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A Conscious Choice of Sources: Tomasz Szpot Dunin on Muscovy in Inner Asia and Sino-Russian Relations in *Historia Sinarum Imperii*¹

Świadomy dobór źródeł: Tomasz Dunin Szpot o relacjach państwa moskiewskiego z Azją Wewnętrzną i Chinami w *Historia Sinarum Imperii*

Abstract

This article explores the sources and interpretive frameworks that shaped Tomasz Szpot Dunin's representation of Muscovy, its position in Inner Asia, and its relations with China at the turn of the eighteenth century. It examines the missionary literature on which he relied, asking whether his account drew on earlier Catholic reports describing attempts to enter and traverse Muscovy, or whether it was based primarily on writings produced

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by Jesuit missionaries active in China. The study further examines the extent to which Szpot Dunin engaged with information and stereotypes circulating in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and whether his portrayal of Muscovy aligned with Polish–Lithuanian political interests in the aftermath of the Treaty of Grzywałtowski (1686). Finally, it considers how the global aims of the Jesuit Order, including access to Muscovy and the establishment of an overland route to China may have influenced his narrative strategies. By addressing these questions, the article situates *Historia Sinarum Imperii* within its intellectual, political, and institutional contexts and contributes to ongoing discussions about competing loyalties to royal patrons and other networks of the early modern Jesuit order.

Keywords: China, Jesuit missionaries, Muscovy, Poland-Lithuania, Siberia, Thomas Szpot Dunin.

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest ustalenie źródeł i ram interpretacyjnych, które ukształtowały sposób przedstawienia państwa moskiewskiego przez Tomasza Szpota Dunina, roli, jaką odgrywała Moskwa w Azji Środkowej, a szczególnie na Syberii, oraz jej relacji z Chinami na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku. Poprzez analizę literatury, na której opierał się autor, bada się, czy jego narracja czerpała z wcześniejszych katolickich relacji opisujących próby dotarcia do państwa moskiewskiego i podróży przez jej terytorium, np. wzdłuż Wołgi na Kaukaz i do Persji, czy też opierała się przede wszystkim na pismach jezuitów działających bezpośrednio w Chinach. Artykuł analizuje ponadto, w jakim stopniu Szpot Dunin wykorzystywał informacje i stereotypy krążące w Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów oraz czy jego obraz państwa moskiewskiego pozostawał w zgodzie z interesami politycznymi Rzeczypospolitej po zawarciu traktatu grzywałtowskiego (1686). Wreszcie stawia pytania o wpływ takich celów zakonu jezuitów jak uzyskanie dostępu do państwa moskiewskiego czy otrzymanie pozwolenia na podróż lądową do Chin przez terytorium wielkiego księstwa narracyjne autora. Podjęcie tych zagadnień ma na celu głębsze zrozumienie treści i kontekstu powstania dzieła Tomasza Dunina Szpota oraz dodania jeszcze jednego przypadku do dyskusji na temat konfliktu lojalności względem państwa pochodzenia lub zakonu wśród jezuitów w epoce nowożytnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Chiny, misje jezuickie, Moskwa, Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów, Syberia, Tomasz Szpot Dunin.

Tomasz Ignacy Szpot Dunin (ca. 1645–1713), a young Polish nobleman from Podlasie, entered the Society of Jesus in Vilnius in 1664. In the years that followed, he pursued studies in philosophy and theology

and completed pedagogical training at Jesuit colleges in Reszel, Vilnius, Drohiczyn, and Warsaw. He was ordained a priest in Vilnius in 1677. Over the next eleven years, he served in various capacities within the Lithuanian Province of the Society of Jesus. In 1688, he was sent to Rome, where he remained for the rest of his life. Although hearing confessions in St. Peter's Basilica was his primary duty, he was also tasked with compiling a history of the Jesuit mission in China from its beginnings to his own time. His unpublished manuscripts, preserved in the Jesuit Roman Archives, include *Historia Sinarum Imperii*, two series of *Collectanea*, and several shorter works.²

This study examines the sources of Szpot Dunin's knowledge and the intellectual frameworks that shaped his narrative on Muscovy, its role in Inner Asia, and its relations with China in the second half of the seventeenth century, with particular emphasis on the turn of the eighteenth century. The article aims to assess which missionary accounts he used. Did he draw on seventeenth-century Catholic reports describing attempts to enter and travel through Muscovy, for example by Ioannes Thaddeus (1600s–1610s), Thomas Vitale (1639), Philippus d'Avril and his companions (1680s), or Ioannes Milan (1690s–1700s), or did he primarily rely on accounts written by missionaries active in China, such as the well-known accounts of Thomas Pereira, Ioannes Francisus Gerbillon, Antonius Thomas, or Ferdinandus Verbiest? Did he include the seventeenth-century Catholic reports describing both successful and failed attempts to enter Muscovy? The study also considers the extent to which Szpot Dunin incorporated information or stereotypes about Muscovy circulating in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and examines whether his portrayal aligned with Polish–Lithuanian political interests after the Treaty of Grzymułtowski (1686).

