, dated from 1625 to 1638. They were written in various languages – Latin, Italian and Portuguese (among the printed ones, there are also ones written in Polish and addressed e.g. to his family). The manuscripts are in various condition and legibility. Their publication in a critical edition should soon be expected from an experienced custodian of the ARSI, Fr. Robert Danieluk, S.J., PhD.

Męciński's letters carry the marks of the epoch, with Latin phrases thrown in between the lines. It seems that sometimes functioned as ornaments of the style, but sometimes one gets the impression that the author found it easier to express his thoughts this way. Reading them is not an easy task for the modern reader, as styles merge within them, intertwining information and metaphor. Extremely complex and obscure images are followed by surprisingly simple and concise sentences. The way in which the letters are signed is interesting. The author usually signs them as Albertus (Alberto) Męciński. When already on the mission in Asia, he adds the nickname "Pole", significantly in a letter to Olivier Pensa from 20 February 1634, where he explains the change with a note: "adesso mi chiamo di Polonia".⁵⁰ Thus, he later presents himself with two names

50 Wojciech Męciński SJ, 'The Letter of Albert Męciński to Oliviero Pensa, from Goa', 20 February 1634, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 7r.

(“Alberto Męciński adesso mi chamo Alberto Polaco”) just as in his 1635 correspondence with Muzio Vitelleschi.⁵¹ Finally, after a few years in Asia, when he was probably generally known as Albert from Poland, he signs his letters simply as Alberto Polaco.⁵² The last words directed from his way to Japan in July 1642 are signed again as Albertus Męciński – as a kind of farewell.⁵³ In his family correspondence with Zofia Kurdwanowska, he uses the Polish version of his first name – Wojciech.⁵⁴

This pulsating rhythm of the letters and his undulating style is reinforced by sentences and phrases with a high emotional charge. References to God's love are, of course, not surprising in a priest's correspondence, but they are not only a literary means of expression.⁵⁵ They seem to actually put an incentive to Męciński's actions and way of thinking. The author also does not shrink from mentioning his tears as in the example from 1638.⁵⁶ If one remembers Francis Xavier describing his first student – Anjirō – he also refers to emotions, however, he sees them as a sign of a truly interior, spiritual experience.⁵⁷ References to tears appear in the missionary Jesuit literature more often from this time on.

The range of places the letters were sent from constitute a wide number of locations on Męciński's missionary way: from Évora in Portugal, to Goa, to Macau and the Philippines. Some of the letters contain interesting, but short reflections on the visited sites. The aim of the author was not to explore, which is visible in the content of the messages he sent. Actually, the only compact descriptive text refers to Formosa (Taiwan) and is the result of the author's experience of the Dutch captivity on his island.⁵⁸ In a letter sent from Goa to his sister (and a similar one directed to

51 Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Cochín’, 19 April 1635, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 8r.

52 Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Macau’, 3 January 1638, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 9r.

53 Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Saint Peter and Paul College, from Philippines’, 2 July 1642, ARSI, Pol. 52, f. 291v.

54 Stanisław Bodniak, ‘List Polaka z Goa o Indiach z Roku 1634’, *Rocznik Gdański* 12 (1938): 206.

55 Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Nuno Mascarenhas, from Madrid’, 19 April 1631, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 4r; Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Oliviero Pensa, from Lisbon’, 16 February 1633, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 5r.

56 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Macau’, ARSI, Jap.Sin. 38, f. 9r.

57 Francis Xavier SJ, ‘The Letter to John III. King of Portugal (20.06.1549)’, in *The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier*, ed. and trans. Henry James Coleridge, vol. 2 (London: Burns and Oates, 1872), 151.

58 Tłuczyński, *Vita et Mors Gloriose Suscepta R.P. Alberti Menciński e Societate Jesu in Odium Sanctae Fidei Catholicae apud Japonos Una Cum Aliis Quatuor Ex Eadem Societate Patribus Interempti*

the Cracowian college) he tries to shed light on Indian exoticism.⁵⁹ In the letter to his sister, written in Polish, he explains the differences in diet and he describes the local fruit, but he does it without a scientific slant, but in a way that is typical for the family correspondence. It should be stressed here, that when he presents his view on the existence of seven-headed dragons in Africa, he makes a remark that this is only a rumor.⁶⁰

Other information is woven between the discussion of other matters, especially spiritual. The obstacles he encounters occupy an important place in his letters. All events that delayed his arrival in Japan are seen as hurdles that are intended to pull him away from the actual task in front of him. A process for approval of his donations for the Jesuit college in Cracow, which forced his return to Poland from Portugal and the unfortunate and unexpected carrying off of his ship to Brazil are part of the correspondence⁶¹ as was his Dutch captivity. The Dutch themselves, in accordance with the spirit of the era and the environment he was from, he referred to as “the enemies of the faith” (“inimigos de fe Hollandeses”).⁶² But William Adams, a merchant of the Dutch company of East India and a castaway in Japan, and later Advisor to the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu reported that Japanese interpreters were sworn enemies due to the fact that they were baptized by the Franciscans and Jesuits.⁶³ Męciński’s words should not, therefore, be shocking, but they must be considered against the background of contemporary relations.

