

## The Cloistered Ambassador: non-European Agents in the Convents of Madrid (1585-1701)

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**ABSTRACT:** In line with its medieval predecessors, the Habsburg court had no particular problem in receiving representatives from outside the Christendom's framework. Until 1580 these usually included Maghrebi envoys with an ambiguous status and without a notable diplomatic presence. Subsequently, the aggregation of the crown of Portugal to the Spanish Monarchy and the ceremonial standardization that gradually took place led, on the one hand, to the arrival of African and Asian agents of a different profile, with whom there was less familiarity, and on the other, to an attempt to assign them to the existing diplomatic categories. Among the numerous problems of Madrid as a reception centre for "exotic embassies," we will look at the use of the city's monasteries as accommodation for some of these agents and their entourage. Instead of being offered houses, these individuals were left in a provisional situation in accordance with their dubious diplomatic status, a policy that triggered problems of public order and decorum because of their difficult coexistence with the monastic communities. These and other monasteries played a further role as places of sociability and exchange for people who were not accustomed to such institutions. This will provide a glimpse into the complementarity between palaces and monasteries in a strongly confessionalised court and, paradoxically, into a kind of ceremonial flexibility that bordered on tolerance.

**KEYWORDS:** Diplomacy; Lodging; Intercultural; Global History; Japan; Kongo; Algiers.

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**RESUMEN:** *El embajador enclaustrado: agentes extraeuropeos en los conventos de Madrid (1585-1701).*— La corte de los Austrias, en línea con sus predecesores medievales, no tuvo especial problema para recibir a representantes ajenos al marco de la Cristiandad. Hasta 1580 solía tratarse de enviados magrebíes con un estatuto ambiguo y sin una notable presencia diplomática; posteriormente, la agregación de la corona de Portugal a la Monarquía hispana y la progresiva formalización ceremonial provocó, por una parte, la llegada de otro perfil de agentes africanos y asiáticos con los que existía menor familiaridad y, por otra, que se les intentara asimilar a las categorías diplomáticas existentes. Dentro de las numerosas problemáticas de Madrid como centro de recepción de "embajadas exóticas", nos fijaremos en el uso de los monasterios de la villa como alojamiento para algunos de estos agentes y su séquito. En lugar de recibir casas de aposento, estos individuos quedaron en una situación de provisionalidad acorde con su dudoso estatus diplomático y se desencadenaron problemas de orden público y decoro por su difícil convivencia con las comunidades monásticas. Estos y otros monasterios desempeñaron una segunda faceta como ámbito de sociabilidad e intercambio para gentes no acostumbradas a tales instituciones. Con ello se atisbarían la complementariedad entre palacios y cenobios en una corte fuertemente confesionalizada y, paradójicamente, una flexibilidad ceremonial rayana con la tolerancia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Diplomacia; Alojamiento; Intercultural; Historia global; Japón; Congo; Argel.

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Flee from the huddles where news is recounted and cock-and-bull stories are told, for it matters little to you whether the Turk comes or goes, or whether the Chinese wage wars, and the Japanese send many ambassadors, and Prester John is subdued to our ways, and [32v] the Araucanians rebel; stay away from them and avoid that people might call you a fantasizer and a storyteller (Almeida, 1644, ff. 32r-32v).

The curious and idle public of early modern Spain showed great interest not only in the explorations and discoveries of its fellow countrymen, but also in the events that involved powers outside the traditional framework of Christendom which increasingly touched on the interests of a monarchy with global ambitions. The “news and cock-and-bull stories” about Turks, Chinese, Japanese, Ethiopians and Araucanians introduce us to a field that is still little explored in Spanish diplomatic historiography, as is the comparative analysis of the relations established with these non-European powers. Apart from two recent and preliminary articles with a comparative scope on the reception of these extra-European embassies in Spain (González Cuerva, 2018, pp. 21-54; López Conde, 2018, pp. 126-141), the rest of the sizeable and uneven bibliography tends to be well documented but bilateral and positivist (Brasio, 1955; Martínez Ferrer and Nocca, 2003; Gil Fernández, 1991 and 2009). More recent and ambitious approaches, linking with cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural encounters, is being made available

(Escribano Páez, 2016, pp. 189-214; Rubiés, 2016, pp. 351-389; Zhiri, 2016, pp. 966-999). This study will examine the reception of missions at the court of Madrid and how the monasteries of the city were used to provide accommodation to some of them. Defining these missions as non-European does not prejudice their confessional status, since they included Muslims, Shintoists and also Catholics, but rather suggests that they represented rulers who did not form part of Christendom, understood as the medieval political community under the authority of the Pope and represented at the ecumenical councils (Rivero Rodríguez, 2000, pp. 10-16).

Regarding the representatives of powers outside this framework of Christendom, the first problem the royal authorities faced was how to recognize them and compare them with the existing categories. The standard model, which was put to test in the second half of the sixteenth century when Madrid became the permanent seat of the Monarchy, was to draw a distinction between extraordinary ambassadors, “who appeared at a complimentary occasion or represented a sovereign in the most important dynastic ceremonies” and resident ambassadors, who acted as honourable spies and maintained constant communication between the two courts (Frigo, 2008, pp. 15-18).

