

# MAPPING AND TRANSLATING SPACES, CULTURES, AND LANGUAGES. The Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Rome, 29-30 January 2026

Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche  
Dipartimento di Studi Europei, Americani e Interculturali, Sapienza Università di Roma

## PROGRAMME

EDITED BY

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PROGETTI DI RICERCA DI RILEVANTE INTERESSE NAZIONALE (PRIN 2022) - REF.: 20222SY2K7

“MAPPING AND TRANSLATING SPACES, CULTURES AND LANGUAGES.

EXPERIENCES FROM THE MISSIONS CONNECTED TO THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE (1540-1700)”

## SYNOPSIS

This conference marks the conclusion of the PRIN 2022 project **“Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures and Languages: Experiences from the Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)” - MAT**, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research and by the European Union (NextGenerationEU).

The MAT project brings together history, linguistics, and translation studies to investigate the processes of cultural and linguistic mediation—and miscommunication—that characterized missionary encounters across the Portuguese Empire and the system of *Padroado* between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Missionary spaces are approached as privileged laboratories of encounter, in which languages, worldviews, religious practices, material cultures, and systems of knowledge were continuously **negotiated, adapted, transformed, and at times imposed**, within asymmetrical relations of power.

Within this framework, the project examines the heterogeneous missionary contexts connected to the Portuguese Empire between circa 1500 and 1700. Through a systematic analysis of missionary, mercantile, and institutional archival sources, the research pursues three main objectives:

- (1) to document interactions between European agents—primarily missionaries—and African, Amerindian, and Asian communities, in order to develop a comparative history of the processes that led either to mutual linguistic learning and accommodation or to resistance and rejection;
- (2) to trace the emergence of early modern multilingual spaces, communities, and identities;
- (3) to analyse how power asymmetries shaped cross-cultural encounters and influenced their linguistic and cultural outcomes.

The diversity of missionary settings connected to the Portuguese Empire—ranging from small-scale societies with predominantly oral traditions to highly structured polities with long-standing written cultures—provides a particularly productive framework for this analysis. By foregrounding such variability, the project contributes to early modern global history while also addressing questions of linguistic mediation, cultural translation, and asymmetrical exchange that remain highly relevant today.

From a methodological perspective, this research is situated at the intersection of global history, the history of written and visual cultures, historical linguistics, and translation studies,

with a strong emphasis on the materiality and spatial embeddedness of sources. Through the analysis of maps, books, grammars, dictionaries, catechisms, missionary writings, and archival documents, the project contributes to the valorisation of multilingual corpora often marginal to established historiographies, highlighting the central role of cultural mediators, multilingual communities, and local practices of appropriation and reinterpretation.

The conference is conceived as a moment of synthesis and conceptual consolidation, structured over two days that reflect complementary analytical perspectives.

### Day One: Operational Concepts and Practices of Mediation

The first day of the conference is devoted to clarifying and refining the **core operational concepts** of the project—*mapping* and *translating*—understood not as neutral or merely technical activities, but as historically situated practices of knowledge production, cultural mediation, and power.

**Mapping** is approached in its broadest sense: not only as cartographic representation, but as a set of intellectual, visual, linguistic, and epistemic frameworks through which early modern Europeans perceived, ordered, and rendered intelligible unfamiliar spaces and societies. Maps, atlases, toponymic systems, and geographical texts are examined alongside conceptual and symbolic mappings—biblical, demonological, and historical—that situated new worlds within pre-existing cosmologies and narratives of salvation.

**Translating** is likewise treated as a multifaceted process that extends beyond the transfer of meaning between languages, encompassing linguistic, cultural, epistemic, and interepistemic forms of translation. Translation involved practices relating to texts, prayers, images, objects, performances, scripts, and material culture, through which different systems of knowledge, belief, and representation were rendered commensurable—or strategically reframed. It included strategies of domestication and accommodation, phonetic transcription and semantic innovation, visual mediation and ritual enactment. Rather than resolving alterity, translation often generated zones of tension, ambiguity, and creative hybridity across epistemic boundaries.