Second, the study investigates whether the global objectives of the Jesuit Order, such as obtaining permission to preach in Muscovy, securing authorization to travel to China via the overland route through Muscovy, or assessing the possibility of expanding missionary activity in Inner Asia, influenced the construction of Szpot Dunin's narrative. By addressing these questions, the study sheds light on the author's intellectual and

2 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 102-103 (*Historia*); Jap. Sin. 104-105; 109-111 (*Collectanea*). For more about Szpot and his work, see: Robert Danieluk, "Konfesjonal 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; Łukasz Burkiewicz, Andrzej Wadas, "Życie i dzieło Tomasza Ignacego Dunina Szpota SJ (1644/1645–1713) oraz jego wkład w etnografię nowożytnych Chin," *Perspektywy Kultury* 49/2 (2023): 337–358.

political positioning, thereby enriching our understanding of *Historia Sinarum Imperii* and contributing to the recent discussions on the competing loyalties to royal patrons and other networks within the Jesuit Order in the early modern period.³

Which sources informed Tomasz Szpot Dunin's account of Muscovy, its role in Inner Asia, and its relations with China?

An analysis of Szpot Dunin's perception of Muscovy, its role in Inner Asia, and its relations with China must take into account his origins, his education and intellectual formation he received within the Lithuanian Province of the Jesuit Order, and his later intellectual development during his stay in Rome after 1688.

Born around 1645 in Podlasie, Szpot Dunin spent his youth amid the series of mid-seventeenth-century military campaigns conducted on the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth by, among others, Swedish, Transylvanian, and Muscovite forces. The Muscovite–Polish War of 1654–1667 had long-lasting repercussions for the socio-economic life of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. During the conflict, the Muscovite army pursued a policy of resettlement, forcibly transferring inhabitants of Lithuanian towns and villages into Muscovite territories, which resulted in severe demographic losses. Members of the local nobility were also taken captive; their treatment varied from being held as hostages at the court of the grand duke or in the households of prominent Muscovite officials to being deported to distant eastern regions, where their skills were used to support Muscovite efforts to colonize Siberia.⁴

3 For more on the competing jurisdictions and loyalties tied to state networks emerging within the Society of Jesus in the early modern period, and especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, see: Dauril Alden, *The making of an enterprise: the Society of Jesus in Portugal, its empire and beyond 1540–1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 267–272; Frederik Vermote, “Travellers Lost and Redirected: Jesuit Networks and the Limits of European Exploration in Asia,” *Itinerario* 41/3 (2017): 484–506.

4 Particularly noteworthy among the most recent and comprehensive studies on this topic are: Jerzy Wojciechowski, *Obraz Rosji w Rzeczypospolitej w drugiej połowie XVII wieku*, PhD Dissertation defended at the University of Silesia, Katowice (Katowice, 2020), 202–225; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, “Captive Colonizers: The Role of the Prisoners of War from Poland-Lithuania and the Crimean Khanate in the Russian Subjugation of Eastern Siberia,” *Journal of World History*, 33/1 (2022): 73–102.

From the very first diplomatic negotiations following the outbreak of the war, held in Niewież in 1656, the Polish–Lithuanian side demanded the return of captives and forcibly resettled civilians. This demand, which remained a recurring issue in Polish–Muscovite negotiations, was incorporated into the agreements concluded in 1667 and 1672. Under the provisions of the Truce of Andrusovo (1667), all those who had not changed their faith, including members of the nobility, the clergy, soldiers, and Jews, were permitted to return to their homeland. Peasants, merchants, and townspeople, however, as well as Jews who had converted to Orthodoxy and married Orthodox women, were required to remain in Muscovy. A subsequent treaty concluded in 1672 granted townspeople and merchants permission to return, provided they were not residing in the households of boyars or state officials.⁵