Resident ambassadors used to have their own residence, which was rented out for long periods of time and at their own expense, while extraordinary ambassadors, who were considered honoured guests of the monarch,



FIGURE 1. Location of the main ambassadorial lodgings in seventeenth century Madrid. Modified from Pedro Teixeira's *Topographia de la villa de Madrid*, 1656 (Edition by Dirección General del Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, Madrid, 1881).

were usually accommodated in more prominent lodging houses paid for by the Royal House, in fulfilment of the basic requirements of the law of nations. However, compared to other cities with a longer tradition of courtly reception, Madrid was faced with an endemic problem of quality accommodation for these extraordinary missions. In Lisbon, the kings of Portugal relied on a centrally located palace for this purpose since 1449, the *Palácio dos Estaus* (Pacheco, 2016, pp. 313-351), but in Madrid different main houses were alternately used. The most important were the Casa del Tesoro, very close to the Royal Alcázar, the Casa de las Siete Chimeneas (now the Ministry of Culture) and, since the 1660s, the Casa de Hospedajes (House of Lodgings) (Fig. 1). This little-known building, dedicated exclusively to the reception of royal guests, was located on what today would be the southwest side of the Plaza de España, not far from the Royal Alcázar (García Sierra, 1994, pp. 745-751).

Therefore, the main problems posed by these missions did not derive from confessional scruples but from doubts regarding the ambassadors' status and their suitable treatment according to power of their masters. In the case of the Muscovites, Moroccans, Persians and Ottomans, there was no hesitation in offering them a lodging house of high value, as would have been the case with French or English representatives. Thus, Robert Sherley, who acted as a Persian ambassador in 1618, was accommodated in the house of the Count of Puebla (in Calle del León), which costed eight thousand *reales* a year, and was also granted a monthly allowance of 1500 ducats (Gil Fernández, 2009, pp. 385, 394-396). As for the Ottoman ambassador (1649-1650), the house of the Marquise of Auñón was reserved, which costed twelve thousand *reales de vellón* per month (Díaz Esteban, 2006, pp. 80-82).

## FRIARS AND DIPLOMACY

Given the difficulties in communication, the presence of clerics facilitated the acceptance of these missions and their mediating ability. Moreover, in doubtful cases, the convents of the order that sponsored a diplomatic mission served as residences for these entourages. The use of monastic facilities as royal lodgings was perfectly standardised in the Iberian monarchical practice since the Middle Ages, examples of which are the Jerónimos monastery in Lisbon, the monastery of Poblet for the Crown of Aragon or El Escorial and the Jerónimos in Madrid for the Spanish Monarchy.

It was also common for the friars who carried out diplomatic missions to be accommodated not in a palace but in the houses belonging to their orders. This occurred when in September 1609 the Capuchin Lorenzo da Brindisi arrived in Madrid, where "they had never seen any religious with the noble character of an Ambassador, he caused admiration to all" (Ajofrín, 1784, p. 393). Fray Lorenzo was a papal legate and a representative of the Duke of Bavaria. Since there was no Capuchin convent in Madrid, he stayed at the Hospital of the Italians until the King ordered that, as an ambassador, he should go to the

monastery of San Gil, which was next to the Royal Alcázar and belonged to another division of the Franciscans, the Discalced (Ajofrín, 1784, pp. 395-396, 404).

In the case of some non-European missions, recourse to mendicant friars living in their own convents was particularly convenient. Thus, the Franciscan Alonso Muñoz arrived in 1611 as ambassador of the Japanese shogun Daifusama and, in the absence of a final answer from the Spanish court, he lived between the Franciscan convents of Madrid and Salamanca with an ambiguous diplomatic status until 1613.<sup>1</sup> The Discalced Carmelite Friar Redempto de Santa Cruz also made easier the ministers' task of finding accommodation for him when he arrived in Madrid in 1618: as an escort and guarantee of the aforementioned Persian embassy of Robert Sherley, he did not add more expenses to the royal treasury, since he stayed in the convent of his order at the Court, that of San Hermenegildo in Calle Alcalá (Gil Fernández, 2009, pp. 398-403).

The widening of the scholarly scope regarding the agents involved in foreign policy has been one of the most noteworthy contributions of the new diplomatic history (Kaiser, 2010, pp. 295-318; Carrió-Invernizzi, 2014, pp. 607-609; Tremml-Werner and Goetze, 2019, pp. 407-422). The inclusion of friars as intercultural mediators and skilled negotiators offers a particularly fertile field for research that serves both to underline the "confessional diplomacy" (Anderson and Backerra, 2020) of the time and to explore the existence in the Spanish Monarchy –and in the Catholic world in general– of a different diplomatic circuit for "friar embassies."

Thus, it still remains to ask to what extent the redeemer friars and missionaries played a fundamental role in the relations between the Spanish Monarchy and the rulers of North Africa. It seems that apart from acting as generic go-betweens (Pomara Saverino, 2018, pp. 27-29), they also effectively served as diplomatic agents authorized by the Monarchy, but with a special status: these religious, familiar with those lands, allowed contacts to be established with Muslim princes "in sourdine," without risking the reputation of the Monarchy through the dispatch of official embassies. That was the assessment made in the failed discussions to send a mission to Morocco in the first years of the seventeenth century under the Discalced Carmelite Fray Jerónimo Gracián de la Madre de Dios.<sup>2</sup> During the reign of Philip IV, this method was advocated without hesitation and up to three embassies headed by Franciscans were sent to the Moroccan Sultan. In the last one, in 1646, the richness of the retinue made it indistinguishable from a secular embassy: Fray Francisco de la Concepción brought forty mules transporting the gifts for the Sultan, which included fabrics, perfumes, porcelain and glass from Venice (Ocaña, 1646, p. 12; Lourido Díaz, 2005, pp. 122-128).

