

“The Devils Sang Matins So Properly:” Francis Xavier’s Close Encounters with Demons in Daniello Bartoli’s Asia (1653)

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Article abstract

Daniello Bartoli (1608–85) was commissioned to write the “official” history of the Society of Jesus a century after its foundation. Later called by Leopardi “the Dante of baroque prose,” Bartoli offered a powerful representation of the overseas policies of his order, as well as an appealing overview of the remote lands its members visited for the first time. The main character and hero of Bartoli’s treatise *Asia* (1653) is Francis Xavier (1506–52), the “Apostle of the Indies.” This paper focuses on Xavier’s “strange encounters” with the “Indian otherness,” recounted by Bartoli as a confrontation with the “spiritual otherness.” Our essay examines several episodes of supernatural events in which Bartoli indulged in a dramatic narrative. With his colorful language, did Bartoli want to encourage vocations to the order, fellow Jesuits to travel to Asia, to gain financial and political support, or all of them? These episodes will be analyzed from a historical point of view (how Bartoli used his sources) and in a pedagogic perspective (which message he wanted to spread and to which readership).

STRANGE(R) ENCOUNTERS

“THE DEVILS SANG MATINS SO PROPERLY:” FRANCIS XAVIER’S CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH DEMONS IN DANIELLO BARTOLI’S *ASIA* (1653)*

ELISA FREI AND LAURA MADELLA

Abstract: Daniello Bartoli (1608–85) was commissioned to write the “official” history of the Society of Jesus a century after its foundation. Later called by Leopardi “the Dante of baroque prose,” Bartoli offered a powerful representation of the overseas policies of his order, as well as an appealing overview of the remote lands its members visited for the first time. The main character and hero of Bartoli’s treatise *Asia* (1653) is Francis Xavier (1506–52), the “Apostle of the Indies.” This paper focuses on Xavier’s “strange encounters” with the “Indian otherness,” recounted by Bartoli as a confrontation with the “spiritual otherness.” Our essay examines several episodes of supernatural events in which Bartoli indulged in a dramatic narrative. With his colorful language, did Bartoli want to encourage vocations to the order, fellow Jesuits to travel to Asia, to gain financial and political support, or all of them? These episodes will be analyzed from a historical point of view (how Bartoli used his sources) and in a pedagogic perspective (which message he wanted to spread and to which readership).

Dal Sagro Quirinal, nel Mondo ignoto,
vàssi i mostri a domar Saverio il Pio.
—Cristoforo Ivanovich, 1675

From the holy hill of Rome to the unknown world,
Pious Xavier travels, and tames the monster.¹

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¹ All translations are the authors’ own unless otherwise indicated.

Introduction

This essay focuses on the Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506–52) and his strange encounters with Indian demoniacs as recounted a century later by his confrere Daniello Bartoli (1608–85) in the section of his *Istoria della Compagnia di Gesu* (*History of the Society of Jesus*) dedicated to Asia.

We first outline the importance of Bartoli's monumental work and the role played in it by the first missionary sent by the Society of Jesus to the Far East. The following section then summarizes a few cases of demonic possession that Xavier dealt with while in the East and investigates Bartoli's sources. As we will demonstrate, the inclusion of stories about demons was not a random choice by Bartoli, who wrote shortly after Xavier's canonization in 1622: these evil agents helped Bartoli in corroborating Xavier's holiness and supported the pedagogical aims of his work, the readership of which included prospective and potential Jesuits and missionaries.

The core of the essay thus takes into consideration some features that make Xavier's encounters with demons outstanding in Bartoli's hagiographic depiction of his life. Even if Bartoli usually tried to be a reliable narrator of events (according to the sources he had available to him), his commitment as a historian and his attitude as a storyteller can never be separated from his religious goals. Thus, the demoniac episodes appear as specific stranger encounters within the boundaries of that wider, stranger world that was Asia, the non-Christian continent where Jesuits were trying to spread the Gospel. As we contend, Bartoli inserted these episodes not only to perfect Xavier's image as a saint but also to provide his readers with a demonstration of how Jesuits fought Satan in the Far East. The stories about Indian demoniacs are not as redundantly dramatic and terrifying as many Xaverian edifying tales were, but Bartoli's masterful use of rhetorical instruments, especially figures of sound, well convey both the extraneousness of demons to human beings and the Jesuit concern about Catholic rites and prayers being contaminated by local non-Christian elements. Finally, faithful to Bartoli's promise to write inspiring yet amusing stories, Xavier's main demonic experiences end humorously, depriving the episodes of either dramatic or frightening nuance.

Daniello Bartoli's *Istorie*

This essay deals not so much with the “real” Xavier, but rather with his history as it was rewritten by Daniello Bartoli in his work *Asia* (1653). Daniello Bartoli was

born in Ferrara in 1608 and joined the Society of Jesus when he was sixteen. He shared with many confreres a dream of undertaking exotic missionary adventures, but he was never able to realize these aspirations. He always lived in what is today Italy, studying, preaching, and most of all writing—about his order, but on a diversity of other subjects as well. On the occasion of the centennial anniversary of the Society of Jesus in 1640, Bartoli was appointed to write what would become a cornerstone of the order and a reference work for both the religious and lay public: the *Istorie della Compagnia di Gesù*. The individual volumes of Bartoli’s *Istorie* were printed over several decades—*Asia* (1653), *Japan* (1660), *China* (1663), *England* (1667), and *Italy* (1673)—and Bartoli could not help but transfer his passion for overseas missions to the composition of this “official history” of the Society of Jesus, a challenging task that can be seen as “both global in scope and universal in aspiration” (Ditchfield 219).

The *Istorie* constantly highlights the Society’s impulse towards the new geographical realities of the world. When Bartoli describes the Asian missions, his “longing for adventure” brings to life “le pagine più avvincenti, appagate letterariamente da una materia di straordinaria suggestione” (“the most compelling pages, thanks to a subject matter of extraordinary literary splendor”; Biondi’s introduction to Bartoli, *Italia* 38). His fascinating descriptions of the transoceanic journeys indissolubly linked those discoveries and explorations with the *missio* of the new-born order—as desired by its providential vision. The “success” of Catholicism in such a wide world and during the difficult times of the Counterreformation, was strictly intertwined with the Jesuits’ apostolic endeavor to teach on a global scale. Bartoli knew that a Jesuit had to *act*, in his own world and time, and in fact the missionary journey has always been a distinguishing feature of the Society of Jesus. Such a journey was the concretization of the mobility and detachment required of all Society members, ready to move anywhere in the world but also willing to return to Rome, always at the Superior General’s orders and in the name of indifference.