The most questions are evoked by Japan itself, the aim of the journey that occupied Wojciech Męciński’s mind for over twenty years. Already in the correspondence to his sister from 1626 he shared his desire to visit this

A.D. 1643. 23 Martii., 108-112; Nguyen, *Polscy Misjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku*, 48.

- 59 Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘List Wojciecha Męcińskiego Do Siostry Zofii Kurdwanowskiej z Goa, Indie, 20.02.1634’, ed. Stanisław Bodniak, *Rocznik Gdański* 12 (1938): 204-206; Wojciech Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Cracow, from Goa, 20.02.1634’, in *Vita et Mors Gloriose Suscepta R.P. Alberti Męcniński e Societate Jesu in Odium Sanctae Fidei Catholicae apud Japonos Una Cum Aliis Quatuor Ex Eadem Societate Patribus Interempti A.D. 1643. 23 Martii.*, by Ignacy Maciej Tłuczyński (Cracovia: Franciscus Cezary S.R.M., 1661), 77-84.
- 60 Męciński SJ, ‘List Wojciecha Męcińskiego Do Siostry Zofii Kurdwanowskiej z Goa, Indie, 20.02.1634’, 205.
- 61 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Cracow, from Goa, 20.02.1634’, 78; Męciński SJ, ‘List Wojciecha Męcińskiego Do Siostry Zofii Kurdwanowskiej z Goa, Indie, 20.02.1634’, 204.
- 62 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Macau’, ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 38, f. 9r.
- 63 三浦按針(William Adams), ‘The Letter to “my unknown friends and countrymen”, from Hirado, Japan, 23.10.1611’, in 三浦按針11通の手紙: 英和対訳, ed. 田中丸栄子, ジェフ・ニール, and 浜野みさえ (長崎: 長崎新聞社, 2010), 040.

country which he had felt for a few years.⁶⁴ From the same 1626, when he obtained permission to undertake a mission to that country, Japan begins to appear regularly in the letters. The later the letters, and consequently, the closer the author was to his objective, the more frequently he evoked the name of the country. The letters themselves do not indicate any deeper knowledge of Japan (although Męciński could have gained some during his studies which prepared the lecturers and alumni alike to the departure), the Jesuits' knowledge of the country, having been gathered for almost a century, was already vast.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Japan appears as a slogan, and Męciński seems not to be curious about what it looks like, what he had heard about this, or what he had heard about its inhabitants. For example, we can learn from a letter written in 1638 what the Governor of Manila promised help to transport the missionaries to Japan, but there is no information about the country itself.⁶⁶ Męciński focuses, understandably, on Japan in a letter of July 1642. We must remember, however, that the letter was written in the face of the expedition that was highly likely to end with his martyred death, a fact of which he was fully aware. Japan is thus described as a country ruled by a tyrant and an oppressor of his subjects and especially hostile against Christians. The Jesuit did not have any doubt that the power and attitude of the Shogun had Satanic origin and were a proof of demonic influence.⁶⁷

Męciński compared the situation in Japan to the state of affairs in ancient Rome under the rule of Diocletian.⁶⁸ This is a very poignant comparison. As is known, Diocletian's persecution of Christians included the most elaborate and orchestrated undertakings in the history of early Christianity. However, the comparison made by Męciński was not about a simple simile. The purpose was deeper and legible for those who are well-versed in the history of the Church. The martyrs of Diocletian's era laid foundations for the change which took place during the reign of Constantine.

64 Wojciech Męciński SJ, 'The Letter of Albert Męciński to Zofia Kurdwanowska, from Rome, 1.11.1626', in *Żywot Wielebnego Księdza Wojciecha Męcińskiego Societatis Jesu Męczennika Japońskiego z Różnych Pisarzów Zebrany*, ed. Rafał Skrzynecki SJ (Kalisz: Drukarnia J.K.M. y Rzeszypty Collegium Soc. Jesu, 1781), 38; Nguyen, *Polscy Misjonarze Na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII-XVIII Wieku*, 54.

65 Angelo Cattaneo, 'The Mutual Emplacement of Japan and Europe During the Nanban Century', in *Portugal, Jesuits, and Japan: Spiritual Beliefs and Earthly Goods*, ed. Victoria Weston (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2013), 28-29.