It should be emphasized that the Muscovite side consistently refused to allow the return of abducted peasants and repeatedly obstructed the departure of even those limited groups formally covered by the agreements. This practice became a persistent source of tension in subsequent negotiations and remained a regular feature of the instructions issued to Polish–Lithuanian envoys sent to the grand duke of Muscovy. Given the scale of the Muscovite invasion and the protracted nature of the conflict, which, with brief interruptions, lasted more than thirty years, it is highly probable that Szpot Dunin became familiar with the issues of war damage, captivity, and forced resettlement during this period. Moreover, he may have come into contact with individuals, most probably members of the nobility, who returned to the Commonwealth under the terms of these agreements.

As Szpot Dunin served at the Warsaw collegium in the years 1678–1680 and again in 1686–1688, he likely had relatively easy access to information and rumors circulating at the royal court, including those related to the final negotiations and conclusion of the Treaty of Grzymułtowski (1686), which not only brought the decades-long Polish–Muscovite conflict to an end but also secured, although only for a very short period, certain privileges for Catholics in Muscovy.⁶ Nevertheless, *Historia Sinarum Imperii* contains no direct references to eastern Siberia as a destination of forced resettlement, nor does it draw on any oral or written accounts left by Polish exiles.

5 Wojciechowski, *Obraz Rosji w Rzeczypospolitej w drugiej połowie XVII wieku*, 224–226.

6 Kirill Kochegarov, “The Jesuit Mission and the Local Catholic Community in Smolensk. The First Years after the Treaty of Eternal Peace 1686,” in *Foreigners in Muscovy. Western Immigrants in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Russia*, ed. Simon Dreher, Wolfgang Mueller (London: Routledge, 2022), 115–132.

There is, for example, no evidence that Szpot Dunin was familiar with what was presumably the earliest Polish description of eastern Siberia, authored by a Jesuit, Andrzej Kawieczynski. He was taken captive from the Nowogródek collegium in Lithuania in 1654. As a relatively prominent figure, Kawieczynski was initially held in Moscow, where he began organizing the life of the local Catholic community. This activity met with the disapproval of the grand duke's officials, who subsequently sent him to work in the Siberian quarries. Kawieczynski returned only after four years, following the intervention of Polish–Lithuanian envoys in 1664.

The final years of Kawieczynski's life were spent at the collegium in Nieśwież,⁷ where, before his death in 1667, he wrote memoirs that are now lost but were used in composing his obituary.⁸ According to the latter, the Jesuit lived alone in exile among local inhabitants described as heathens who practiced witchcraft and worshipped trees and devils. It is difficult to determine whether Szpot Dunin, who spent the years 1680–1681 in Nieśwież, had any opportunity to become acquainted with either Kawieczynski's writings or with stories about the extraordinary circumstances of his captivity. Likewise, there is no evidence that Szpot Dunin was familiar with the diaries of Adam Kamieński Dłużyk, a former war captive deported to Siberia in 1660 who returned to the Commonwealth in 1672. Although Dłużyk's account is relatively well known and has been widely discussed, offering valuable proto-ethnographic descriptions of Siberia,⁹ it must be read with considerable caution, particularly the sections concerning his own service in the Yakutsk province.¹⁰

In searching for additional groups of texts that might have influenced Szpot Dunin's narrative, one must exclude the anti-Muscovite propaganda produced in circles surrounding the Polish court from the second half of the sixteenth century onward.¹¹ At first glance, it may seem surprising

7 For a detailed account of this significant Jesuit establishment in the Lithuanian province, located in the capital of the influential Radziwiłł family, see: Andrea Mariani, "Duszpasterstwo jezuitów nieświeskich w XVII–XVIII wieku. Między ideałem potrydenckim a lokalnymi uwarunkowaniami," *Rocznik Lituanistyczny* 2 (2016): 47–91.

8 Bronisław Natoński, "Kawieczynski (Kawaczynski, Kawęczynski) Andrzej h. Ostoja (1619–1667)," in *Polski słownik biograficzny*. vol. 12 (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków: PAU, 1966–1967), 249.

9 Adam Kamieński-Dłużyk, "Diariusz więzienia moskiewskiego, miast i miejsc," z pierwodruku wydali oraz przypisami i komentarzami opatrzili A. Kuczyński, B. Polewoj, Z. J. Wójcik," in *Dwa polskie pamiętniki z Syberii XVII i XVIII wiek*, ed. A. Kuczyński (Wrocław–Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1996).