Through interdisciplinary dialogue, the first day explores how these practices operated within missionary contexts: how linguistic competence, visual culture, material circulation, and institutional frameworks shaped encounters between European missionaries and local communities; how translation and mapping were embedded in theological, political, and

pedagogical agendas; and how they functioned simultaneously as tools of communication, persuasion, governance, and exclusion.

## Day Two: Case Studies

The second day shifts the focus from conceptual frameworks to **historically grounded experiences**, examining specific missionary contexts, regions, and actors across Africa, Asia, the Atlantic world, and the Americas.

Through a series of detailed case studies, the conference investigates how mapping and translating practices were concretely enacted in diverse settings: Jesuit linguistic and educational programmes in China; the production and circulation of geographical knowledge in Sino-European encounters; the translation of prayers, catechisms, and core Christian doctrines in Japan, Brazil, and West-Central Africa; the role of indigenous clergy, creole societies, and local mediators; and the circulation of languages and religious knowledge across imperial, confessional, and linguistic boundaries.

These contributions highlight the variability of missionary experiences and challenge any unified model of cultural encounter. They reveal how local conditions—political structures, existing literary traditions, social hierarchies, and linguistic ecologies—shaped missionary strategies and outcomes. At the same time, they underscore the global interconnectedness of these experiences, tracing the circulation of texts, models, and practices across continents.

Taken together, the two days of the conference aim to demonstrate that *mapping* and *translating* were not ancillary activities of missionary expansion, but central mechanisms through which early modern global encounters were conceptualized, negotiated, and remembered. By combining conceptual reflection with close historical analysis, the final conference of the MAT project seeks to advance a more nuanced understanding of missions as dynamic spaces of intercultural interaction in the early modern world.

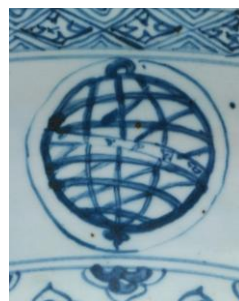
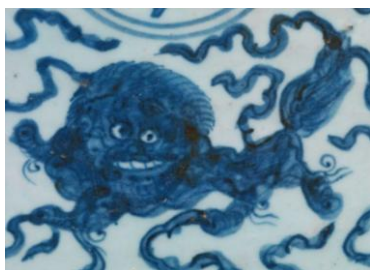
## Icon of the Conference

We have selected as one of the visual references for the conference a porcelain dish produced in China for the Portuguese market between circa 1520 and 1540, today held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York - <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/204716>.

This artefact provides an early material example of the processes of cultural and symbolic mediation that characterised the missionary enterprises associated with the Portuguese

Empire. The juxtaposition of Chinese decorative motifs (the doglike lions) with the Portuguese royal arms and the armillary sphere points to a shared yet profoundly asymmetrical space of negotiation between distinct systems of knowledge, belief, and representation.

The presence of the *IHS* Christogram—rendered by an artisan operating outside the Latin alphabetic tradition and thus imitating unfamiliar graphic forms—later adopted by the Society of Jesus, anticipates the central role that visual and material forms would play in the translation and transmission of Christian doctrine. The object thus illustrates how processes of translation extended well beyond language, encompassing images, symbols, and material culture. As such, it constitutes a privileged source for examining early modern encounters as sites of hybridity, power relations, and cross-cultural communication.



Details from a Chinese porcelain dish produced for the Portuguese market, featuring a Chinese doglike lion, the Portuguese royal arms and armillary sphere, and the *IHS* Christogram, derived from the Greek Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*).

On view at The Met Fifth Avenue, Gallery 201, and available in digital form at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/204716>

# MAPPING AND TRANSLATING SPACES, CULTURES, AND LANGUAGES.

## The Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Rome, 29-30 January 2026

### PROGRAMME

**Thursday, 29 January 2026 - Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula di Archeologia**

#### **9:30 - Welcome Greetings and Introduction**

Arianna Punzi (Presidente della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Sapienza Università di Roma)

Paola Avallone (Direttrice, Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR)

Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR), Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma), *Introduction*

#### **10:00 - Session 1 - MAPPING**

Chair: Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR)

