

DESIDERI'S WORKS

1. Awareness of Desideri's work

For about two hundred years Desideri was only known through a private letter sent to his confrere Ildebrando Grassi and published in 1722 (translated into French) in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, a famous collection of letters written by Jesuits from various mission locations. The collection was continually reprinted and translated into various languages during the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of his ideas filtered through those who had met the missionary personally although they lacked the tools to develop and quote them fully.

Desideri's massive, profound and brilliant account was characterised by complicated and adventurous events, which are discussed in a specific piece of work [E.G. Bargiacchi, *La 'Relazione' di Ippolito Desideri fra storia locale e vicende internazionali*, "Storia locale", (a. I), n. 2, Dec. 2003, pp. 4-103)]. The earliest information was provided by Carlo Puini who published various passages from the account, broken up in his monograph entitled *Il Tibet (Geografia, storia, religione, costumi) secondo la relazione del viaggio del P. Ippolito Desideri (1715-1721)*, Società Geografica Italiana, Roma 1904. Greater international awareness came with the English translation, which was almost complete, edited by Filippo De Filippi (*An Account of Tibet. The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J., 1712-1727*, edited by F. De Filippi, Routledge, London 1932). It was only between 1954 and 1956 that the complete version was published, in three volumes and in the original Italian, expertly edited by Luciano Petech. The three volumes (Parts V, VI and VII, respectively 1954, 1955, 1956) were the final part of a seven-volume work entitled *I missionari italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal* (abbreviated as *MITN*), La Libreria dello Stato, Rome, 1952-1956 (altogether vol. II of "Il nuovo Ramusio", the series edited by IsMEO).

Unfortunately this edition has yet to be translated into English but American academic Michael Sweet is working on this with a complete translated version in a critical edition which will complete the notes made by Petech with new knowledge deriving from studies carried out over the last fifty years.

Desideri was able to write five important works in the Tibetan language. Four of these were published, with an Italian translation, between 1981 and 1989 (*Opere tibetane di Ippolito Desideri S.J.*, a cura di Giuseppe Toscano S.X., IsMEO, Roma, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1989). The largest volume is still unpublished, and is considered to be a splendid interpretative commentary of the *Mādhyamika* school concepts: Tucci defined it as "a weighty volume written in flawless Tibetan" and offered to "publish it as a rightful tribute to the great Tibetan and to highlight with this unique monument the encounter between Buddhist and Christian theology".

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