10 Kołodziejczyk, "Captive Colonizers," 93–94.

11 At this point, it is worth mentioning at least one of the earliest examples of such texts, recorded in the 1570s during a period when the papacy – much as it would again in the

that a Polish–Lithuanian Jesuit who personally witnessed the long-term consequences of the Muscovite–Polish military conflicts (1654–1686) nevertheless refrained, in his depiction of the former enemy and long-standing rival, from reproducing the negative stereotypes that circulated in the Commonwealth during the seventeenth century.¹²

A revealing example of Szpot Dunin's stance can be found by comparing his assessment of Muscovite trustworthiness in diplomatic negotiations with that expressed, for example, by one of the most influential Polish statesmen in the 17th century, Crown Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski. In the early 1640s, when the Polish court was considering an anti-Crimean alliance, the hetman described the prospective partner as follows:

“But considering the innate hatred of the Muscovites toward our nation and their slippery faith, the matter appeared full of danger. For once they had settled in that place, they would have drawn to themselves all of Christendom situated by the Black Sea and the Maeotian Marshes: they would have drawn in even the Tatar hordes, whom they would already have detached from the Turks and through whom they could have become a burden to us. Moreover, with the Cossacks so close, both in faith and in the hope of plunder, who can say whether they would not have torn them away from us and then [do the same] with the whole Ruthenia?”¹³

1680s – sought to draw Muscovy into a desirable anti-Ottoman alliance: *Sprawa wielkiego kniazia moskiewskiego. Roku 1571 [A Brief Account of the Character and Brutal Rule of Vasil'evich, Tyrant of Muscovy]* by Albert Schlichting. According to recent findings, the work was initially promoted by the Polish court for internal use rather than as part of an international anti-Muscovite campaign. It was only the papal nuncio to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Vincenzo dal Portico, who – while preparing for a mission to Muscovy aimed at drawing it into an anti-Ottoman league – ordered the Polish text to be translated into Latin and sent to Rome. This step ultimately led the Holy See to abandon its plans for an alliance with Muscovy. Contrary to a thesis long upheld in Russian and Soviet historiography, it was not the Polish–Lithuanian court that directly shaped the negative image of Muscovy on the international stage by commissioning a strongly critical Latin description of the state. Rather, this development resulted from the initiative of the nuncio. It was dal Portico who ordered the translation of Schlichting's Polish account into Latin – a version that influenced papal policy in 1571 and contributed to the relative popularity of its various redactions in the early modern Commonwealth and Western Europe. For more, see: Hieronim Grala, “Wokół dzieła i osoby Alberta Schlichtinga. (Przyczynek do dziejów propagandy antymoskiewskiej w drugiej połowie XVI w.),” *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 38 (2000): 35–51; Albert Schlichting, *Sprawa Wielkiego Kniazia Moskiewskiego*, ed. Grzegorz Franczak, Marek Janicki (Warszawa: Sub Lupa, 2025), esp. 34–38.

12 Hieronim Grala, “O genezie polskiej rusofobii,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 83/1 (1992): 135–153.

13 “Ale konsyderując *innatum odium* moskiewskie przeciwko narodowi naszemu i owę ich śliską wiarę, zdała się *res periculi plena*. Bo osiadłszy tamto miejsce, wszystko

In his account of the negotiations at Nerchinsk (1689),¹⁴ Szpot Dunin makes no reference to alleged Muscovite duplicity, a charge that, as Koniecpolski's opinion illustrates, recurred frequently in seventeenth-century Polish–Lithuanian political writings. On the contrary, he explicitly challenges this negative stereotype in the following passage:

The second dispute that arose lasted longer. Had it not been resolved by the same Fathers [Thomas Pereira and Ioannes Franciscus Gerbillon], it would have been necessary, right at the very beginning of the talks and without settling the matter, to leave the settlement of Nerchinsk and return to China. The Chinese had already formed an opinion of the Muscovites, essentially for every reason: that this nation is inclined to deceit, ambushes, and wickedness. This belief, which once encompassed all Europeans, before China entered into maritime trade relations with them and experienced that Europeans love virtue and justice no less than the Chinese themselves, now revived with particular force in regard to the Muscovites, perhaps because of the crimes of the Muscovite common people along the borders with Tartary, or because of the deceitful rebuilding of Albazin. The task of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus was to strive constantly, in all matters, to eradicate this belief completely from the minds of the Chinese and the Tatars.¹⁵