Bartoli’s books were read not only by fellow Jesuits but became well known even among lay people, who held a constant interest in these exotic and edifying topics.² As Adriano Prosperi has pointed out, Bartoli had the hard task of writing “a real history” while at the same time having to “stimolare nei lettori l’ammirazione e il desiderio di contribuire a un’impresa straordinaria” (“to inspire

² One of Bartoli’s admirers was the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) who defined him “il Dante della prosa barocca” (“The Dante of the Baroque prose”; qtd. in Ditchfield 224).

the readers' admiration, and their desire to contribute to an extraordinary experience"; *Asia* XXXI).

As Argan has shown, baroque culture intentionally pursued the discipline of minds and consciences through both its literary and artistic output, and Bartoli's *Istorie* constitutes a masterpiece of this ideal (Ditchfield 228). Seventeenth-century Italian historiography is often criticized for its lack of stylistic identity and comprehensiveness. Such works originated, however, from the humanists' new vision of the historical subject, which arose towards the end of the sixteenth century and introduced a new way of writing history; that is, new in terms of theory and methodology and, eventually, philosophical paradigms (Galasso 41–44). Bartoli's perspective was thus part of a general growing awareness of the power and implications of history written by the members of the *res publica litterarum*. At the same time, Bartoli's work exemplifies how a similar awareness was developing within the Catholic Church, where the complex interrelationship of "truth, time, and space" in writing history had possibly become more intricate and compelling. Writing the history of the Church from within, as a member of its clergy, implied a confrontation of the doctrinal *apparatus* with philological humanism and the expanding geographical horizons of Christianity (Tutino 2–3).

Bartoli's *Istorie* can be seen as a historical and hagiographical treatise with many peculiarities, some of them pre-eminently baroque—the taste for which Bartoli had acquired. He was interested in "miracles," a word that etymologically derives from the Latin *mirari* and thus describes events that awaken astonishment and amazement. What better scenario than the Asian missions, and what better time than the 1650s (a few decades after Xavier's canonization), to indulge this interest in the miraculous?

Moreover, the baroque architecture of the *Istorie* reminds one of a Russian nesting doll: *Della vita e dell'istituto di S. Ignazio di Loyola fondatore della Compagnia di Giesù* (*History of the Life and Institute of St. Ignatius of Loyola Founder of the Society of Jesus*) (1650), "an ambitious universal history of the Society" (Levy 144), was meant as an introductory volume to the *Istorie*. It acted as the perimeter, precondition, and basis of the two "geographical" narrative units—*Asia* and *Europe*—which in turn contain further narrative units that were themselves divisible into smaller episodes, parables, and digressions.

The marvelous and the strange were the quintessence of baroque art, and their inclusion in Bartoli's work is a reason for its success. *Asia* in particular, even by way of its title, promised readers a fabulous exhibition of peoples, places, animals, and adventures, the mythic exoticism of which had been ennobled through classic

literature (in Herodotus’s *Histories*, for instance) and reinvigorated by medieval and early modern chronicles (Marco Polo’s *Il Milione*, among others).³ Bartoli was eager to maintain what his title promised, as he wrote in the fourth chapter: “Nel che fare, spero che non m’andrà fallito, che questa mia fatica, qualunque ella sia, non riesca a’ lettori di non minor piacere che giovamento” (“I hope that my labour, whatever its outcome has been, will succeed in amusing my readers as much as benefiting them, as a result of the many, varied and illustrious events that I am going to tell”; *Asia* 10). He went on to enumerate adventures full of exotic and evocative words (“barbarian kingdoms,” “the end of the world,” “bonzes,” “Brahmins”) and gripping adjectives (“new,” “unknown,” “ferce,” “gruesome”). But even though Bartoli was perfectly adapted to the literary trends of his time, he ultimately wrote to celebrate the first century of the Ignatian order, and his main goal was a religious one: *docere* (“to teach” or “instruct”) his readership, not just *delectare* (“to entertain”).

Francis Xavier as *Asia*’s Catholic hero: Bartoli’s tales and their sources

Born in the Kingdom of Navarra (now Spain) in 1506, Xavier met Ignatius in Paris and became one of the first members of this most renowned and often criticized order. From the start, the Jesuits engaged in cross-cultural apostolic ministry, benefiting from their close relations with the Iberian empires. In fact, King João III of Portugal sent Xavier to the East Indies in 1539, even before the Society of Jesus was approved by the pope (1540). In this way, Xavier became the “Apostle of the Indies”: he was not only the first Jesuit but often the first European to operate in certain hostile territories. He constantly sent letters and accounts from Asia that mesmerized his confreres and, after being redacted by the Society of Jesus, many more readers.

Francis Xavier is the undisputed main character of Bartoli’s *Asia*, and his life and deeds as recounted in that text represent a real box of wonders nestled among many other different Indian, Chinese, and Japanese boxes. But, to some extent, Xavier’s box is flashier, because his role in the global, pedagogical perspective of the

³ In regard to Marco Polo, Lucien Febvre wrote the following: “Egli dedica il suo libro a coloro che vogliono conoscere ‘le diversità delle religioni del mondo.’ Diversità e non somiglianze, ecco la parola vera, la parola del testimone, la parola vissuta” (“He dedicates his book to the men who crave to know ‘the differences of the lands of the world.’ Differences and not similarities, that is the true word, the witness’ word, the real word”; 18).

treatise as a whole is more significant. His canonization in 1622 had, alongside that of the Society's founder Ignatius, enshrined Xavier as a prominent example of Jesuit virtue, in as much as it was emblematic of the ecumenically successful vocation of the order. Through the "Apostle of Indies," Bartoli was thus able to unfold a powerful model of Catholic devotion and action, readable on many levels and "addressed to an audience as broad as its [*Istorie*'s] scope was wide" (Ditchfield 226).

Amid a remarkable range of *Asia*'s exotic settings, wild landscapes, horrible diseases, weird clerics, and unusual practices, Bartoli's Xavier also experienced several *maleficia*,⁴ which are characterized by some very intriguing features. Where did the stories of these events come from? Were they true? Did Bartoli believe they were? Throughout the entire *Asia*, Bartoli proudly declares that he has not invented any of the stories he relates and has always referred to authoritative sources.

One of the main sources for *Asia* was Xavier himself. As noted, he was the author of many letters and accounts sent from Asia, which Bartoli knew almost by heart. In addition, at the time of Bartoli's writing, Xavier had already been the subject of several hagiographies; in these cases, Bartoli drew mainly from Xavier's biographies by Orazio Torsellino and João de Lucena, both writing in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁵ Bartoli also gleaned his information from books about the Society of Jesus and its Asian endeavor, most of all from the volumes by Giovanni Pietro Maffei (1590), Nicolò Orlandini (1615), and the latter's successor, Francesco Sacchini (1621–61). Finally, Bartoli was a scrupulous erudite who had the great advantage of being able to access the immense number of sources in the Jesuit archives: manuscript reports, epistles, and *litterae annuae*. The Jesuit archives also held all sorts of documents related to Xavier's canonization trials; after Xavier became a saint in 1622, no author could write about his life without reporting on the miracles he was said to have performed.⁶ Moreover, a seventeenth-century reader expected to find this kind of supernatural narrative in any book.