Jean-Marc Besse (CNRS-EPHESS), *The Forms of Cartographic Culture in Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*

Paolo Aranha (Consulente storico del Pontificio Collegio Urbano), *Mapping and Translating India: Biblical and Demonological Frameworks in Early Modern Catholic Missions*

#### **11:00 - Coffee break**

## 11:30 - Session 2 - MISSIONS AND INDIGENOUS CLERGY

Chair: Linda Zampol D'Ortia (Ca' Foscari Università di Venezia)

Flavio Rurale (Università di Udine), *Early Modern Missions (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries): between Dialogue and Conflict*

Massimo Carlo Giannini (Università di Teramo), *Indigenous Clergy and Linguistic Knowledge in and beyond the Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire*

Giovanni Pizzorusso (Università di Chieti), *Languages at Propaganda Fide: From Alphabets to Texts (Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries)*

13:00 - Lunch break

## 14:30 - Session 3 - TRANSLATING CULTURES AND LANGUAGES

Chair: Massimo Carlo Giannini (Università di Teramo)

Linda Zampol D'Ortia (Ca' Foscari Università di Venezia), *Issues in the Cultural Translation of Prayers: The Early Modern Jesuit Mission in Japan*

Valentina Bottanelli (FSCIRE), *Translating God, Transcribing Prayer: Jesuit Linguistic Strategies in China*

Antonio Gerace (University of Coimbra), *Translating Faith across the Luso-Atlantic: Missionary Theory and Practice in Brazil and West-Central Africa*

16:00 - Coffee break

### **16:30 - Session 3 - TRANSLATING CULTURES AND LANGUAGES (CONTINUED)**

Chair: Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR)

Alexandra Curvelo (FCSH NOVA), *Visualising Translation and Cultural-Transfers: Early Modern Japan (c.1590-c.1600)*

Sabina Brevaglieri (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin), *Dissonant Objects in Translation: Missionary Engagement and (In)Visible Collecting in Baroque Rome*

### **17:30 - Session 4 - ROMANIZATION**

Chair: Paolo De Troia (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Emanuele Raini (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"), *Romanization and the Cross-Cultural Mediation between Writing Systems: The Latin Alphabet in Early Modern China*

Antonio Perri (Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, Napoli), *From Tacuilolli to Machiyotlatoliztli: Scripts and Cultures Contact in Early Colonial Mexico*

**Friday, 30 January 2026 - CNR - Sede centrale, Biblioteca Centrale "G. Marconi", Sala A**

### **10:00 - Session 5 - LINGUISTIC POLICIES AND DEVICES**

#### **Welcome Greetings**

Salvatore Capasso (Direttore, Dipartimento di Scienze umane e sociali, patrimonio culturale/CNR)

Chair: Tjerk Hagemeijer (FLUL, Lisbon)

João Luís Lisboa (FCSH NOVA), *Printers and Language in Lisbon and Coimbra in the Sixteenth Century*

Paulo Feytor Pinto (CELGA-ILTEC, UCoimbra), *Portuguese Language Policy(ies) in the Overseas Territories: Communication with African, Asian, and South American Populations (1540-1700)*

John Considine (University of Alberta), *Variety, Alterity, and Familiarity in Portuguese Missionary Lexicography*

Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma), *Variety, Alterity, and Familiarity in Portuguese Missionary Grammars*

**12:15 - Transfer on foot to Sapienza, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Museo dell'Arte Classica (approx. 350 meters)**

**Lunch break**

## **14:00 - Session 6 - CHINA**

Emanuele Raini (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale")

Isabel Pina (Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau), Cristina Costa Gomes (Centre for Classical Studies/University of Lisbon), *Mapping and Translating Chinese through Portuguese: Jesuit Approaches, Methods and Linguistic Tools (1570s–1700)*

Giulia Falato (Università degli Studi di Parma), *Mapping Intellectual Interactions in Late Imperial China: the Jesuit Educational Programme and Discourse*

Paolo De Troia (Sapienza Università di Roma), Irene Verzì (Sapienza Università di Roma), *Cultural and Linguistic Encounter in Sino-Jesuit Geographical Works*

