

## DESIDERI PROJECT

### 9. Lectures and events 2007

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2007 a meeting was held in the Town Hall of Pistoia, attended by: Renzo Berti, mayor of Pistoia; head of the cabinet, Fabio Fondatori; Pistoia city councillor for culture, Tommaso Braccesi; Pistoia provincial councillor for culture, Cristina Donati; general secretary of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia, Giovanni Pieraccioli; Tuscan regional councillor Daniela Belliti, and myself. The decision was taken during this meeting to proceed with the creation of a specific website dedicated to Desideri, with the collaboration of various municipal and regional bodies, the support of specialised national institutes and important international links.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February at 3.00pm I held an open lecture-lesson in the Department of Linguistic and Oriental Studies at the University of Bologna (Palazzo Poggi, Via Zamboni 33), entitled “Ippolito Desideri and the birth of Tibetan studies” to open the course of Prof. Erberto Lo Bue, Professor of History of Art in India and Central Asia and of Classical Tibetan Language (reported in “La Nazione”, Saturday 3.2.2007, p. XI / Agenda Pistoia, *Lezione di Gualtiero Bargiacchi*).

An evening dedicated to Desideri was held on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at 9.00pm, at “L’Angolo dell’avventura e dei grandi viaggiatori”(Lungotevere Testaccio 10, angolo via Romolo Gessi), including a projection of the documentary “Desideri” by Massimo Prevedello. The event, which I introduced along with Vittorio Kulczycki and the director’s assistant Giandomenico Bosa, was very successful and it was an incentive for other similar events.

On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2007, at the Istituto Samantabhadra (centre for Buddhism and Tibetan cultural studies, Via di Generosa 24, 00148 Roma), following an introduction by the chairman Luigi Straffi and by Ven. Geshe Sonam Chanchub, I gave a talk entitled “Ippolito Desideri, the Marco Polo of Tibet” (the journey to the snowy wastes told as a novel).

Pistoia’s new San Giorgio library, inaugurated on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007, has name one of its reference rooms after Desideri. This text is shown on the illustrative panel:

Ippolito Desideri (Pistoia 20.12.1684 – Rome 13.4.1733), Jesuit missionary. Completed an extraordinary journey from Rome to Lhasa (capital of the then mysterious and unknown land of Tibet) between 9th September 1712 and 18th March 1716, crossing the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and Indian oceans, India and the entire Trans-Himalayan plateau in one of the most memorable exploits of exploration history. His five-year stay in Tibet enabled him firstly to learn the language and subsequently to master a knowledge of this distant country’s profound philosophical and religious concepts and provide an accurate description of them which is still unsurpassed today in many aspects. This was made possible by his heroic spirit of devotion to helping others and a remarkable cognitive ability which led him to an open, calm and loving dialogue with his hosts in that country. The Pistoiese missionary is thus not only a great explorer of unknown territories and notions, and forerunner of modern studies of Tibet and Buddhism, but also and above all the herald and champion of a peaceful approach to dialogue with different cultures and traditions on an exemplary quest for truth. He represents an enlightening example for all serious scholars and also for all responsible human beings.

At 4.00 pm on Friday 11th May I held a conference entitled “The discovery of Tibetan culture and language: Ippolito Desideri and Sandor Csoma de Körös”, at the Sala del Gonfalone at the Tuscan regional council centre (Palazzo Panciatichi, via Cavour 4, Firenze), introduced by Paolo Bartolozzi (vice-chairman of the Tuscan regional council) and Prof. Alessandro Parenti (secretary of the Circolo Linguistico Fiorentino). The event was promoted by the Circolo Linguistico Fiorentino (founded in 1945 by Giacomo Devoto) and the University of Florence, with the Tuscan regional council. To mark the occasion the latter published a small volume entitled “Desideri. Research, publications and events promoted by Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi” with a foreword by minister Riccardo Nencini (chairman of the Tuscan regional council), an illustrated table

of the Circolo Linguistico Fiorentino (p.7) and this document, updated on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007 (pp. 9-43). The event was announced in an article in “Il Tirreno” (Wednesday 9.5.2007, p. IV/Pistoia: *Desideri pioniere pistoiese in Tibet. Ricerca storica sul missionario del Settecento*) and mentioned on 11.5.2007 in “La Repubblica” (p. XVI/Firenze) and “La Nazione”, following Cesare Sartori’s review of the bibliography mentioned above.

The documentary “Desideri” by Massimo Prevedello was screened during the events linked to the Buddhist festivities of Vesak held this year in Rome at full moon in the month of vesākha (April-May) to mark the birth, enlightenment and parinirvana of Buddha. The screening took place on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May at 10.00am at the conference centre of “La Sapienza”, university of Rome (Via Salaria, 113), as part of the “Laboratory of East-West dialogue. The example of Tibet” (organised by Fondazione Maitreya and MIRIS, Master Immigrati e Rifugiati – Sapienza. Università di Roma), introduced by Prof. Maria Immacolata Maciotti, with contributions from Dechen Dolkar (chairman of the Italian section of the Tibetan Women Association), Massimiliano A. Polichetti (Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale “Giuseppe Tucci”), Geshe Gedun Tharchin (Istituto Lamrim, Association for the study of Tibetan Buddhism and meditation) and Livia Pecci of the Istituto Samantabhadra (with a reading of the message of greeting from resident lama Geshe Sonam Chanchub). The documentary, presented by Maria Angela Falà (chairperson of the Fondazione Maitreya and vice-chairperson of the European Buddhist Union) and illustrated by me, met with great enthusiasm.

On 7-11 September 2007, the “13<sup>th</sup> International Association of Ladakh Studies (IALS) Colloquium in Rome” was held in Italy for the first time (organised by Elena De Rossi Filibeck) at which I presented a paper entitled *Ippolito Desideri’s first remarks on Ladakh* (Facoltà di Studi Orientali dell’Università di Roma “La Sapienza”, via Principe Amedeo 182b; morning of 8.9.2007). The paper was mentioned in “La Nazione” (Tuesday 4.9.2007, p. VII / Agenda Pistoia, Invito di prestigio per Bargiacchi) and will be published in the proceedings of the conference, attended by leading scholars from the area under Indian administration, but mainly Tibetan in origin. The abstract of this paper is on pp2-3 of the specific dossier published for this occasion by the Facoltà di Studi Orientali of Rome university which organised the event. Here below is the introduction to the conclusive *Report*:

*13th IALS COLLOQUIUM REPORT, ROME 2007*

The 13th IALS Colloquium took place in Rome under the auspices of the Università di Roma «Sapienza» from 7-11 September 2007.

Rome was a particularly appropriate venue for an international conference, both because of the city’s central role in the history of European civilization, and because of its strong tradition of Tibetan and Himalayan studies. As Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi reminded us, the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri was among the first Europeans to visit Ladakh on his way to Lhasa in the early 18th century, and his reports from the region remain an important historical source. In the 20th century, one of the greatest names in Tibetan studies has been Giuseppe Tucci who visited Ladakh and Western Tibet in the 1930s. Tucci’s pupil Luciano Petech published his thesis on the Ladakhi royal chronicles in 1939 as well as the definitive history of The Kingdom of Ladakh (c.950-1842 AD) in 1977. Elena de Rossi Filibeck, the Rome-based convener of the colloquium, is herself a pupil of Professor Petech: she therefore stands in the same distinguished tradition.

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