⁴ For an essential overview on demonology and possession in early modern Europe, see Clark; Levack.

⁵ In the case of the Portuguese writer João de Lucena, an Italian translation of his work was made available by Lodovico Mansoni in 1613.

⁶ On Bartoli's *modus operandi* as a historian, see also Umberto Grassi and Elisa Frei, *Asia* XXI–LXXXI.

Xavier beaten in the haunted church

The first episode of demonic possession took place in Mylapore, in the current state of Tamil Nadu, India. St. Thomas was the town legendarily founded by the homonymous saint, the first “Apostle of the Indies” before Xavier, who supposedly started his apostolic missions from there. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had seized the area, renamed the town São Tomé de Meliapor, and reconstructed a small chapel where Thomas was believed to have assembled with his flock. In 1545, Xavier arrived in this place, which was powerfully relevant for the Society of Jesus because it testified to a continuous Christian presence in India—and in this way, also justifying and supporting the Jesuit apostolic effort.

Xavier was hosted by a confrere, Gaspar Coelho (1529–90), who lived there.⁷ The latter had invited Xavier to rest and sleep in his room, but Xavier was more interested in visiting the church to pray, so after Coelho fell asleep, Xavier headed to the chapel. But on the path from Coelho’s room to his destination, Xavier encountered demons lying in waiting for him: they are described by Bartoli as especially active at night, “assuming most hideous forms” (Faber 121).⁸ Xavier, however, showed no fear and proceeded as if they could not disturb him: he “well knew that the devils had no more power against him than Almighty God was pleased to permit” (121). Not only did his faith not vacillate, but he increased the number of his secret visits to the church.

One night, the demons could no longer stand his *hybris* (from their point of view): he had excessively offended their arrogance, showing contempt for them and ignoring their grimaces, but also “their provocation was aggravated by the knowledge of the fact that this same man had wrested from their grasp souls by the thousand” (121). The “immortal hatred” of these creatures burst forth. While Xavier was praying, they moved to action and physically assaulted him, forcing him to spend the next two days in bed recovering from the injuries. While the future saint did not say a thing about the incident, a young Malabar who had seen what had happened informed Coelho. The boy was in shock from the demons’ cries and the sound of their punches against Xavier, which had woken him up.

⁷ Gaspar Coelho was therefore sixteen years old at the time of Xavier’s arrival. Before entering the order, he lived in India as a settler (O’Neill).

⁸ With regard to Xavier’s demonic encounters, this article mainly quotes from Bartoli and Maffei’s *Life of St. Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies and Japan* (trans. Faber, 1859), an English biography that literally translates *Asia’s* first books dedicated to Xavier (while cutting out the more generic chapters on the Portuguese journeys and discoveries).

Xavier quickly healed, and he did not surrender to any threat: during the following nights, he continued visiting the church as if nothing had ever happened. Coming to understand that Xavier could not be easily scared, the evil forces decided to change their strategy. In the early hours of the day, Xavier heard—or so it seemed to him—the melodious sound of priests singing matins. Surprised, he asked his confrere Coelho where the celestial voices were coming from, only to be answered that no priest was in the church in the early morning, and only the demons could have deceived him so well.

At this point, Bartoli quite abruptly ends the account, justifying the decision by stating that “the things which passed between God and [Xavier], in the silence of the night, have been concealed from our knowledge by the humility of the saint” (Faber 122). He does not give any explanation as to how these demons finally surrendered but simply passes on to his moral lesson, directly quoting a letter from Xavier, in which the “Apostle of the Indies” describes how God had proved his strength, letting him know that he wanted him to proceed to Macassar, a city in today’s Indonesia—which Xavier immediately did.

Bartoli sets the scene of this demon episode both geographically and historically,⁹ describing the location in relation to the old and new “Apostles of the Indies,” Thomas and Xavier. Through flashbacks and flashforwards, he briefly reports the legend of the early Christian saint, claiming that he died in a small cave after being hit by a spear. Only erudite brahmins could understand the ancient inscriptions testifying to this, for which Bartoli relies not only on Lucena (*Vita* 136–38) but also on an account made by the Jesuit Nunes Barreto, who wrote from Kochi to the Superior General of the Society in 1567 (*Documenta Indica* 7: 201). In this case, like in many others, Bartoli uses literary and “historical” sources from reliable eyewitnesses. Because of such an old Christian tradition, in the areas miracles still happen, as the Jesuit fathers themselves testified. Once again, Bartoli draws from an account by a Jesuit father, Oliviero Toscanello, who was working in India and described the situation to the Superior General in a letter dated 1575 (*Documenta Indica* 10: 226). After this digression on Thomas, Bartoli goes back again to Xavier’s times; that is, about a century before *Asia*.

Bartoli’s main literary source for this particular episode is Lucena’s biography, which focuses for an entire chapter on “come fù mal trattato, & perseguitato dal Demonio stando in Oratione” (“how [Xavier] was mistreated and harassed by

⁹ On the rhetorical construction of foreign lands in the early modern period and for further bibliography, see Fitzmaurice; Rubiés.

the Devil while he was praying”; 145). Bartoli did not add much to Lucena’s narration, which introduced Xavier’s beatings with a generic remark about how God uses demons to test humans. As Lucena has it, “Certo è che in tempo, quando i Santi più si danno all’Oratione, all’hora il Signore più li lascia patire, esposti alle arti, et forze del nemico” (“Especially when the Saints are praying, God lets them suffer more, exposing them to the arts and power of the enemy”), while, on the other hand, the devil “prende spaventose figure per atterrire i sensi, fino ad addolorare, et trambustare il corpo” (“shapes himself in terrifying ways, to scare their senses, even causing pain and turning their bodies upside down”; 145–46).

Beyond Lucena, however, Bartoli also employs archival sources: the demonic beatings appear in an account by Gaspar Coelho, Xavier’s confrere, who remembers the great friendship he had with him.¹⁰ In a letter to his brothers in Portugal from 1554, Coelho describes Xavier’s three-month stay at his residence. He saw Xavier constantly immersed in “era dado muito à meditação e contemplação, e toda a sua conversação erão spiritualidades” (“meditation and contemplation, and all his conversations were about spirituality and obedience”; *Documenta Indica* 3: 194). According to Coelho, Xavier used to go to the small chapel at night, even after Coelho advised him not to because demons were known to approach people in that area. Coelho tells us that Xavier simply laughed and did not care, and that the only precaution he took was to bring with him a local man to guard the door while he was praying inside. One night, the demons attacked both of them, but Xavier refused to reveal to Coelho the reason for his subsequent ailments. Coelho also recalled in this same letter how, a few days later, Xavier was amazed by the choir of priests he heard singing at night.