chrześcijaństwo *ad Pontem Euxinum et Paludem Meotidem* siedzące, do siebie przyciągnęli: pociągnęliby i same Ordy tatarskie, którychby już odstrychnęli od Turków i niemi mogliby nam być ciężcy. A co większa Kozaków tak blisko mając i wiarą i *spe praedae* kto wie? jeżeliby ich nieoderwali od nas a potem i wszystkiej Rusi?”. Stanisław Koniecpolski, “Diskurs o zniesieniu Tatarów Krymskich i Lidze z Moskwą,” in *Pamiętniki o Koniecpolskich: przyczynek do dziejów polskich XVII wieku*, ed. Stanisław Przyłęcki (Lwów: Drukarnia Piotra Pillera, 1842), 302.

- 14 The history of the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) has been examined in considerable depth in the existing scholarship. For a recent and comprehensive account that also addresses the role of the Jesuits in the negotiations, see, for example, Peter Perdue, “Boundaries and Trade in the Early Modern World: Negotiations at Nerchinsk and Beijing,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43 (2010): 341–356; Birgit Tremml-Werner, Lisa Hellman, “Merely *Ad hoc* Diplomacy? A Global Historical Comparison of Early Modern Japanese–Spanish and Qing–Russian Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatica* 2/1 (2020): 57–78. A study that places greater emphasis on the Muscovite perspective, with particular attention to the treaty's commercial implications, is Erika Monahan, *The Merchants of Siberia: Trade in Early Modern Eurasia* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2016), esp. 55–90. The report of the head of the Muscovite delegation, Fedor Aleksievich Golovin is available in Natalia F. Demidova, Vladimir S. Miasnikov, *Russko-Kitaiski otnosheniia v XVII veke v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, ed. S.L. Tikhvinskii (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1972), 555–641.
- 15 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 102, fol. 47v. I would like to thank Katarzyna Gara for sharing her Polish translation of *Historia Sinarum Imperii*, any errors in the English translation are entirely my own.

The above description should be compared with the corresponding passage from the account left by Thomas Pereira, who, together with Ioannes Franciscus Gerbillon, accompanied the Chinese delegation during the negotiations:

Our [Chinese] ambassadors, however, persisted saying, ‘The Moscovites are not like you – sincere and reliable – do not let them deceive you. Today they say one thing, but tomorrow they do not keep word. We have had a lot of experience with them, and you have had none; we know that they are liars.’

Hearing this and knowing that it was a misconception – though seemingly they had some foundation for it insofar as it pertained to the people of the lower classes and that it would threaten the expected success [of the negotiations] – I decided to rise in defense of the Moscovites and of the common interest, for which I hope the Moscovites will show gratitude towards the Society of Jesus and for which also the Grand Duke will not deny us due acknowledgement. Therefore, I spoke as follows: ‘Sirs, it is not right to make mountains out of mole hills. You must not confuse small matters with important ones and much less conflate mean people with great. The concept which your Excellencies have of the Moscovites is founded on the basis of dealings with people of the lower class, whose aim usually is deception. Until now, you have not had an opportunity to negotiate with and know the Moscovites. What you said of them could also be said about the Chinese, among whom there are liars without number; from which fact, however, it does not follow that one must deny credit to all Chinese; on the contrary, one must consider individuals. Again, you say that the Moscovites drink much wine; are there not many Chinese who drink as well, and who in this respect are nowise inferior to them? Many of them can daily be found walking and on horseback in the streets of Peking – a topic on which much more could be said. Yet, in spite of all this, one must not conclude that there are no sober people among the Chinese, for indeed there are many who do not drink at all. And the same could be said about other matters, so that one must not refuse confidence in these people even though there is malice in the inferiors or perfidy in common people. You should listen to what the Moscovites say on this question and not blindly believe what others say about them.’¹⁶

16 Thomas Pereira, *The Jesuits and the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689): The Diary of Thomas Pereira*. S. J., ed. Joseph Sebes (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1961), 240–243.