The advantages of these delegations of friars were obvious. Thanks to their integration into the local societies, they made it possible to establish more efficient political communication with those actors outside the framework of Christendom at the least possible risk to the confessional reputation of the Catholic King. In addition to playing on

the misunderstandings of their status and representative capacity, the Monarchy found them particularly economical, as it financed these missions through the subsequent payment of alms to the religious orders concerned<sup>3</sup>. The latter, in turn, put their global connections at the service of the Spanish Monarchy in order to benefit from its protection and thus advance their interests with respect to other congregations. These are matters of constant relevance in the four cases that will be analysed below: the Japanese embassies of 1584 and 1615, the Congolese embassy of 1607 and the Algerian embassy of 1701.

#### NON-EUROPEAN AMBASSADORS ACCOMMODATED IN THE CONVENTS OF MADRID

The so-called Tenshō embassy, which marks the first diplomatic contact between Japan and Europe (1584-5), was atypical for several reasons. The four Japanese men who constituted it were teenagers, relatives of the *daimyō* (feudal lords) of Arima, Bungo and Otomo who had converted to Catholicism, and were accompanied, almost guarded, by the Portuguese Jesuit Diogo Mesquita. Their status as ambassadors of a sovereign was, therefore, very questionable, and at their reception in Madrid and later in the Italian courts doubt persisted as to whether they came “as real ambassadors from the Japanese nobility, messengers in Jesuit hands, or noble travelers from faraway lands” (Musillo, 2012, p. 166).

Since their disembarkation in Lisbon in August 1584, the Japanese were given accommodation only in Jesuit colleges throughout their stay, as the Jesuits tried to capitalize on this mission and take them almost as hostages (Valladares, 2001, pp. 27-28). It is not surprising, therefore, that upon their arrival in Madrid they did the same and stayed in what was later known as Colegio Imperial on Calle Toledo. On 14<sup>th</sup> November 1584, Philip II, his children and his sister, the dowager empress Maria of Austria, received these young men in audience as “*personas principales*” (distinguished persons), without entering into delicate questions of diplomatic status. Their stay with the Jesuits also allowed the college to become a place of courtly sociability where they were visited by prelates and noblemen, thus freeing the Crown from the task of finding a residence for them and from possible disputes over the diplomatic status they should be granted.<sup>4</sup> However, later chronicles expressed no doubts as to the status of the embassy, since in retrospect the reception of representatives from lands farther away than the Roman Empire ever achieved conferred honour and prestige on the Monarchy (Quintana, 1629, ff. 354v-355r).

In the case of the next Japanese mission received in Madrid, the Keichō (1614-1615), the issue of its diplomatic status and corresponding accommodation had to be addressed more directly. Again, there was the question of a representative with an ambiguous status, since the samurai Hasekura Tsunenaga was a respectable man, though not Catholic,<sup>5</sup> and represented the *daimyō* of Sendai, not the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (the de facto supreme ruler of Japan). Hasekura also enjoyed the company and

advice of Iberian friars, on this occasion, the Franciscan Luis Sotelo from Seville. Thanks to the strong connections of the latter in Seville, where one of his brothers was an alderman of the local council, the mission of Hasekura received excellent treatment there and was provided with accommodation in the Reales Alcázares (the local royal palace) at the expense of the city from 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1614. The high cost that this implied to the municipal coffers and the doubts over his status as an ambassador, which the King had not yet recognised, led them to cut short their stay in Seville and go to Madrid on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1614 (Gil Fernández, 1991, pp. 394-407; Fernández Gómez, 1999, pp. 284-285).

The Councils of State and of the Indies were called on to decide whether this mission should officially be received and at what level, so as not to worsen relations with the shogun Ieyasu. In the end, the decision was made to receive him, but at a lower rank: the Shogun was equated with the Holy Roman Emperor, so the *daimyō* of Sendai would be equivalent to a small Italian prince.<sup>6</sup> While these decisions were being made, the president of the Council of the Indies ordered, in the king's name, the guardian of the convent of San Francisco in Madrid to provide accommodation for the entourage, since it had already brought with the Franciscan Luis Sotelo as an intermediary.<sup>7</sup>

This temporary solution was prolonged to the despair of the parties involved: the negotiations of Hasekura and Sotelo did not make progress, but the maintenance of the Japanese entourage, made up of about thirty people, costed 200 *reales* a day. In addition, the money was taken from the *penas de cámara* (civil penalties), a very precarious source of royal income to which many other payments were charged. In June 1615 it was estimated that the enormous sum of 30000 ducats would be needed to pay off the costs of the embassy.<sup>8</sup> On the part of the convent, the complaints were continuous and were channelled by the convent guardian Pedro de Leganés: the Japanese were housed in the lower infirmary and the adjacent rooms, but these thirty men caused much discomfort to the neighbouring old and sick friars because of the narrowness of the space, the many visits they received from curious outsiders and, lately, because a typhus epidemic had been declared from which five individuals had already died.<sup>9</sup> The disruption that the Japanese caused to the daily life of the monastery can be seen in “the multitude of so many barbarous people and the untold number of fellow-countrymen that came continuously to see them” (Gil Fernández, 1991, p. 410), which demonstrates the porosity of these convent spaces and the lax access to them: while the Japanese were in a royal audience, some strangers took advantage to force their locks and to steal a katana and different pieces of kitchenware. The situation became so untenable that the Council of the Indies considered taking the embassy out of the court and housing it in Aranjuez until the ships that would take them back were ready.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in October 1615, it was decided that the convent should be compensated for the inconvenience with a small amount of alms (a thousand *reales*), which was not paid, however, until 1619, since it was charged to the