Bartoli goes beyond Coelho, however, and quotes the original source of this event, part of a letter written by Xavier from Mylapore in May 1545.¹¹ Xavier’s autograph is addressed to two Jesuit fathers, Paolo da Camerino and Diogo Borba, and ends on a very optimistic note: “Deos nuestro Senior me desse a sentir dentro en minha alma sua sanctissima vontade” (“God our Lord moved me to feel inside my soul his most holy will”), which caused “con muita consolaçon interior senti e cognosci ser sua vontade de eu ir aquelas partes de Malaqua” (“great interior consolation, because I felt and knew it was his will for me to move to Malacca”; *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii* 1: 292).

¹⁰ See *Monumenta Xaveriana* 2: 946–47 and *Documenta Indica* 3: 194.

¹¹ Lucena did as well; see *Vita* 148.

Analyzing the entire letter by Xavier, one can find no mention of his feud with the demons or the two days he had to take off to recover. He was probably aware that his detractors (especially those denying his miracles, such as Protestant readers) could attack him on this point; thus Bartoli openly admits that Xavier never mentioned the episode to Coelho. Lucena had made a similar literary maneuver before Bartoli, claiming that when the Vicar asked him if he was feeling well, “risponde il Padre Francesco, mi sento molto mal disposto. Et d’onde è venuto replica egli a Vostra Reverenza hora tanto gran male? dissimula il Padre, e muta ragionamento” (“Father Xavier answered, ‘I do not feel well at all.’ ‘And what are the reasons for this current sickness?’ the Vicar asks in turn. The Father dissimulates, changing the subject”; Lucena 148).

In conclusion, even if the episode is not mentioned in Xavier’s letter, Bartoli does not create it on his own but rather relies on his literary predecessors and most of all on the eyewitness account. Coelho’s letter was supposed to be trustworthy, since he was Xavier’s host and friend. About Coelho’s letter, however, we should note that it is not dated immediately after Xavier’s departure from Mylapore, but from ten years later. In the meantime, Xavier had died (1552) in an odour of sanctity: more and more interest was growing around him, and miracles were fundamental to guarantee him a successful path to canonization. Bartoli wrote *Asia* in the mid-1650s: the Society of Jesus was still celebrating its first glorious century (1640), and Xavier had already reached the status of saint (1622). Bartoli had good reasons to include this episode, even if Xavier himself never wrote about it.

The Malaccan demon and the Javanese witch

The second meeting between Xavier and demons to be described in this essay took place in Malacca, which is located today in Malaysia. Bartoli starts the chapter describing this episode by pointing out that “in the depositions, attested on oath, we read that his miraculous cures could not be counted one by one, nor even in round numbers” (Faber 137); as the tradition goes, Xavier was used to performing multiple healings simply by touching the sick with his hands. Regarding demons, Bartoli describes how one day, a local boy fell ill. Anton Fernandez was just fifteen years old, and his mother was so desperate that, even if formally a Christian, she was “so far addicted to paganism as to confide in magic, a highly-esteemed art on the Isle of Java, of which she was a native” (137). Worried and in a panic, the mother decided to call “certain Indian sorceresses,” among whom there was an old woman named Nai, famous as the most expert in this field. Bartoli maliciously underlines how it was only “after stipulating a handsome remuneration” that Nai

accepted the case (137). She cast her spells on a thin braid rope and tied it to the boy, which not only did not heal him but deprived him of his senses. The doctors arrived and proclaimed themselves powerless: Anton was meant to die. “Another woman, this time a “good one” (“buona donna”), asked the afflicted mother: “Why do you not send for the holy father?” (138). The mother finally “believed” and sent a messenger for Xavier.

As soon as Xavier entered the house, the boy regained strength and started raging. The closer Xavier drew, the more the boy became restless. The holy man recognized “that this violence did not proceed from natural causes, but from the devil” (138). The final piece of evidence was when Xavier showed Anton the cross, and the boy, enraged, spat on it. But Xavier did not manifest any fear. He simply took out the Gospel and read it while aspersing the boy with holy water. Anton stopped moving, froze, and became silent, but he was not healed yet. Xavier gave the mother a final set of instructions: “Prepare such and such food, and give it him at such an hour of the night” (138). The boy also had to be accompanied to the church where Xavier would celebrate Mass the next day and ask Mary to save him. Bartoli concludes by synthetically acknowledging how the recovery clearly took place, exactly as Xavier had foreseen it.

For this second episode, Bartoli’s hagiographic source is once again Lucena, reported almost word for word. In his recounting of Xavier’s work in Malacca, Lucena describes all the efforts of the boy’s family to heal him—first, in an evil and mistaken way, and then finally in their appeal to the only “authorized exorcist,” namely Xavier (Lucena 167).

The other, even more heavily deployed source is a collection of interviews. These interviews, conducted in Malacca in 1556–57 for Xavier’s canonization process, are with eyewitnesses who observed the miracle. The first witness is a local man, António Mendes, who recalled how Xavier “por todas as partes omde amdaua trabalhaua muito por trazer to dos os ynfeis que podia á nosa fee” (“constantly went here and there, working so hard because he wanted to convert as many people to our faith as he could”; *Monumenta Xaveriana* 2: 420). The locals—both Christians and non-Christians—considered him an eminent person, enjoyed talking with him, and appreciated his honest and charitable attitude. Mendes stated that the victim of possession was a fifteen-year-old boy, the son of Portuguese nobleman João Fernandez d’Ilher. Mendes called the local “witch” (*feticeira*) Nhiay Malluquo (*Monumenta Xaveriana* 2: 421) and described how her evil ceremonies only worsened the boy’s situation. As soon as Xavier entered the door, however, the boy, who had been in a catatonic state before, started yelling

and struggling. With the help of his holy tools (missal, crucifix, and holy water)—which were efficacious, unlike those of Nai—Xavier managed to calm the boy, finally saving him with Mass and prayers.

There was another witness of this event: the boy's father. João Fernandez d'Ilher testified at the same Malacca trials in 1556–57 that he called Xavier to save his son after three days of inexplicable illness. He did not mention the local witch's intervention, but he did confirm that the previous witness, Antonio Mendes, was present at the scene (*Monumenta Xaveriana* 2: 427–28); in fact, he had asked Mendes to immobilize his son while he was having uncontrollable spasms after seeing Xavier.

It is true that these details do not appear in Xavier's letter, who used to account extensively for every event of his life. On the one hand, Bartoli proceeded along the literary path traced by Lucena, but why trust António Mendes and Fernandez d'Ilher? Bartoli had no doubts about reporting their account because they were witnesses, under oath, and had been privy to these events, being respectively the servant and father of the "possessed" boy. We have to highlight, however, that as in the previous demonic episode in Mylapore, here too the facts were recalled after Xavier's death and a dozen years after they took place. Still, we can see that Bartoli does not invent or exaggerate details that cannot be found in (almost) coeval sources.

