

DESIDERI PROJECT

7. Biography of Desideri

In spring of 2006 I completed a new piece of work: a concise but complete and documented biography of Ippolito Desideri. The book was published by Brigata del Leoncino, Pistoia, and presented on 5th May 2006 in the Sala Maggiore of Pistoia's Palazzo Comunale by Antonio Frintino (chairman of the Brigata del Leoncino), Cesare Sartori (journalist), Fabio Scialpi (lecturer in Indology and History of Religions at the universities of Rome and Basilicata, representing the IsIAO due to the illness of chairman Gherardo Gnoli), Leonardo Rombai (lecturer in Geography, University of Florence) and Nicola Gasbarro (lecturer in History of religions, university of Udine). The presentation was announced in the Pistoia section of "La Nazione" on 30.4.2006, (p. IX Lorenzo Maffucci, *Ha portato a Pistoia un po' di mondo*); on 4.5.2006, (p. X *Il pistoiese che scoprì il Tibet e il buddhismo*); and on 5.5.2006 (p. XIII, *Desideri e il Tibet*).

The book was warmly welcomed at a second presentation in Rome on Wednesday 14th February 2007, at 5.00pm, at the head office of the Società Geografica Italiana (Villa Celimontana – Via della Navicella 12), introduced by: geographers Andrea Cantile of the I.G.M. (director of "L'Universo") and Claudio Cerreti of the university of Rome (director of "Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana"), religious historian Nicola Gasbarro (University of Udine), Jesuit Tommaso Guadagno, national vice-chairman of the Apostolate for prayer and Prof.ssa Maria Angela Falà (University of Rome), director of the quarterly "Dharma" and vice-chairperson of the European Buddhist Union. Of particular interest was the talk by Prof. Franco Salvatori, chairman of the S.G.I., who announced his willingness to make a direct commitment to presenting this new publication (the bibliography of Desideri).

The presentation of the book at the S.G.I. is reported in "La Nazione" (Tuesday 13.2.2007, p. IX / Agenda Pistoia, *A Roma la biografia di Desideri*) and "L'Universo" (a. LXXXVII, n. 2, April-May 2007, pp. 299-300).

Reviews of this short biography were published in "Il Tirreno" (Thursday 15.6.2006, p. IV / Pistoia, Paolo GESTRI, *I segreti dell'esploratore Desideri nell'ultima fatica di Bargiacchi*), "Geostorie" (Bulletin and newsletter of the Bollettino e notiziario del Centro italiano per gli studi storico-geografici, January-August 2006), "Bullettino Storico Pistoiese" (2006, pp. 206-208), "Avventure nel Mondo" (January-June 2007), "L'Universo" (year LXXXVII, n. 2, April-May 2007), "La Civiltà Cattolica" (21.7.2007, pp. 206-207), "Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana" (July-September 2007), "La Vita" (year 110, n. 45, Sunday 16.12.2007, Mariangela MARAVIGLIA, *L'avventura tibetana di Ippolito Desideri*), "Il Libro Aperto". Quarterly newsletter of the Pistoia branch of the Club Alpino Italiano (yr. XIX, no. 3, December 2007, Rita CORRIERI BECHERUCCI, *Ippolito Desideri, primo ...*), "Rivista Geografica Italiana" (December 2007). Full information in the bibliography.

Comments about this book:

The author brings to fruition years of research in the journeys and writings of Desideri [...] offering us a well-documented profile of this Jesuit missionary considered from psychological, cultural and religious points of view, emphasizing his strong personality with particular ability to reason backed up by solid theological study, all of which enabled him to grasp and communicate the essence of the Tibetan cultural and religious situation, until now practically unknown to the Western world [F. SURDICH, "Geostorie", Jan-Aug 2006]

I was fascinated by the style and content [of the book]... written in such a human, rich, style, full of life and proximity to the reader [Mariano BALLESTER S.J., handwritten note sent to the author from Rome, 18.5.2006].