66 Męciński SJ, 'The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Macau', ARSI, Jap. Sin. 38, f. 9r.

67 Męciński SJ, 'The Letter of Albert Męciński to Saint Peter and Paul College, from Philippines', ARSI, Pol. 52, f. 291r.

68 Męciński SJ, 291r.

In the Christian interpretation of history this sacrifice was seen as a battle leading to the victory of Christianity in the West. Even though Męciński did not state it directly, it is easy to see the reason for the comparison. He saw himself as a soldier of Christ in a battle which can be ended with the victory of Christianity over a pagan state.

Snippets of information on the country which he was heading to which he shared with the addressees of the letters are strictly connected with this purpose. He mentioned the persecution already in the early letters.⁶⁹ In later ones, he mentions methods of torture. These include burning alive, using a steel crate, swords, crucifying, the breaking wheel and others.⁷⁰ The most importantly, there is a new kind of torture, invented and introduced before a few years before – and at the same the most terrifying one – the torture of the pit. Męciński was, therefore, conscious of not only the expected death, but also the way in which it would be inflicted on him. He also did not forget about his predecessors – his journey companions. The well-known Italian Jesuit, Marcello Mastrilli, set out together with Męciński on his journey east,⁷¹ and reached Japan earlier than the Pole (in 1637), was martyred to death there by decapitation after several days in the torture pit.⁷² Męciński mentions it in his letter from Macau in 1638, where he devotes more attention to it.⁷³

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Katarzyna Nowak, in a conclusion to her article on the Polish Jesuit, suggested that he might have been driven by “a conqueror’s fervor, which made him set out on a journey to explore Japan far away, providing salvation and love of one’s neighbors”.⁷⁴ If one looks from a certain

69 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Zofia Kurdwanowska, from Rome, 1.11.1626’, 37.

70 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Saint Peter and Paul College, from Philippines’, ARSI, Pol. 52, f. 291r.

71 Tanner, *Societas Jesu Usque Ad Sanguinis Et Vitae Profusionem Militans in Europa, Africa, Asia Et America Contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judeos, Hæreticos, Impios, Pro Deo, Fide, Ecclesia, Pietate : Sive Vita, Et Mors Eorum, Qui Ex Societate Jesu in Causa Fidei, & Virtutis Propugnate Violentâ Morte Toto Orbe Sublati Sunt*, 1675, 420.

72 Cieslik SJ, ‘The Case of Christovão Ferreira’, 49; Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 101.

73 Męciński SJ, ‘The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Macau’ m ARSI, Jap. Sin. 38, f. 9r; Tluczyński, *Vita et Mors Gloriose Suscepta R. P. Alberti Mencinški e Societate Jesu in Odium Sanctae Fidei Catholicae apud Japones Una Cum Aliis Quatuor Ex Eadem Societate Patribus Interempti A.D. 1643. 23 Martii.*, 106, 127-134.

74 Katarzyna Nowak, ‘Pierwszy Polak w Japonii – Wojciech Męciński’, *Iaponica*, no. 12 (2000): 178.

perspective on Męciński's letters, one could say that he is actually silent about Japan. Although the guiding thought and direction was reaching this country for around twenty years, his messages were filled with this objective rather than with imagination concerning the land where he was heading and its inhabitants. For him, Japan was an image of his way to Christ and a union with Him in suffering. By signing the letters with "designatus pro mori in Christo" (designated to die in Christ) he clearly emphasized his perspective of looking at reality. His love for Christ and his will to die in His name to a degree which might shock the modern man, were transposed to the country where he was heading. In Japan, Christ's faith was intended to grow on soil sprinkled with the blood of martyrs, and he saw himself in the role of a fertilizer. Therefore, having read Męciński's letters and being familiar with his biography, one can conclude that love is apparent in them, which is silently transposed from Christ to the country the authorities of which reject Him, and at the same time, on the people who are being barred from getting to know Him. This silence is different from the one of the novel by Shūsaku Endō, who created a literary image of the internal struggles Cristóvão Ferreira and members of the "Rubino's second group". Reflecting on the tragic fate of all the Jesuits who chose Japan as the area of their missionary activity in the seventeenth century, it is worth remembering also the less known silence – that of Męciński, the first Pole to travel to Japan knowing that he would never learn about the country where he was about to lose his life.

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Jap. Sin. 38, f. 1rv: The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzi Vitelleschi, from Avignon (26.12.1626).

⁷⁵ I am greatly indebted to Fr. Robert Danieluk S.J., PhD from ARSI for his help in acquiring access to the letters of Wojciech Męciński S.J.

- Jap. Sin.* 38, f. 2rv: The Letter of Albert Męciński to Muzio Vitelleschi, from Évora (4.04.1627).
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