Children and women are often crucial personae in Bartoli's narration. In this case, the villain of the Malaccan possession is clearly Nia, the Javanese "witch," who not only did not improve the situation but almost killed Anton with her evil sorceries. The person who summoned the witch was also a woman: the boy's mother, who was Javanese in origin and, in Lucena's words, "cieca d'impazienza, di vedersi morire il figlio" ("blind in her impatience of seeing him die"; Lucena 167). Even if she was a convert and her new chosen faith should not have wavered, she still felt some attachment to her ancient beliefs and referred to a local practitioner instead of putting her trust in Xavier. Deliverance came, however, also through a woman, who suggested that Anton's mother call the only authorized healer.

But there was another woman as well who was a constant presence in Xavier's life and appears in both of these episodes: Mary. Both demonic encounters end well because of her intervention. In Mylapore, Xavier became a victim of the demons after fervently praying in the small church "before an image of our Blessed Lady, much revered by the people" (Faber 175). The witness of this attack remembered how Xavier moaned and suffered, "invoking the assistance of the great mother of God" (176). In the Malaccan exorcism, the boy was freed from

the demon by Xavier, but the last detail to completely heal him was once again due to Mary. In fact, as soon as the boy could stand, his father promised to bring him to Our Lady of the Mountain Church, where Xavier would be celebrating Mass the following day, to ask for her blessing.

The young exorcists

There is another fascinating episode of diabolic possession—from when Xavier first arrived on the Fishery Coast—recounted in Bartoli’s *Asia* (130–32). Bartoli introduces the scene by noting how God seemed to send multiple illnesses to the population there “per tirarli, quasi contra lor voglia, al suo conoscimento” (“to draw them, as it were, in spite of themselves, to the knowledge of him”; 80). Every time someone fell ill, he or she was immediately referred to Xavier in order to receive from him baptism and health, which were inextricably linked. As Bartoli relates, Xavier was so popular he could not possibly fulfill all his commitments. He found a solution in using as his messengers

i fanciulli del paese, battezzati da lui, e così bene istruiti ne’ principi della fede, che gli valevano per maestri. Questi dunque, presa dal santo chi la corona, chi il crocifisso, chi il reliquiario, o qualunque altra sua cosa somigliante, se ne andavano sparsi qua e là, dove ne’ casali e ne’ villaggi d’intorno v’avea infermi che chiedessero sanità. (80)

the native children, whom he had baptized and so well instructed in the principles of the faith as to be employed as teachers, probably in the manner of our catechists...the saint entrusted his rosary, his crucifix, his reliquary, or some other object of devotion, and then dispersed them through the neighboring hamlets where there happened to be any invalids calling for help.

Sick people were healed only after they accepted the baptism and proclaimed their faith in Jesus. One day, while he was teaching the mysteries of faith, Xavier was asked for help by two men coming from a neighbouring town. They needed him to cure their master because of “un fiero demonio, che lo straziava” (“a powerful demon who was tormenting him in a frightful manner”; 80). The reason for Xavier not to intervene personally was practical—he had no time—but also symbolic: “non degnando quel superbo spirito di tanto onore, che per iscacciarlo avesse a tralasciare e sospendere una così profittevole opera” (“he disdained to honor the

devil so far as to suspend the profitable task"; 80). He limited himself to sending some children armed with his cross.

The possessed man was in a miserable state, and this worsened as soon as the children arrived. The demon could not stand being treated so vilely by Xavier, not considering him worthy of a direct intervention. Even if the "exorcists" were young, they had been properly instructed and were not afraid of him. Bartoli describes how they perfectly operated as a team and with clarity of mind, "come avessero a cacciare non un demonio ma un cane" ("as if it were a dog instead of a devil which they were going to drive away"; 81). The rich man was forced to kiss the cross, and "the fiend" within him disappeared. Not only was the man's soul saved, but so were many more: after seeing what the cross of Christ could do, other people decided to convert. As Bartoli concludes, "Fu questa vittoria del Saverio per mano de' suoi fanciulli" ("This victory was achieved by the hands of children"; 81).

A narrative guide to dealing with demons

Xavier's demonic encounters are just the last episode of an early Christian and then medieval hagiography. It was very common for holy men to come into contact with ordeals and temptations during their life: the most famous example may be Anthony the Great, whose conflicts with demons had extraordinary success in written and painted traditions.

Certainly, the post-Tridentine Catholic Church made its relevant contribution in updating the practice of expelling evil entities from haunted places and human beings. As a part of Catholic ritual, exorcism had to be regulated and standardized, just as any other ritual, so it was included in several revisions of *Rituale Romanum*.¹² On the matter, the early Jesuits embraced the theology of their time. Ignatius himself, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, formulated "Rules for Discerning of Spirits" to support the first and second week of retreat.¹³ Klingenschmitt emphasizes that "good or evil spirits are [for Ignatius] personal spiritual beings," as well as demons that were something more concrete than "mere personifications of the power of evil," and which were provided with willingness and determination, enabled to act by the intensity of their malice or their host's corporeity (79–82,

¹² At an early stage, *Rituale Romanum* dealt with exorcism as ancillary to the Holy Sacraments, but in the 1614 edition, authorized by Pope Paul V, a whole chapter was devoted to exorcism; see *Rituale*, "De exorcizandis obsessis a daemonio" 178–220.

¹³ The *Spiritual Exercises* are structured in several weeks of retreat (meditation, prayers etc.).

quoting Toner 36). And they soon had their “domestic” experts in demonology, the most famous being undoubtedly the Flemish Martin Delrio (1551–1608), whose fundamental work *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* was first published in 1599 (Machielsen 117).

Bartoli would have been familiar with this literary *corpus*, and the stories he tells and the exorcisms he describes are completely orthodox and consistent with it. He may have inserted the three different demon-encounter stories to obtain a small but complete collection of demoniac cases, knowing that, as a part of their missionary training, Jesuits were instructed on how to face demons as well: they should learn (and teach others) when and why demonic events happen, and how to deal with them. The life of St. Xavier offered the perfect occasion to display such *exempla*.

To recap, in the first tale Bartoli presents in *Asia*, Xavier refused to “waste time” exorcising a possessed man and sent pious children in his stead; in the second story, demons seized a church, beat Xavier, and disguised themselves as chorister priests; in the final episode, a devil possessed a boy and Xavier defeated him through prayers. Thus, Evil expressed itself in completely different ways and prompted different reactions in the Navarrese Jesuit.