A close reading of the two passages indicates that Szpot Dunin relies heavily on Pereira's account; his description of the negotiations is, in effect, a shortened version of it. This dependence is particularly evident in his treatment of the Latin interpreter of the Muscovite delegation. As in Pereira's narrative, the interpreter remains unnamed and is mentioned only as "the Latin interpreter." The individual in question was Andrei Belobotski, a Polish nobleman, most likely of Ruthenian origin, who left the Commonwealth for Muscovy and converted to Orthodoxy around 1681, a trajectory that would have been of obvious interest to a Polish-Lithuanian readership. To conclude the discussion of possible Polish-Lithuanian influences on Szpot Dunin's narrative, it is worth briefly considering the titles he employs for the rulers of Muscovy in *Historia Sinarum Imperii*. Throughout the work, they are consistently referred to as the "grand dukes of Muscovy," rather than the "tsars of Muscovy" or the "Russian tsars."

In light of the long-standing diplomatic disputes of the seventeenth century—stemming from the Polish refusal to recognize the Muscovite ruler's claim to the title of tsar—this terminological choice might initially appear to reflect Szpot Dunin's origins and a degree of loyalty to Polish-Lithuanian political tradition. Even the fact that, under difficult political circumstances, the Commonwealth agreed in the Treaty of Grzymułtowski (1686) to refer to Ivan and Peter as *velikie gosudary tsary, velikie kniazi*¹⁷ does not preclude the possibility that a Polish Jesuit might deliberately employ a less prestigious title to protest against the strengthening of the Muscovite power in the region.¹⁸ Yet the reluctance to recognize the title of tsar was not unique to the Commonwealth. Within the Catholic world, there existed a persistent unease about acknowledging more than one emperor in Christendom. Jesuit missionaries in China, such as Thomas Pereira, Ioannes Franciscus Gerbillon, and Antonius Thomas, also referred to the rulers of Muscovy as "grand dukes." Szpot Dunin's choice of terminology is therefore more plausibly explained by this wider Catholic concern than by the specifically Polish-Lithuanian diplomatic practice of avoiding the title *tsar* in the context of rivalry with Muscovy over the Ruthenian heritage.

In his account of the early stages of Chinese–Muscovite relations, the first official embassies dispatched by the grand duke to Beijing (beginning

17 *Sbornik gramot i dogovorov o prisoedinenii tsarstv i oblasti k gosudarstvu rossiiskomu v XVII–XIX vekakh*, part. 1 (Petrograd = St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922), 155.

18 Henryk Wisner, "Dyplomacja polska w latach 1572–1648," in *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, ed. Zbigniew Wójcik, vol. 2 (Warszawa: PWN, 1982), 96–100, 116–117.

in 1654), and the conflicts between the Kangxi emperor and Galdan, the powerful khan of the Dzungars, Szpot Dunin draws extensively on the writings of Jesuit missionaries active in China in the second half of the seventeenth and the very early eighteenth centuries. This reliance can be illustrated by comparing the description of the Chinese army's celebrated victory over the Dzungars at the battle of Ulan Budung (1690) in *Historia Sinarum Imperii* with that found in *De Bello Cam Hi Imperatoris Tartarot-Sinici contra Tartaros Erutanos. Feliciter confecto anno 1697*, written by Antonius Thomas and sent to Rome in 1701. As Davor Antonucci has discussed in detail, the Jesuit missionary devoted particular attention to the tactics employed by the Galdan, who during the battle used camels as protection against the Emperor's army. This information was derived directly from a report submitted to the court by the Chinese commander-in-chief.¹⁹ Szpot Dunin provides the same detail in the following passage:

“Therefore, in order not to be surrounded by a large number of imperial troops and to withstand the first assault, he [Galdan] established camp near Mount Pecha. His right flank was protected by forests stretching over gently rising hills, while his left was shielded by the banks of a river swollen with marshes that were difficult to cross. In the center of the camp, camels lay in a dense row, tied together so that they could not move, forming, as it were, a solid wall against the imperial cavalry. Concealed behind their massive bodies were riflemen who defended the camp.”²⁰

Similarly, when addressing missionary efforts to reach the Far East by an overland route, Szpot Dunin confines his discussion to the unsuccessful attempt of Philippus Grimaldi in 1690, situating it within the broader framework of the Jesuits' intermediary role in Sino-Russian relations. This passage constitutes the sole instance in which he mentions the support of John III Sobieski for Jesuit plans to reach the Far East *iter Moscoviam*, and he explicitly equates the Polish king's role with that of the Habsburg emperor.²¹ He provides no information about the contemporary mission of Philippus d'Avril, who travelled with Polish-Lithuanian Jesuits, nor does he refer to earlier efforts by missionaries from various orders to make use of the Volga route through Muscovite territory. Consequently, his narrative omits relatively well-known figures

19 Davor Antonucci, “Antoine Thomas: A Historian of the Sino-Zunghar War,” in *The itinerary of Antoine Thomas S.J. (1644–1709), scientist and missionary from Namur in China*, ed. Michel Hermans, Isabelle Parmentier (Leuven: F. Verbiest Institute, 2017), 219–252, esp. 246–248.

