

Robert Danieluk SJ

ORCID: 0000-0003-1145-4131

The Pontifical Institute of Ecclesiastical Studies

Kilian Stumpf, *The Acta Pekinensia or Historical Records of the Maillard de Tournon Legation, vol. 3: January 1708 – February 1709*, eds. Paul Rule, Claudia von Collani (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2024; *Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia*, 10), viii + 644 pp.

Among rich sources of the Jesuit Roman Archives concerning the Society's missions in East Asia, there is a volume quoted as *Japonica-Sinica* 138 containing the “Acta Pekinensia,” i.e. a 1467-pages-relation describing the visit in China of the pope Clement XI's envoy, archbishop (later cardinal) Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710) at the beginning of 18th century.¹ The author of that manuscript was a German Jesuit Kilian Stumpf (1655–1720), a missionary in China from 1694, appointed at that occasion pontifical notary whose task was to document

1 More about him in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 67 (Roma: Istituto Treccani, 2006) (online: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maillard-de-tournon-carlo-tommaso_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maillard-de-tournon-carlo-tommaso_(Dizionario-Biografico)/), accessed on 22.12.2025).

that legation.² His Latin narration including texts in other languages covers the years 1705–1710, which were a crucial time of the long and complicated history of the Chinese rites and their final condemnation by Rome.

The result of de Tournon's mission is known (Stumpf calls him “the Lord Patriarch, who in matters Chinese is no better informed than a day-old infant,” p. 532), as is the entire history of that controversy, while the limits of this review make impossible even a brief summary of the events described here. The “Acta” will probably not change the already existing historiography or prevailing opinions about the matter in question, however they will undoubtedly enrich our knowledge of it, particularly in what concerns the details.

In 2015 the Macau Ricci Institute and the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome published an English version of the first part of the “Acta” in the well-known series *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*.³ At that time, also the undersigned author took the liberty of preparing a review of it.⁴ The second volume of Stumpf's work appeared in 2019, this time opening a new important series of the publishing house Brill: *Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia*.⁵ Five years later, the readers can enjoy the third and the last part of the “Acta,” published again by Brill within the same series. What all those three volumes provide is an English translation, yet one is tempted to quote here rather a Russian proverb saying *Бог любит Троицу*. It literally means “God loves the Trinity,” but in this case it is more appropriate to use as its English equivalent “Good things come in threes.”

The present part of the “Acta” covers the period January 1708 – February 1709. A very short “Introduction” (pp. 1–5) is followed by the list of the headings and subheadings given by Stumpf to his text. Actually

2 More about him in *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-temático*, vol. IV (Roma: Institutum Historicum S.I. – Madrid, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3151–3652.

3 Kilian Stumpf, *The Acta Pekinensia or Historical Records of the Maillard de Tournon Legation: First Transcribed Edition and English Annotated Translation*, vol. 1: *December 1705 - August 1706*, eds. Paul Rule, Claudia von Collani (Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu – Macau, Macau Ricci Institute, 2015; *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu – Nova Series*, 9).

4 Robert Danieluk, “Review of *The Acta Pekinensia or Historical Records of the Maillard de Tournon Legation*, by Kilian Stumpf,” eds. Paul Rule and Claudia von Collani, *Annales Missiologici Posnanienses* 22 (2017), 167–169.

5 Kilian Stumpf, *The Acta Pekinensia or Historical Records of the Maillard de Tournon Legation*, vol. 2: *September 1706 – December 1707*, eds. Paul Rule, Claudia von Collani (Leiden–Boston, Brill, 2019; *Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia*, 1).

this 20-pages-long enumeration may serve as a summary of what the German Jesuit wrote concerning the events of that time. Another useful tool for using this rather large book is the index at the end (pp. 626–644) listing the names, places and concepts (also in Chinese), which the readers will appreciate together with the bibliography (pp. 615–625) and the numerous footnotes with which the editors accompany the text helping us to understand it better. The “Acta” themselves start at p. 29 and go until p. 614.

Based on his privileged place of observer but also one of the protagonists of the described events, Stumpf recalls here what happened during this last part of the unhappy legation of Maillard de Tournon and the echoes those vicissitudes had in different ecclesiastical and missionaries milieux.

After the legate’s decree against the Chinese rites from January 1707 (about it, see pp. 338–339) the missionaries found themselves in a very difficult situation: on the one hand they had to obey the ecclesiastical authority, on the other hand they could expect punishment from the emperor and his administration if they disrespect the rites. Indeed, the classical Greek figure of being caught between Scylla and Charybdis might be appropriate to speak about those months and years. We know how all that ends⁶. “I do not want to add either a prologue or my own epilogue” – writes Stumpf at the end of what he reports concerning April 1708 – “since the reader is aware of what has already been related above, and from this he is able to conclude for himself with which of the parties truth and justice reside” (p. 174).