It is important to take note of how these demons were depicted. The sparse description of them and the lack of spectacular details contrast with Bartoli’s usual prose when dealing with marvelous facts. When it comes to Christian piety, his prose reaches heights of upsetting, repellent preciousness. For example, stories of martyrdom, torture, and the healing of lepers are lavishly described in all their horrific details, as if Bartoli would like to impress the reader and sacralize those moments as well. At the same time, when baroque writers report events relating to black magic, “one is struck by the richness of detail with which actions of a prodigious, horrifying, and monstrous nature are consistently presented” (Castillo 78). In Lucena’s narration of Xavier’s demonic encounters, the tone is livelier and more dramatic. Possessed people are represented as being in agony and described with an almost plastic diction—reminiscent of Michelangelo’s cursed souls or Bernini’s ecstatic sculptures, with harsh movements of eyes and mouths and muscles, gloomy tension of flesh and bones: “storcendo la bocca, gli occhi, il viso, & il corpo tutto” (“[the boy] warped his mouth, eyes, face and his whole body”; Lucena 167). Bartoli, however, abandoned such violent language relating to the body, and the demons’ behavior is characterized rather generically, with words like “the devil was tormenting him in a frightful manner” (Faber 132), and “[the boy]

fell into convulsion, making the most frightful grimaces” (196).¹⁴ Additionally, in Lucena’s description, the devils haunting St. Thomas’s church seem frantic in their attempt to scare Xavier and divert him from his stoic devotion in prayer, and their satanic joyride lasts for many, many lines (147). It is quite the contrary for Bartoli, as he condensed everything in two short paragraphs (176). Not only do Bartoli’s devils lack any physical description, but even the violence of their intention, widely described by Lucena through the devils’ gestures and mimicry, has been significantly compressed and made more generic: “the devils fell upon him, beating him so unmercifully that his wounds and bruises actually confined him to his bed for two days” (176).

The first consequence of such terse depictions of demonic encounters is that the visual and material strangeness of the black magic dimension does not overcome the visual and material value of the indigenous human and natural otherness. On the other hand, no detail allows us to identify Xavier’s demons, either geographically or culturally: with no costumes, no bodily features, and no facial traits, they are shaped as generic evil entities. They are supposed to shout and speak a language that Xavier understands as well, but be it Latin or Spanish or Portuguese, Bartoli does not mention. Perhaps this sort of vagueness had the aim of showing all possible “evil spirits” present in foreign cultures as manifestations of the Christian Evil One. That is, that these spirits assume the same form everywhere and, just for that reason, are easily recognizable by everyone and “comparable” everywhere using the same tools, which were within the reach of the Jesuit fathers in Catholic European countries as well as in the most remote, pagan lands.

This could have been a message supporting those who craved to become missionaries. It is the issue of persuasion, more than any other, which always connects a book to its potential, alleged, and desired audience. No research has been conducted so far as to Bartoli’s early readers (Ditchfield 226). Many clues, however, confirm that the ideal public for the *Istorie* was the Society itself: Jesuits, students becoming Jesuits, and possibly—much more so in the case of *Asia*—aspiring missionaries. It is widely documented how Jesuits who lived in colleges and houses fed their dreams about missionary sacrifice on the letters sent from the missions around the world, and such letters were often amended, collected, and printed (Prosperi 95, 165; Friedrich 3–39). Bartoli’s *Asia* provides not only the supreme missionary archetype, but it also depicts a Catholic hero conquering

¹⁴ The original Italian here is rather different—“cominciò a inferire, a gittar grida altissime, e a dibattersi” (Bartoli, *Asia* 132)—but it is also quite generalist and weak in comparison to Lucena.

souls in the Far Eastern vineyard of the Lord. Xavier’s life inspired many missionaries, as the case of the Neapolitan Marcello Mastrilli shows and as Bartoli remarks (Bartoli, *Giappone* 439).

At the same time, Bartoli’s narrative could also aim to reassure (or silence) those who feared (or hoped) that the Society of Jesus could not oppose Evil on such a global scale. After all, the epic narrative of Jesuit missionaries’ achievements in the Far East should also counterbalance the painful sense of failure of the Society and the whole Roman Catholic Church towards Protestant and Anglican Europe (Basile 302).

Inescapable metaphors

The material lack of definition in Bartoli’s narrative highlights the spiritual, but also the mental (and psychological, *ante litteram*) clash between the devils and the Jesuit, whose physical outcomes are the embodiment of a rather conceptual metaphor.¹⁵ Evil spirits are jealous, envious, and self-centered, and they aim to drag human beings down into their never-ending discontent. In this respect, as Klingenschmitt highlights, Ignatius recommended the following: “With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse” (Klingenschmitt 141). Thus, if Xavier wants to resist their temptations and challenges, he has to play the demons’ game. To this purpose, his faith in God has no power, and it will not operate as it does when dealing with poor and sick people. His faith gives Xavier no additional strength and no prodigious healing against the beatings—this would be pride, showing off his powers, capitulating to the challenge of Evil. Rather, in these confrontations Xavier’s faith manifests itself in extraordinary mental resistance; as Bartoli wrote, “Xavier, who disdained to honor the devil so far as to suspend the profitable task in which he was actually engaged [i.e., teaching catechism], very calmly took off a small cross” (Faber 132). Moreover, “his *sang-froid* was excessively mortifying to the pride of the fiends, who could not endure that one single man should dare to do what combined numbers fearfully avoided” (175).

Nevertheless, Xavier’s encounters with the demons could also disguise something that had indeed happened—even if it did not involve anything supernatural or preterhuman. Let us compare Xavier’s encounters with similar events

¹⁵ On the metaphorical embodiments of spirits, see Maggi ix–x.

as reported in Antonio Ruiz de Montoya and studied by Jutta Toelle. Montoya's *Conquista Espiritual* (1639) is a first-hand chronicle from the Paraguayan mission to Guairà, also testifying to some demonic encounters. Toelle argues that these narrations could be a metaphorical, emphasized transposition of real events which, in some way, disturbed or tried to jeopardize the Catholic hegemony in a recently Christianized land. According to Toelle, the missionary and author Montoya was convinced that such episodes were truly and personally triggered by evil spirits—rather consistently with the aforementioned Ignatian understanding of spirits as persons—and recounted his version accordingly. Something very similar could be hidden behind Xavier's demons.¹⁶ Anton's possession and illness after some magic rituals, for instance, could be a warning against the practice of indigenous medicine, on which locals could still be relying. This was often seen as a danger because it involved non-Christian-centric knowledge, located in a world of wisdom completely detached from the classics of European culture. Although missionaries actually grew quickly confident with indigenous healing practices (Harris 75), such a confidence, if frankly represented, could elicit dangerous suspicions in the Catholic motherland and its public.