income of Mexico (the affairs of Japan were managed from the Philippines, and this archipelago depended on the Mexican viceroyalty).<sup>11</sup> Contrary to these tensions, the chronicles and treaties of the period did not record any problems, but that the accommodation of the Japanese embassy at San Francisco was a display of decency. Although the numerous visits they received from “molti Grandi titolati, Signori, e Cavalieri” (Amati, 1615, p. 37) were acknowledged, the fact that they rejected the offers of accommodation from these aristocrats showed the modesty of the Japanese gentlemen.

Compared to the great courtly presence and implications of the Japanese embassy, the Congolese mission of Emmanuel Ne Vunda in 1607 earned for itself a lack of interest that bordered on indifference. The circumstances were quite different: although the ambassador of King Alvaro II of the Kongo was, like his master, a Catholic and well versed in Iberian customs, his objectives were against the general interests of the Spanish Monarchy. The kingdom of the Kongo, converted to Catholicism by the Portuguese in the first half of the sixteenth century, sought to be recognized among the princes of Christendom and become a direct feudatory of the Pope. While the Portuguese authorities considered it to be a vassal kingdom and subject to the *Padroado* (the royal patronage of the Portuguese crown), Alvaro II made sure to address Philip III on an equal footing as a “brother” or “friend.”<sup>12</sup> To this conflict of authority and jurisdictions were added the disputes between different orders (and of different national origins) for the control of the evangelization of the Kongo: the Spanish Monarchy sent Portuguese Dominicans, but Portuguese Augustinians and, with papal support, Castilian and Italian Discalced Carmelites also tried to participate.<sup>13</sup>

Ne Vunda had to make his way through delicate interests and rely on pontifical support for his success, but at the same time it was almost impossible for him to bypass contact with the Iberian authorities, since the only route available to him to reach Europe was that controlled by the Portuguese through Lisbon. To make matters worse, his bargaining abilities were severely curtailed during that journey, as his ship was attacked in the Atlantic by Dutch pirates who stole all the gifts and money he was carrying for the European authorities. In such a precarious state, Ne Vunda disembarked in Lisbon in November 1605 with an entourage of twenty-five people and with the *nzimbu* (small mollusc shells) that he had kept as the only currency.<sup>14</sup>

Philip III, despite the mistrust of the Portuguese authorities, ordered that he be treated like any other ambassador, and after a few months spent in Lisbon at the expense of the crown, he presented himself in Madrid before October 1606.<sup>15</sup> Once the objectives of his mission and his poverty had been made clear, which were preceded by his bad reputation in Lisbon on account of the high debts he had left behind,<sup>16</sup> the treatment he received at the royal court worsened considerably. Instead of being treated as an ambassador, he was demoted to the status of a pretender, like the many representatives of the Greek and Balkan authorities who were entertained at court while presenting

their plans for attacking the Ottoman Empire (Floristán Imízcoz, 1988).

The accommodation he was given was, accordingly, very modest. He was charitably received, together with the surviving members of his entourage, at the convent of La Merced. Given the disputes between Augustinians, Carmelites and Dominicans on account of the evangelization of the Kongo, it was more prudent to accommodate him with the “neutral” order of the Mercedarians, although they had great experience in Africa as rescuers of captives. Compared to the hustle and bustle caused by the Japanese in 1584 and 1614, the Congolese mission lacked such an exotic aura, since there was already a prominent sub-Saharan community –of slaves– at Court (Bravo Lozano, 1980, pp. 11-30). For this reason, the testimonies about Ne Vunda’s stay in Madrid presented him as a virtuous Catholic who lived confined to his monastic cell, afflicted with serious illnesses (which would cause his death a few months later), and who only moved around the city to negotiate with the royal ministers (Martínez Ferrer and Nocca, 2003, pp. 42-43).

He only managed to get out of this limbo thanks to the support of the pontifical representatives: when the nuncio Mellini prepared to return to Rome in October 1607, he managed to get Ne Vunda to accompany him in his entourage.<sup>17</sup> The Congolese agent arrived at the Eternal City in a dying state, but, as a sign of the very different role that his embassy played before the Pope, he was received with splendour: he was accommodated in the Vatican Palace with the rank of ambassador of a crowned king, Paul V himself gave him the last rites and his funeral at Santa Maria Maggiore was comparable to that of a cardinal.<sup>18</sup> The *Nigrita* (“little black man”) represented the global reach of the papacy of the Counter-Reformation and the advance of Catholicism throughout the world, while in Madrid it was an annoying challenge to the royal patronage in Africa.