[...] an exciting work about Desideri, so well-documented, accurate, rich in detail and in-depth observations such as the one regarding confession [...] the quotations [by Desideri] are always so full of life it is like being at his side and sharing with him the cold, adversities, excitement and frustration [Gian Carlo CASTELLI, typewritten letter to author sent from Anguillara, Rome, 12.6.2006].

We must not underestimate the importance of this book, modest in size but of considerable importance for its interpretation of Pistoia's most skilled and versatile character. [...] Enzo Bargiacchi unequivocally succeeds in presenting a human and psychological profile of Ippolito Desideri [...] Enzo Bargiacchi's work is a penetrating, supple, rich bibliography of Ippolito Desideri's immortal undertaking [R. RISALITI, "Bullettino Storico Pistoiese", 2006].

Bargiacchi gives us a detailed portrait of the character [...] and] the lively narrative account of his terrible journey makes us participants in the suffering, hopes and frustrations of the Pistoiese missionary, as if we were beside him. The whole volume reads like a compelling novel, fluid and enjoyable, with a concise and exhaustive style and efficient prose which communicates the sincere passion of a scholar and researcher and human sympathy for this extraordinary [...] character [F. ANGELETTI, "Avventure nel Mondo", Jan-June 2007].

Worth noting [...] is the correspondence between Desideri's text and his reflections which Bargiacchi intersperses with travel notes referring to more recent visits to the same places. The result is a very unusual dimension to this journey, perfectly contextualized in geographical terms. [...] from the ideas defined by Gasbarro of the responsible journey [...] we reach the intrinsic message of peace hidden in the folds of understanding of others through historical, anthropological, religious, scientific and social observation, resulting in an extremely varied and enjoyable book [S. CACIOLLI, "L'Universo", April-May 2007].

This book is a biography written in an enjoyable and enthralling narrative style, starting with the original sources and manuscripts of Fr Desideri [...]. The real character of the Jesuit emerges from its pages as an incarnation of the charisma of the Society of Jesus [...] We can confirm that Fr Desideri thus experienced the surpassing of the egocentric self found in both Christianity and Buddhism and which opens the way to a more universal dimension. [T.GUADAGNO, "La Civiltà Cattolica", 21.7.2007].

Bargiacchi [...] does full justice to the traveller [Desideri], presenting a pithy and efficient biography, enjoyable to read, clear and enlightening – and well-documented from start to finish despite his decision, here, to reserve the information on a barely preliminary level while waiting (we hope not for long) for the publication of a more [...] detailed text. [C. CERRETI, "Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana", July-Sept 2007]

After the publication in 2003 of *La Relazione di Ippolito Desideri*, Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi has devoted another two appreciable and extensive studies to focusing on the figure and works of the Pistoiese Jesuit missionary [...].

With the 2006 volume, Bargiacchi draws from very extensive critical multidisciplinary reading and the many archival sources preserved especially in the Historical Archive of the Society of Jesus in Rome, and reconstructs with a sure hand and much detail the life of Ippolito Desideri. [L. ROMBAI, "Rivista Geografica Italiana", December 2007].

A supple and yet rigorous volume which draws masterfully on sources and original manuscripts well known to Bargiacchi to bring to life Desideri's adventure as well as a religious and intellectual portrait of the protagonist and his unique ability to enter distant cultures, unexplored prior to his lifetime. [Mariangela MARAVIGLIA, "La Vita", 16.12.2007].

A definitely interesting text in many aspects and therefore to be recommended to anyone wishing to discover and learn about our Marco Polo of the mountains, a Pistoiese missionary with great respect and attention to the culture of the ethnic groups he encountered. [Rita CORRIERI BECHERUCCI, "Il Libro Aperto", December 2007].

Copies of this first draft of Desideri's biography, to be followed by a much more extensive and well-documented version, now being edited, may be requested from the Taberna Libreria owned by Federica Lucarelli (Via della Rosa, 38 - 51100 Pistoia - tel. e fax 0573 994562 - e-mail: info@tabernalibraria.com).

[Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi, website <http://www.ippolito-desideri-net>]