In Montoya's chronicle, one tale deserves particular attention: a group of demons visited a reduction (*reducción*) dressed like Jesuits and sang litanies in choir, as if they were part of a procession (Toelle 85–86). This recalls a specific moment in Xavier's second encounter with St. Thomas's devils in Mylapore: "Once, however, they [the devils] changed their style, and sang matins in choir so correctly that he [Xavier] really was deceived, and on the following morning asked the vicar what priests those were who had been singing matins at such an unusual hour of the night" (Faber 176). In both cases, the demons' actions seem to retrieve the long-standing tradition of the "devil in disguise" to show a deeper concern for a sort of religious contamination, probably related to Catholic liturgies and private and collective prayers. Unlike Montoya, Bartoli did not see the events personally: his terse rendition of Lucena's tale can be therefore connected to his detachment from the events, at least in part. Bartoli's "objectivity" allowed him to better polish his metaphors in a very personal style. As Ditchfield has noted, Bartoli was a master in moving the reader with emotions (228): in the *Istorie*, emotions should arise

¹⁶ All the more that even Bartoli's hyperbolic tales are supposed to disguise tricky realities such as "accomodamenti ai riti locali, accettazioni del culto degli antenati, messe celebrate in cinese" ("compliance to the local rites, acceptance of the ancestor worship, [and] masses in Chinese language"; Basile 308), all issues that had already unleashed the thorny *querelles des rites*.

from a well-calibrated strategy of words, which mainly relied on visual stimulation and moral overstatements, but sometimes, as is the case of Mylapore’s demons, leveraged emotional sobriety and a masterful narrative of sounds.

Acoustic suggestions

Sounds, noises, and voices play a significant role in all of Xavier’s demonic encounters as narrated by Bartoli. After all, spirit possessions (perhaps because of the analogous proximity of vocal emission and *pneuma*) have a long literary tradition of “vocal battles”: possessed creatures typically cry and talk with distorted voices, while the “facilitator” (the exorcist or another counterpart) pronounces formulae or prayers. This happens in a codified dialogue that almost parallels a *certamen*. Thus, in the description of the exorcism made by the children in the Fishery Coast, Bartoli shows the possessed man “howling terrifically” (Faber 132) and the young exorcists expelling the demon “cantate le lor consuete orazioni” (“once [they had] sung their usual prayers”; *Asia* 81). There is a similar occurrence in Malacca, where the sorceress’s rites had caused the young Anton a severe speech impediment: as Xavier entered his room, the boy “rose up in a fury, screaming wildly” (Faber 196) while the Jesuit performed his rite, which included, among several gestures, the reading aloud of the Passion of Christ (*Asia* 132).¹⁷

The role of words and sounds in episodes of exorcism and, even before this, in ancient religious and shamanic rites is crucial, and even older than literature on the relations between human beings and spiritual forces (Power 17–19). Bartoli’s writing granted this role an even more specific nuance, as the devils of the church in Mylapore show. The tale’s first part does not contain any mention of sounds or voices: Bartoli introduces Xavier in the haunted church and displays the growing tension among the saint and the devils, but nothing actually happens, creating the expectation of an action scene, which promptly arrives. In the following paragraphs, the events take place at a rapid pace, punctuated by acoustic features. At first, a violent noise indirectly illustrates Xavier’s beating. The laconic English—“the devils fell upon him, beating him so unmercifully” (Faber 121)—translates an Italian sentence rich in harsh consonant and onomatopoeic effects: “lo assalirono, e con una fiera tempesta di tante e così crude percosse il

¹⁷ Faber’s English translation in *Life of St. Francis* reads, “Xavier...read the Passion of our Divine Lord” (196), while in the original version it reads as follows: “gli lesse sopra la passione di Cristo” (*Asia* 132), where “gli” clearly specifies “to him,” thus “aloud.”

batterono, che tutto il pestarono e ruppero” (*Asia* 116). Second, the publicity, and thus the possible reality of Xavier’s demonic encounter, is surrounded by the opposition between the missionary’s untold dimension (his absorption in prayer, his silence about the haunting) and the devils’ noise. Eventually, as the “Apostle of the Indies” chose to conceal what happened (“He did not say a word”; Faber 176), his behavior could justify, as mentioned previously, the reason why Xavier’s letters never made known the devils’ episode. At the same time, it would be coherent with his obstinacy in disregarding the demons, since what has never been told has never been real (God created things by calling their names).

But a young man had learnt the truth because of the cries that awoke him at night. Once again, the English version is shortened and diluted: “[He] was awakened by a loud noise. He arose and, following the direction of the sounds, was terrified by the violence of the blows, as well as by the groans of the saint, whom he could distinctly hear invoking the assistance of the great mother of God” (176). This could be a more faithful rendition of the original Italian version:

svegliato allo schiamazzo de’ demoni e allo strepito delle percosse, si rizzò e trasse subito al romore; e udì con ispavento il rimbombo de’ colpi, i gemiti del santo, e le parole che diceva, invocando la madre di Dio in soccorso. (*Asia* 116)

[The young man,] who was awakened by the shouting of the demons and the brawl of the blows, rose and suddenly stood up because of the noise; he was terrified as he listened to the rumble of the fists and the groans of the saint and the word he said, pleading for the mother of God to rescue him.

After moments of such dramatic intensity, according to Lucena’s intonation but in Bartoli’s more sober style, the plot *desinit in piscem* with a comic closure. First, the church’s vicar mocked Xavier for his cries to the Virgin; second, and more notably, desperate to conquer Xavier’s attention, the devils disguised themselves as Jesuits and sang litanies at midnight, being finally able to deceive the saint—and from this very passage comes the title of this essay.

As for the ironic aspect of the tale, it is consistent with the initial purpose of *Asia*: to amuse and benefit readers at the same time. Covering a satanic subject in a humorous style should not be seen as disrespectful; even a specific handbook like Girolamo Menghi’s *Compendium of the Exorcistic Art* (1595) displayed on

the frontispiece, under the title, the specification that this was “opera non meno giovevole alli essorcisti, che dilettevole a’ lettori” (“a useful work to all exorcists, an amusing work for all readers”). Or, to indulge in Jesuit literature, how could we not mention Domenico Ottonelli’s *Good Recommendations and Cases of Conscience on Dangerous Conversation* (1646), whose “ancient and modern cases” sometimes concerned magic as well as black magic, and politely winked at Italian comic and salacious *novellas* (65–67, 194–96). In the religious field as well as in the lay one, diversity and otherness—albeit supernatural, demonic, sneaky, and dangerous (the devils) or bright and pure (the saint)—provided good writers with the best opportunity to jest and show their wit.