The last case is the little-known mission of Mehmet Rais, representative of the bey of Algiers to Charles II, although when he arrived in Madrid in the spring of 1701, he found Philip V of Bourbon already on the throne. The residence of a Muslim representative in a convent was unprecedented. However, the explanation was simple: the Algerian entourage went directly to the convent of the Trinidad Calzada, in Calle Atocha, because it was accompanied and guided by the Trinitarian Fray Francisco Ortega, who was in charge of the Trinitarian hospital of Algiers (Porres Alonso, 1996, p. 639). As in the Japanese cases, the order that mediated the arrival of these extra-European missions sought to keep them under its direct control. In this case, the Trinitarians acted quickly, without waiting for royal orders to enter the Court, and so the Council of State could not anticipate the reception and rank that would be granted to Mehmet Rais. The discussions, therefore, took place when they were already “accommodated in the convent of the St.ma Trinidad at this court.”<sup>19</sup>

When it came to establishing the rank of the representative of Algiers and the precedents that could be taken

into account for his case, the memory of the Moroccan embassy of al-Ghassâni in 1690-1691 was still recent in the minds of the ministers. The precedent of the Ottoman mission of Ahmed Aga in 1649-1650 was also consulted. On the Algerian side, these cases were well known, since the intermediary Francisco Ortega pleaded that Mehmet Rais should receive the same treatment as the Moroccan envoy.<sup>20</sup> For the Councillors of State, the differences between the “King of Meknes” (Sultan of Morocco) and the ruler of Algiers, who is never mentioned as a monarch but as a “*duan* or viceroy” or “petty king,” were obvious.<sup>21</sup> This is the reason why the ceremonial rite specific to the “Moorish ambassadors,” which had begun with the Ottoman mission of 1649 and was refined with the Moroccan mission of 1690, was adapted, that is, downgraded. Mehmet Rais was given his own carriage and was accompanied by two court bailiffs but was denied his own accommodation.<sup>22</sup>

This attitude exposed the limits of the flexibility of the royal ministers, who were relatively generous in granting honours, but very keen to avoid scandals and conflicts. The memory of the great trouble caused by the two previous Muslim embassies in Madrid was fresh. The Ottoman embassy was hosted in the houses of the Marquise of Auñón, between Calle Alcalá and Paseo del Prado, where it became a headache for the authorities by visiting brothels, receiving or kidnapping prostitutes, assaulting bailiffs and protecting fugitives from justice. In the Moroccan case, al-Ghassâni resided in the already mentioned Casa de Hospedajes, where his entourage caused the same problems due to the uncontrolled entry of individuals and the shelter provided to fugitive Muslim slaves.<sup>23</sup> In order to avoid such chaos, the temporary solution of housing the Algerian mission in the convent of the Trinidad Calzada proved to be ideal, since the friars would be responsible for the management of the space and the control of the entrance. For this reason, the royal order issued stated in detail that no one would be allowed to have access to the lodgings, except for the designated service staff, and especially no woman, not even if she used the excuse of pregnancy craving.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, the problems that the presence of these strangers caused in the daily life of the convent soon became evident. Apart from the cost of maintaining them, the main issue was “the lightness of the people who come in infinite numbers curious to see them, in such a disorderly crowd that they have almost broken down the door of the cell in which they live.”<sup>25</sup> As in the Japanese case or the Amerindians two centuries ago (Taladoire, 2014, pp. 31-37), this mission also met the requirements of exoticism for it to become an attraction for the city, especially because of the rich gift that Mehmet Rais had brought for the King: two horses, two lionesses, a savannah cat, a cutlass, some embroidered bags, two bottles, and another one for gunpowder, and a box of Algerian products. Although the lionesses were domesticated, they must have become nervous by the crowd of people who came to see them, and so they reacted violently; the friars were especially worried because they did not have cages and feared suf-

fering a greater misfortune, since the animals were kept in a room chained to a wooden pillar.<sup>26</sup> The Council of State tried to appease the Trinitarians: they alleviated their expenses with some financial aid that remained unspecified and Philip V accepted the gift of the wild animals.<sup>27</sup> Apart from the curiosity aroused by the lionesses, there were no conflicts with the local population, partly because of the careful movement control that the stay in a convent implied.

## MONASTIC SOCIABILITY

The final aspect of the involvement of these non-European missions in the life of the court convents is not related to their residence there but to the use of the convents as spaces of courtly sociability. The role of the monasteries of Madrid as a central node of courtly celebrations is well studied, and especially the function of the royal foundations of the Descalzas Reales and the Encarnación as discreet political meeting places (Río Barredo, 2000, 147, pp. 191-197; Sánchez, 2015, pp. 53-82). While the Count Duke of Olivares preferred to negotiate secretly on carriage trips, his uncle Baltasar de Zúñiga took advantage of the cloisters of the monastery of San Jerónimo to discuss with the ambassadors some of the most delicate treaties of the Monarchy, as with the extraordinary Frenchman Basompierre in 1621 (Marrades, 1943, p. 75).

Despite the naturalness of the experience in monasteries, non-European missions invited reflection on the limits of their use. In the case of royal events held in monastic churches, there was a tendency to regulate their access, an easy solution given the long experience of those in charge of etiquette in controlling different types of visibility. For example, the Japanese Tenshō mission was in Madrid in November 1584, when the future Philip III was sworn in as Prince of Asturias in the church of the Jerónimos. The Japanese had not yet been received by the King nor had their treatment been decided, so they were invited to follow the ceremony from a high platform, behind a lattice.<sup>28</sup> The same solution was adopted in October 1601 on the occasion of the baptism of the Infanta Ana of Austria in the church of San Pablo in Valladolid. The Persian ambassador Hussein Ali Beg, then present at the court, was recognized as representing a crowned king, so he had to follow the ceremony from the ambassadors' bench. To avoid complications, a “little floorboard” was erected in a corner of the main chapel from where he watched the baptism satisfied (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1997, p. 121).