20 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 102, fol. 56v.

21 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 102, fol. 43r-v.

such as Ioannes Thaddeus, prefect of the Discalced Carmelite mission in Persia, who travelled in the first two decades of the seventeenth century,²² the Dominican Thomas Vitale,²³ whose own journey in 1639 inspired him to compose a quasi-guide for fellow missionaries on how to prepare for the Volga route, and numerous others who attempted to reach Persia, Central Asia, or China overland route in the second half of the seventeenth century.²⁴

Surprisingly, Szpot Dunin remains silent about the Jesuits from the Bohemian sub-province, who thanks to the support of Leopold I – yet another member of the Holy League – were granted permission to remain in Moscow in 1685. Although they were expelled as early as 1690,²⁵ two other members of the Society, Ioannes Milan and Ioannes Berula from Olomouc, were sent back to Moscow in 1693, disguised as ordinary Catholic clergy.²⁶ Initially, they focused on ministering to the residents of the German suburb (*Nemetskaia sloboda*) and on cultivating valuable contacts at the Petrine court, including the renowned Siberian cartographer Andrei Vinus.²⁷ In 1700, Milan travelled south to the Azov Sea region, where he spend some time among the Kalmyks, a group only briefly mentioned by Szpot Dunin.²⁸ From this expedition, Milan produced a detailed report which Paul Shore has described as “an important early contribution to the ethnography of the region,” containing insightful remarks on their social customs, beliefs, music, and language. As might be expected, the missionary devoted a significant portion of his manuscript to the description of local religious practices.²⁹ Milan’s

22 *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia. The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. Herbert Chick (London–New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), vol. 1, 104–112, 196–197; Christian Windler, *Missionare in Persien. Kulturelle Diversität und Normenkonkurrenz im frühneuzeitlichen Katholizismus (17.-18. Jahrhundert)* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau-Verlag, 2018), 189, 213.

23 Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide (hereafter APF), *Scritture originali referite nelle Congregazione* (SOCG), vol. 119, f. 265-267.

24 For a recent study on the missionaries’ efforts to open the land route in the-mid 17th century, see: Yuval Givon, “Connecting Eurasia: Jesuit Experimentation with Overland Mobility Between China and Europe, 1656–1664,” *Journal of World History* 33/4 (2022): 639–668.

25 APF, *Acta Sacra Congregatione anno 1684*, vol. 54, fol. 126v; *anno 1692*, vol. 62, fol. 183.

26 APF, *Acta Sacra Congregatione anno 1693*, vol. 63, fols. 105r-107r.

27 For a monography of Vinus in English, see: Kees Boterbloem, *Moderniser of Russia: Andrei Vinus, 1641-1716* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); for his contacts with Milan, 228.

28 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 102, fol. 65v.

29 Paul Shore, “A Jesuit among the Kalmyks: An Example of Proto-Ethnography by the Society of Jesus in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Early Modern Overseas Careers*.

precise objectives remain a mystery. However, a note in the minutes of the monthly meetings of the cardinals and consultors of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in 1699 suggests that, although the Holy See was rather pessimistic about prospects of operating directly in Moscow, it nonetheless entertained some hope regarding missionary work among the Kalmyks and considered that possibility worthy of further exploration.³⁰ Given that Milan travelled south in 1700, it is likely that he acted in response to this Roman initiative.