As for the dissemination of acoustic elements, it is possible that Bartoli reflected a context comparable to the one described by Montoya and analyzed by Toelle (87–88). Outside of Europe, in the East as well as in the West Indies, the cultural shock that Jesuits experienced was a sensorial shock too. Foreign savors, flavors, and fragrances caught the missionaries’ attention as well as the many other aspects of indigenous spiritual and material life, as testified by their letters. In this sense, the acoustic and vocal diversity must have been extremely unfamiliar, or perhaps even disturbing, to the missionaries’ ears, accustomed as they were to a regulated and over-sophisticated *regimen* of training in rhetoric (Casalini and Paur 200) and the management of silence. Moreover, as voices are so tightly related to the movements of spirits, missionaries could be more inclined to attribute moral and even esoteric contents to acoustic expressions, and they verbally emphasized these sensations in their letters and chronicles. Although our author was not a first-hand (eye or ear) witness, he knew well how the propagation of voices and sounds worked: he even wrote a treatise on this subject in 1679, *Del suono, de’ tremori armonici e dell’udito* (*On Sound, Harmonic Tremor and Hearing*), which possibly restated its literary sensibility on the matter.

From a stylistic perspective, mannerism and baroque traditionally pursued a vivid narrative stressing visual effects more than sounds, which was quite consistent with the reconquered eminence of the sense of view above all other senses as a vehicle and instrument of knowledge (Classen 151–53). Thus, Bartoli’s choice to make his narrative vivid by boosting the ambience of sound seems more peculiar. It could help to stress the strangeness and non-human nature of the devils and their world, whose textual evidence and effectiveness¹⁸ could (stylistic suit-

¹⁸ On *enargeia* and *energeia* in early modern literature, poetry, and literary criticism, see Giunta 2016.

ability) and should (moral/religious appropriateness) not be represented by visual *acribologia* (an abundantly detailed narration). In so doing, Bartoli had Xavier's encounters with demons stand out and gain personality among the many other episodes of Xavier's life, the rhetorical effects of which had been more visually built.

Conclusions

Whether Xavier really had or was thought to have had demoniac encounters is not the point of our research: in the seventeenth century, spiritual and magic forces were still part of daily life for most people, whose categories of perception and knowledge differed from our twenty-first-century psychologically imbued perspective. Furthermore, there was a long-standing rhetorical tradition of writing and reusing the first-person narrative to justify unusual or impressive facts, and the Society of Jesus officially acknowledged that such events could really happen.

Daniello Bartoli accepted the demonic encounters of Francis Xavier in the parts of *Asia* devoted to this powerful but only recently appointed saint. Bartoli's *Asia* came to be held as one of the most authoritative biographical sources on Xavier, and it was widely printed and thus widely read for a long time (especially during the nineteenth century, after the restoration of the order). Xavier's life was also extrapolated from the *Istorie* and translated independently into French, English, Dutch, and Latin.¹⁹ The demons *had* to appear as characters in the *Istorie*: not only as generic villains, but also because they gave to Bartoli the perfect opportunity to highlight Xavier's sanctity and, by extension, justify his canonization.

The previous paragraphs have highlighted the ostensible neutrality of demoniacs in comparison with Bartoli's exotic characterization of the indigenous universe: in the midst of a brand-new reality, Evil becomes a *persona* possessing people and acquiring moments of bodily materiality. However, such a character seems to have no specific ethnic or cultural identity but evilness itself.²⁰ Besides the idea

¹⁹ Through literary Spanish sources, the image of Xavier-exorcist entered the South American tradition as well, at least in Ecuador; for instance, the Convento de la Merced in Quito preserves an oil on canvas portraying the missionary while expelling demons, who come out from a girl's mouth in the form of winged, tailed, and horned little men (dated mid-eighteenth century; see Rodríguez and de Ceballos 90).

²⁰ Bartoli's depiction of demoniacs changed in the third book of *Asia*, i.e., *Cina*. While Indian demons did not possess any peculiar or "Indian" character, Chinese demons entertained closer

that Evil (like God) was the same everywhere, we can perhaps identify a soothing message for the readers, especially if they were Jesuits and prospective missionaries who would expel demons themselves one day, either *verbatim* or metaphorically. Every resistance to the Gospel’s sweet persuasion and its messengers was, in fact, categorized as demonic.

Nonetheless, the demons’ presence and expressions were rendered rather disturbing through the soundscape Bartoli created. And it is quite interesting that Bartoli, in narrating those episodes, chose to privilege the sense of hearing, which is the persuasive channel of poetry and music. It is an ambiguous sense though, since the only demons successfully deceiving Xavier were the ones who sang. It is perhaps worth remembering that Giambattista Marino, in his *Adone* (1623), had entrusted the personification of Flattery with the praise of music (canto 7). Bartoli’s rendition of Xavier’s deception offered a scene of veiled irony, where the Jesuit unintentionally fell short of his usual perfection in a very human way while distracted by the fascination of music. This also suggests that the Indian missions were undermined by a certain confusion, probably originated by the clash with the indigenous sensorial world, which did not spare consecrated places.

On a meta-literary level, all the stranger encounters populating the *Istorie*, especially those in *Asia*, had been experienced and retold several times: by their living actors, by their witnesses, by the authors who first combined and often published them—and who were sometimes the protagonists themselves—and finally by Daniello Bartoli. For him, that profound and insightful immersion in the Roman archives eventually replaced the horizons he never travelled, the missions he never knew, the demons he never met. He probably believed that it was useful, if not essential, to present them to his readers. As the Society’s “official historian,” a role entrusted to him by the Superior General, Bartoli encompassed all that expertise that pertained to the “men of letters” of his age; in this regard, the pedagogical function of those black magic episodes did not strictly depend on the cold facts they represented but more on the rhetorical potential they offered. Among the many forms of baroque “otherness,” demoniacs actually owned

and more complex relations with humans (Bartoli, *Cina* 333–34, 615, 627–28). Different was Matteo Ricci’s approach to these types of events. Jesuits in the Ming and Qing empires were direct rivals of Daoist and Buddhist priests: one way to show the legitimacy of their cult (which demanded exclusivity) was to insist on their God’s superior powers in the super- and preternatural realm. In the cases of possessions, Jesuits did not even have to “overstretch *their* own principles, for exorcism was a familiar and comfortable task to perform for Catholic priests” (Zhang 10).

a discrete rhetorical potential, and Bartoli, as we have seen, exploited it wisely, so that a single brief tale contains a density of references and suggestions.

These are nothing but a few of the pieces in *Asia's* multicoloured mosaic of “stranger things,” and in the wider setting of a pedagogical program, we would only pinpoint how the impulse towards strangeness and diversity has been a constant in the Jesuit artistic output throughout the seventeenth century. Just think of the etymologies of *diverto* and *extraneus*, which both refer to something external, evading, going a different way, and the *trompe-l'œil* ceiling in the Church of Jesus in Rome (c. 1661–79), where human figures break frames and borders to escape outside and down to the nave in a mixture of painted and plaster decorations. In the same way these blessed souls moved away from the Light to meet worshippers and draw their attention and faith, so should Jesuit missionaries be willing to run into the world, far from the center of Catholicism, ready for every kind of encounter. And perhaps, to authors and writers, stranger ones were the most welcome.

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