On less solemn occasions, the visit to convents was part of the daily routine of the court, a habit that in the case of Muslim embassies led to moments of confusion. The Ottoman Ahmed Aga took advantage of one of his many idle days while waiting for a royal response to visit the nearby convent of the Calatravas. The presence of a group of Muslims in the locutory caused such a surprise that the abbess did not know how to act and, when she finally came out to meet them, the visitors had left. Since their confessor warned them that by doing so they had snubbed a guest of the king, he was called back to the con-

vent another day and “was accepted and celebrated with music.” The nuns, with cowls and masks, sang him two serious romances in the locutory which he assured them he had greatly enjoyed. There was an immediate stir at court, because it seemed that the Calatravas had organized a feast for an “infidel”; the Council of State thought that it was not appropriate for the Turkish ambassador to visit sacred places on his own initiative and the abbess was slightly punished.<sup>29</sup>

The same problem occurred with the Moroccan embassy in 1690-1691. The envoy, al-Ghassânî, was the secretary of the sultan Muley Ismail and a man of culture, so he showed great interest in visiting convents and holding theological debates with Catholic religious. al-Ghassânî left a detailed chronicle of his journey in Spain, where he recorded his visits to convents (including female ones), the impression that the celebration of the Holy Week and the canonization of Juan de Dios made on him and his theological disputes with a friar who had lived in the Orient and knew Arabic. In the end, the latter’s prior forbade the friars to see al-Ghassânî, which he regrets in his chronicle (al-Ghassânî, 2003, pp. 157, 173-179; Zhiri, 2016, p. 982).

Paradoxically, problems disappeared when it came to visiting the monastery of El Escorial. A royal invitation to the main foundation of the dynasty was a sign of honour and of the success of a diplomatic mission. Accordingly, those who did not receive a gift from the king or a positive response to their demands, like the Congolese Ne Vunda or the Japanese Hasekura, were not invited to the monastery. The outcome of the encounter with the members of the Tenshō embassy (Masarella, 2012, p. 244) or the Persian embassy of 1601 mentioned above was different. The cultural clash between the Safavid courtier and the Hieronymite friars was striking: according to Father Sepulveda, these Persians ate like beasts, but the ambassador displayed sensitivity and curiosity. He asked for a lute and played melodies from his homeland in tones not known in Europe, requested to go up the bell tower and hear the ringing, since there were no bells in Persia, and begged that the Shah be given the set of thirteen plates engraved by Juan de Herrera with the plans and layout of the monastery, as he would be very pleased. The farewell was an episode of intercultural misunderstanding which was successfully resolved: Hussein Ali Beg embraced the prior from behind in the custom of his land, the latter was annoyed and embraced him again from the front in the European manner (Alonso, 1989, pp. 146-147).

In view of this precedent, the Ottoman ambassador Ahmed Aga also boasted of having been invited to El Escorial. On that occasion he took the famous comic actor Cosme Pérez/Juan Rana as his companion, a sign of his integration into the life of the court, albeit into its most dubious aspects.<sup>30</sup> After this point, the successive Russian ambassadors were also honoured with this excursion (Fernández Izquierdo, 2000, pp. 89, 104). The curious al-Ghassânî, of course, went at least twice, to the point that he prided himself on his friendship with the prior Diego de Valdemoro, with whom he maintained

correspondence (al-Ghassânî, 2003, p. 181; Zhiri, 2016, p. 981).

## CONCLUSIONS

The use of the convents of Madrid to give accommodation to some of the non-European missions received by the Spanish Monarchy between the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrates the capacity of this political organization to overcome the rhetoric of crusade and of Catholic orthodoxy and to maintain diplomatic relations with all kinds of “infidel” powers. The deeply rooted view of diplomacy as limited to political communication between modern states or European courts needs to be overcome, since the contacts established were more extensive, many-branched and elusive. Braudel (1980, II, pp. 658-659) already pointed out seventy years ago how the Spanish Monarchy combined the image of the paladin of Christianity with its more discreet and continuous communication with the Muslim powers of the Mediterranean. However, it has been argued in many circles that the Spanish Monarchy was unable to create a secularized and intercultural diplomacy until the more stable embassies with the Muslim powers at the end of the eighteenth century (Windler, 1999, pp. 749-750). In reality, formal and visible embassies were but one side of the coin, since different forms of negotiation existed. Likewise, the authorities of the Monarchy showed the necessary courtesy to receive kindly representatives of princes of unclear status, sometimes even on suspicion that they were impostors, though without using residences paid for by the Monarchy itself but by religious institutes. In this way, they were given an intermediate diplomatic status without being treated disrespectfully.<sup>31</sup>