Marco Caboara (The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), *Matteo Neroni- A Renaissance Cosmographer between China and America, Florence and Rome*

**16:00 - Coffee break**

## 16:30 - Session 7 - AFRICA AND THE ATLANTIC WORLD

Chair: Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Francesco Genovesi (CLEPUL, Lisbon), "To Leave Those Foolish Toyes, and to Have Some Understanding of Gods Word": *Portuguese Language and West African Christianization in Early British Sources*

Beatrice Akissi Boutin (Sapienza Università di Roma), *A Priest from Luanda Instructing in Gbè Language Enslaved Africans in Brazil at the Beginning of the 18th Century?*

Tjerk Hagemeijer (FLUL, Lisbon) *On the Crossroads of Language and History: The Case of the Gulf of Guinea Creole Societies and Languages*

## 18:00 - Roundtable with all the participants and Final Remarks

Angelo Cattaneo, Simone Celani, *Final Remarks*



## ADDRESS AND CONTACTS

The conference will be held in Rome on 29 and 30 January 2026, at Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula di Archeologia. Piazzale Aldo Moro, 5 - 00185 Rome and at CNR - Sede Centrale, Biblioteca Centrale "G. Marconi", Sala A, Piazzale Aldo Moro, 7 - 00185 Rome (30 January, morning).

The *Programme* and the *Book of Abstracts* are available online at:

<https://sites.google.com/uniroma1.it/mapping-translating-prin22-cnr/workshop-2026>

The conference is conceived, organised and hosted by the **PRIN 2022 Project "Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures and Languages: Experiences from the Missions connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)"** - Ref. 20222SY2K7 - CUP: B53D23001120006:

<https://sites.google.com/uniroma1.it/mapping-translating-prin22-cnr/home>

There are no registration and participation fees.

Scan the **QR code** for the route from the entrance of Sapienza (Piazzale Aldo Moro, 5) to the entrance of the 'Facoltà di Lettere'. To reach the 'Museo dell'Arte Classica' and the 'Aula di Archeologia': go up the stairs to enter the 'Facoltà di Lettere', walk through the atrium to the end, and go down one floor using the stairs on the right.



### **29 and 30 January 2026 (afternoon)**

Sapienza Università di Roma  
Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia  
Aula di Archeologia  
P.le Aldo Moro, 5  
00185 Rome

### **30 January 2026 (morning)**

CNR - Sede Centrale  
Biblioteca Centrale "G. Marconi",  
Sala A  
P.le Aldo Moro, 7  
00185 Rome

For enquiries, please contact Angelo Cattaneo and Simone Celani at:

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## Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures, and Languages. The Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)

### Concept and Scientific Organisation

Angelo Cattaneo (CNR-ISEM), Simone Celani (Sapienza-DSEAI)

### Scientific Committee

Angelo Cattaneo (CNR-ISEM), Simone Celani (Sapienza-DSEAI), Béatrice Akissi Boutin (Sapienza-DiSp), Paolo De Troia (Sapienza-ISO), Michela Graziosi (Sapienza-DSEAI), Giulia Maggiore (Sapienza-DiSA), Carlo Pelliccia (UNINT), Flavio RURALE (UNIUD)

### Organising Committee

Michela Graziosi (Sapienza-DSEAI), Giulia Maggiore (Sapienza-DiSA)

### Data Media Management

Francesca Di Donato, Lottie Provost (CNR-ILC)

Alessandro Zambetti - AZ-Web; Nicolò Paraciani (CNR-ISPC)

### Administrative Secretariat

Chiara Bigiotti (Sapienza); Maria Rosaria Cotza, Alessandra Lisci, Maria Giovanna Piras (CNR-ISEM)

### Images Credit (p. 1, 6, 12)

Chinese porcelain dish commissioned for the Portuguese market, decorated with the *IHS* Christogram, the Portuguese Royal Arms and armillary sphere, and Chinese doglike lions, ca. 1520–1540. Hard-paste porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, 9.5 × 52.7 cm. © New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art - <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/204716>

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### Progetti di Ricerca di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN 2022)

“Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures and Languages.  
Experiences from the Missions connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)”

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