Conclusion

Given Thomas Szpot Dunin's origins, education, and life trajectory, it is reasonable to assume that his knowledge of Muscovy – and possibly of its role in Siberia – was shaped by literature produced in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as by the rumors and information circulating in his homeland, including those stemming from the prolonged Polish–Muscovite conflict of 1654–1686. It is likewise probable that, during his service in the Lithuanian Province and especially after his transfer to Rome, he became acquainted with reports concerning missionary activity in the Black Sea region, the Caspian basin, and Muscovy following the Treaty of Grzymułtowski. In Rome, he would have had access to Jesuit archival materials relating not only the Chinese mission but also other missionary fields, and he may even consulted documentation from the archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Nevertheless, the preceding analysis suggests that Szpot Dunin made a deliberate decision to base his work primarily on materials produced by Jesuit missionaries active in China. The motivations behind this choice can only be inferred. He may have considered these accounts the most reliable sources available, or as the most appropriate for the purposes for which *Historia Sinarum Imperii* was commissioned.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind the constant circulation of information between the Jesuits in China and their confreres in Europe, as well as with members of the Republic of Letters and with European and Asian courts. Even a European ruler only marginally involved in Chinese affairs, such as John III Sobieski, maintained correspondence with Ferdinand Verbiest, had direct contact with Philippus Grimaldi

East-Central Europeans as Jesuit Missionaries and Dutch East India Employees, ed. Igor Iwo Chabrowski, Natalia Królikowska-Jedlińska (CEU Press: Vienna, 2025), 171–194.

30 APF, *Acta Sacrae Congregationis anno 1699*, vol. 69, fols. 242–246.

during his travels through the Commonwealth,³¹ and appears to have followed developments at the Kangxi court with considerable interest. His family archives preserve a copy of a letter written in 1690 by Antonius Thomas to the Jesuit General concerning the contemporary situation in China and the perspective of the Catholic mission there.³² As a result, accounts produced by Jesuit missionaries in China frequently incorporated information obtained through exchanges with other Western Europeans, Muscovites, and various additional interlocutors. Cartography provides a particularly instructive example in this regard, as Helena Jaskov has demonstrated in her detailed analysis of changes in Jesuit, Muscovite, and Chinese maps following the negotiations at Nerchinsk.³³

Szpot Dunin's choice of sources was most likely shaped by the complex political and religious circumstances in which *Historia Sinarum Imperii* was composed. For the Jesuit mission in China, the turn of the eighteenth century was, on the one hand, a period of remarkable success, symbolized by the Edict of Tolerance (1692), and of renewed hope for securing a viable overland route to China on the other. These expectations were closely linked, among other factors, to Muscovy's accession to the Holy League and to the visit to Rome of Peter the Great's influential courtier, Boris Sheremetev.³⁴ At the same time, however, the mission

31 Karolina Targosz, *Jan III Sobieski mecenasem nauk i uczonych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Muzeum Pałacu w Wilanowie, 2012), 269–332; Michael Carhart, *Leibniz Discovers Asia: Social Networking in the Republic of Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 39, 43–47.

32 Interestingly, in this letter dated 28th of August 1690 and sent from Beijing, Antonius Thomas addresses, among other matters, the issue of reaching China through the overland route in the following manner: “I therefore hope that the piety of the Most Serene King, which I have personally perceived so deeply, will be such that he will not only take care to send many missionaries from our Society here by his ships, but will also approve that some come from Germany and Poland via the overland route through Muscovy, already made safe by merchants, and also from Spain via the Philippines. For this Chinese Empire is vast indeed, as are Tartary and Korea, where the Gospel of Christ may be preached without fear; and, however, many may come from the Society, they will still not be sufficient for so great a harvest.” This is my translation from Latin. National Historical Archive of Belarus in Minsk (NGAB), fond 695 – *Sobieski Archives in Olawa*, op. 162.

33 Helena Jaskov, “The Negotiated Geography of the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) and the Role of the Jesuits,” *Late Imperial China* 40/2 (2019): 45–88.

34 Gościwit Malinowski, “Fryderyk Kazimierz Wolff SJ (1643–1708) i Tomasz Dunin Szpot SJ (1644–1713) – polscy jezuici jako pośrednicy kulturowi w czasach poselstwa cara Piotra I do Europy (1697–1698),” *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 29/4 (2023): 101–110.

was confronted with the increasingly contentious issue of the Chinese Rites controversy.³⁵

Against this backdrop, Szpot Dunin appears to have sought to construct a coherent and focused narrative that responded to the immediate needs of the Jesuit Order. This likely required distilling his account of elements that might have complicated or undermined these objectives, such as a distinctly Polish–Lithuanian negative perspective on Muscovy, or that might have diverted attention from the central concerns of the work – including the future of the China mission – by introducing peripheral issues such as missionary activity in the Black Sea or Caspian regions.

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35 Andrzej Wadas, "Okno możliwości: strategia misyjna jezuitów, Chiny a europejska polityka mocarstw, 1685–1704," *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 31/4 (2025): 313–330.

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