Questions of reputation were especially important in developing policies beyond the traditional framework of Christendom. These concerned, on the one hand, the vigilant supervision of the Pope, who was the guardian of the orthodoxy of a Monarchy that called itself Catholic par excellence. On the other hand, the disputes with France were also resolved in the field of propaganda. In the view of the accusations for impiety and Machiavellianism that the Spanish Monarchy launched against the French one, the latter took advantage of every occasion of a Muslim embassy to attack the alleged hypocrisy of its southern neighbours. During the stay of the Ottoman Ahmed Aga in 1649, the French *Gazette* accused the Monarchy of the fact that “n’ayant eu jusques ici autre pivot que la réputation de son zèle au maintien de la Foy Catholique & aversion a son contraire, en emprunte maintenant un autre de la Porte du Grand Seigneur, s’unissant avec le Turc.”<sup>32</sup> Spanish reports, however, attest to a rather scornful attitude towards the arrival of these agents: in contrast to the suitable reception that the envoy from Algiers was given in 1701 and the popular curiosity he aroused in Madrid, in the romances he is humiliated, according to a traditionally held view that equated Spanishness with the rejection of Muslims. In fact, rather than the clash between a *raison d’état* that advised the acceptance of these contacts sur-

reptitiously and a “popular imperialism” that was reluctant to reach agreements with “infidels,” one witnesses the clear application of the probabilistic moral theology, in which there is no tolerance but a preference for the lesser evil (Sosa Mayor, 2018, pp. 398–420).<sup>33</sup> In any case, as the studies on Iberian early modern cities as “global cities” have showed, the predominant trait was the general invisibility and submission of extra-European actors (even elitist’s ones) in the Old-World capitals (Mira Caballos, 2003, pp. 1–15; Pereda, 2010, 47–51; Martínez-Bermejo, 2017, pp. 604–621).

Finally, this study shows the need to integrate more firmly the political initiatives of the Spanish Monarchy and of the different religious orders, which served as an outpost and a limit for these global contacts. Without the patient and risky work of the missionaries in Japan, Barbary or the Kongo, there would be no effective mediators to make possible the arrival and acceptance of these missions in Europe. However, due to the disputes between the orders themselves, the authorities of the various kingdoms of the Monarchy and the varying papal initiatives, it was very difficult for the Monarchy to manage this missionary infrastructure and align it with its objectives, as it has been thoroughly researched in the Persian case (Windler, 2018, pp. 35–64, 404–426). The establishment of the pontifical congregation Propaganda Fide (1623), dedicated to centralizing the missionary efforts of the Catholic Church, limited to a great extent the capacity of the Spanish Monarchy to use religious orders as an advance guard for its imperial policies in Africa and Asia. Contacts with non-European powers mediated by religious declined so much that only the Algerian mission of 1701 is later recorded, in a more familiar Mediterranean setting.

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## NOTES

- 1 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 10 May 1613, Archivo General de Indias [AGI], Filipinas, 4, n. 8; Gil Fernández, 1991, pp. 259–267.
- 2 “quan importantes serian estas paces, quan deseadas de su Rey y quan suave modo el tratarlas a la sorda y por vía de religiosos (porque los Xarifes se precian de sucesores de Mahoma, morabutos y sanctos) ahorrando embiar embaxadores seglares con autoridad y costa y sin dar ninguno de los dos Reyes su brazo a torcer embiando persona grave a pedir paces.” Jerónimo Gracián de la Madre de Dios OCD to the Council of State, 1604, Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, 493, s. f. I am indebted to Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra for this document.
- 3 “S. M.à gli ha fatto dare il viatico, et al Collegio una buona elemosina p. le spese, che per causa loro sono state accresciute.” *Cavato da una l.ra del Provincial di Toledo scritta la P. G.nrale della Compagnia di Giesu*, 17 December 1584, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano [AAV], Segreteria di Stato [SS], Spagna [Sp.], 31, f. 227v.
- 4 Masarella, 2012, pp. 234–245; Simón Díaz, 1992, I, p. 10; *Cavato da una l.ra del Provincial di Toledo scritta la P. G.nrale*