With all that, the German Jesuit’s narration helps us to enter the feelings that all the protagonists were living when the result of the controversy was not sure yet. It is not necessary to quote here all apparently contradictory statements concerning the rites, issued by Rome during several decades preceding the events described here. At the beginning of 18th century, it was all but clear how all those discussions would end.

What is particular in this section of the “Acta” is that their author abundantly uses letters which were of interest for the events he was referring to. Usually he not just quotes them, but brings entire texts of such documents, always with his annotation confirming their faithfulness to the originals, e. gr. “That this agrees with the original, I so witness. Fr.

6 See a summary of the history of the Chinese rites controversy in William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 334–346, and Joseph Sebes, “Ritos chinos, controversia,” in *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-temático*, vol. IV (Roma: Institutum Historicum S. I. – Madrid, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3367–3372.

Kilian Stumpf, SJ, Notary Apostolic” (p. 451) or “This agrees with the original text, and even the grammatical mistakes have not been corrected” (p. 115).

In his narration, Stumpf offers even examples of his sense of humor, which is sometimes – let’s say it – slightly ironic as in the case of speaking about the members of the Paris Foreign Missions Society, who considered the Jesuits in China excommunicated, but nevertheless accepted their hospitality and their financial help (p. 74), or when he ironically quotes the parable of the dishonest steward from the Gospel according to Luke, praised by Jesus because of his ability to manage a difficult situation, in the context of changing the documents important for the issue under discussion:

For although the Lord in Luke 16 praises the person who knows and acts like this, he did not instruct the college of the apostles to carry this practice into the Church, nor is anything of the kind to be found in canonical documents of the church, old or new (p. 121).

No one will criticize small typing mistakes that happen to everyone using the computer’s keyboard quickly, but to respect the literary genre of the review allowing such remarks: the year of St. Francis Xavier’s death is 1552 and not 1652 as we read in the footnote 5 at p. 183 (the editors themselves give the correct date on p. 305, footnote 14). Besides that, Robert Bellarmine was canonized in 1930 and declared doctor of the Church a year later, while the footnote 2 on p. 386 says that both events happened in 1930⁷. As for the day of the liturgical commemoration of saint Francis Borgia, it is now October 3 and no more October 10 as it used to be (p. 460, footnote 31).

Another small remark concerning the methodology: Since 2019, the new official name of the Vatican Archives is *Archivum Apostolicum Vaticanum*, thus it is appropriate to quote it as “AAV” in replacement of the former abbreviation “ASV,” which appears in the book at p. VIII and in the footnote 39 at p. 39 where we find the old name *Archivum Secretum Vaticanum*.

There is no doubt that the present volume, exactly as its predecessors quoted above, will be of great help to all who study the Jesuit mission in China, especially its particular chapter which was the rites controversy.

7 See more about this in the present author’s article “Un lungo cammino verso l’altare: la causa di beatificazione e di canonizzazione di Roberto Bellarmino,” in *Ripensare Bellarmino. Tra teologia, filosofia e storia*, eds. Scott Brodeur et al. (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana; Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2023), 315–333.

A Polish Jesuit Tomasz Ignacy Szpot Dunin (ca. 1645–1713) – for many years in Rome as confessor in the Vatican Basilica of Saint Peter and the author of a handwritten history of the China mission (currently prepared for publication) – referring to this controversy used the strong word of “tragedy.”⁸ Yet, as in case of all tragedies, it is important not to forget them. Only this could stop new tragedies to come, provided that we learn from the history – *magistra vitae*...

What else to say about this book? A positive opinion of one contemporary reader of it, who was José Soares, the Jesuit vice-provincial of China, reads:

[...] the facts as narrated by Father Kilian Stumpf, Procurator of the Chinese Vice-Province, relating to events in Beijing are narrated with total accuracy. Those things however which the same Father states happened elsewhere, or were described elsewhere on the basis of authentic documents, I testify were so taken, because I have seen and read the documents myself, and have ordered them to be preserved in the archives [...]. (p. 551)

To sum up: maybe the most appropriate way of finishing this review is to quote the Editors who write at p. 5: “perhaps the best approach to this remarkable work is simply to read and enjoy it.”

8 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Jap. Sin. 105-I, f. 15r. More about Szpot in Robert Danieluk, “Konfesjonał i pióro: Tomasz Ignacy Szpot Dunin, polski historiograf jezuickiej misji w Chinach,” in *Iesuitae in Polonia - Poloni Iesuitae. Piśmiennictwo łacińskie czasów nowożytnych*, ed. Jarosław Nowaszczuk (Szczecin: Volumina.pl, 2017), 75–108.