- della Compagnia di Giesu*, 17 December 1584, AAV, SS, Sp., 31, ff. 227r–v.
- 5 Hasekura, perhaps on the advice of Father Sotelo in order to increase the possibilities of success in his mission, ended up converting to Catholicism and was baptized in the Descalzas Reales convent of Madrid under the name of Felipe Francisco de Fachicura on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1615. Fernández Gómez, 1999, p. 288.
  - 6 Sola Castaño (2012, p. 101); Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 16 January 1615, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 153.
  - 7 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 11 November 1614, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 151; Gil Fernández, 1991, p. 409.
  - 8 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 14 June 1615, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 161, f. 1r.
  - 9 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 14 June 1615, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 161, f. 2r.
  - 10 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 14 June 1615, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 161, f. 1v; Gil Fernández (1991, p. 410).
  - 11 Consultation by the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 4 February 1615, AGI, Filipinas, 1, n. 154; Gil Fernández, 1991, p. 410.
  - 12 Petition of Antonio Manuel Nigrita to Philip III, 29 June 1604, in Brasio (1955, VI, p. 110); Alvaro II of Kongo to the collector Fabio Biondo, San Salvador de Congo [M’banza-Kongo], 15 October 1602, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 42; Thornton, 1984, p. 150; Lowe, 2007, pp. 108–123.
  - 13 Philip III to the Marquis of Aytona, Lerma, 31 July 1608, in Brasio, 1955, V, p. 453; the nuncio Carafa to the cardinal Borghese, Madrid, 23 November 1611, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 48; Cortés López, 1991, p. 236.
  - 14 *Relation sur l’ambassade (1608)*, in Cuvelier, 1954, pp. 280, 286–287; Memorial of the ambassador of the King of Kongo, Madrid, 21 March 1607, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 262.
  - 15 The viceroy-bishop of Coimbra to Philip III, Lisbon, 22 November 1605, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 159; the viceroy-bishop of Coimbra to Philip III, Lisbon, 18 March 1606, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 170.
  - 16 Memorial of the ambassador of the King of Kongo, Madrid, 21 March 1607, in Brasio, 1955, VI, p. 262.
  - 17 Cardinal Borghese to the nuncio Millini, Rome, 23 October 1606, AAV, SS, Sp., 333, ff. 304–305; Cardinal Borghese to the nuncio Millini, Rome, 12 December 1606, AAV, SS, Sp., 333, f. 339; Zuazua, 2013, p. 81.
  - 18 José de Melo to Philip III, Roma, 9 January 1608, in Brasio, 1955, VI, pp. 419–420; Lowe, 2007, p. 120; Mansour, 2013, pp. 539–543.
  - 19 To Carlos Francisco del Castillo, conductor of ambassadors, Madrid, 9 April 1701, Archivo Histórico Nacional [AHN], Estado [E], 2866, s. n. (14); Carlos Francisco del Castillo to Antonio de Ubilla y Medina, Madrid, 28 May 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (38).
  - 20 Consultation by the Council of State, Madrid, 7 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (4), ff. 2r, 6v–7v.
  - 21 Consultation by the Council of State, Madrid, 23 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (22), f. 1v.
  - 22 Carlos Francisco del Castillo to José Pérez de la Puente, Madrid, 19 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (21). For the details of receiving the “Moorish ambassadors,” see *Reglamento de Ceremonial de 25 de abril de 1717*, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid [BNE], Manuscritos [Mss.], 10411, ff. 37v–38r.
  - 23 Pedro Coloma to the Marquis of Mirabel, Madrid, 17 October 1649, AHN, E, 2879, n. 21; Tercero Casado, 2020; Arribas Palau, 1985, pp. 271–277.
  - 24 “He should not allow anyone, whether Moorish or Christian, to enter the residence, except those assigned to assist him, even if it were in the capacity of interpreter or under any other pretext, nor should he allow anyone to enter the meal in the capacity of servant of Your Majesty, in order to avoid any inconvenience. And he should take extra care that no women enter in the residence even if it were because of the craving of pregnant women, in which case the conductor of ambassadors will arrange that the envoy show himself in some balcony of the residence, where



- he could be seen from the street.” Consultation by the Council of State, Madrid, 7 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (4), ff. 3r-4r.
- 25 Carlos Francisco del Castillo to José Pérez de la Puente, Madrid, 11 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (16), f. 1v.
  - 26 Ibidem, ff. 1v-2r.
  - 27 The Council of State to Carlos Francisco del Castillo, Madrid, 23 April 1701, AHN, E, 2866, s. n. (19). These animals must have been among those that occupied the new lion’s den at the Palace of Buen Retiro. Gómez-Centurión Jiménez, 2011, pp. 86, 97.
  - 28 “fece parere una tribuna o luogo in alto dal q.ale q.esti sig.ri Giapponesi potessero, senza esser veduti, veder la festa.” *Cavato da una l.ra del Provincial di Toledo scritta la P. G.nrale della Compagnia di Giesu*, 17 December 1584, AAV, SS, Sp., 31, f. 227.
  - 29 Ibidem; Espadas Burgos, 1975, pp. 84-85.
  - 30 “The Turk saw everything, because he is very fond of comedies, and is so comfortable with the comedians that having gone to see the El Escorial he was taken by his comrade to Juan Rana and another phoney they call Mexia.” Felipe IV to the countess of Paredes, Madrid, 26 December 1649, in Vilela Gallego, 2005, p. 67.
  - 31 Fears were well-grounded, as fraudulent embassies were not rare. In cases of doubt, embassies were stopped before they entered Madrid and their credentials were checked. The small village of Villaviciosa de Odón was a frequent lodging in these cases, as had occurred with Mahamet Çelebi/Felipe of Africa in 1658, who was rejected as a fraud (García Sierra, 1994, p. 744), or with the Turkish ambassador Ahmed Aga in 1649. Upon the latter’s arrival, the royal ministers meticulously checked whether he had credentials as an ambassador among his papers, and in all the testimonies of the time the following was made explicit: that he was “sent to His Majesty (as he says) by the Grand Turk under the name of ambassador.” Consultation by the Council of State, Madrid, 23 August 1649, AHN, E, 2877, n. 3. In the end “the treatment was that of Your Excellence, estimated as ambassador of a crowned king.” León Pinelo, 1971, pp. 343-344. See also Díaz Esteban, 2003, p. 154; Tercero Casado, 2020.
  - 32 *Gazette* “La reception faite par Sa Maïesté Catholique d’un Ambassadeur de Constantinople à Madrid, en execution de l’alliance n’aguères conclue entre les Turcs & les Espagnols,” November 26, 1649, p. 1106.
  - 33 According to the romance, Philip V’s response to the embassy would have been “Por que es fuerte disparate / El que un Catholico Rey / Quiera estimar un alarve: / Las Joyas con los Cavallos, / Y los demas animales, / Te estimo en mucho, mas di, / Que precio tengo de darte, / Que yo no quiero deberte, / Esto te toca avisarme.” *Verdadero, y nuevo romance en que da el tiempo quenta à un ignorante de nuestro Gran Monarcha D. Felipe Quinto, nuestro Señor, y de un presente que el Rey de Argel hizo à su Magestad, y asimismo de una carta que traxo su Embaxador, la respuesta de ella, y lo demàs que verà el Curioso Lector*, Sevilla, 1701, f. 2r.
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