

## 2 **The Tail of the Devil: The Vow of Poverty**

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**Summary** 2.1 A Visitation to Japan. – 2.2 The Religious Dress. – 2.3 Tensions Surrounding Silk. – 2.4 Debates on Silk Garments. – 2.5 Devilish Presences and Absences.

### **2.1 A Visitation to Japan**

After Xavier left in 1551 intending to open missionary doors to China, the new head of the Japanese mission became Father Cosme de Torres.<sup>1</sup> Torres' managing of the Japanese mission met with the approval of the Indian Provincial Melchior (or Belchior), Nunes Barreto, who did not introduce any major changes to the missionary policy when he visited Japan in 1556. In the following years, however, things took a turn for the worse. Regardless of Torres' attempts to

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**1** Unlike most of the Jesuits working in Asia at the time, Cosme de Torres had arrived in India via Manila; he therefore did not receive the education, given in Lisbon and Coimbra, to make all Jesuits destined for the Asian missions more familiar with Portuguese Jesuit culture. Born in Valencia in approximately 1510, Torres, after being ordained, sailed for New Spain in 1538, but spiritual disquiet made him cross the Pacific in 1542. He met Francis Xavier in Ambon and decided to follow him to Goa. After doing the *Exercises*, he entered the Society in 1548. His main activities in the following year were guiding devotees in the *Exercises*, and teaching children in Kanyakumari. In 1549 he followed Xavier to Japan and became the head of the mission when the latter left the country in 1551.

subsequently maintain contact with both Goa and Europe,<sup>2</sup> a lack of correspondence between Japan and India seems to have characterised this period; the official catalogues of the mission are similarly scarce (Schütte 1968, 43). Contacts were mostly maintained by the Jesuits and Portuguese merchants who moved between the two missions and allowed a flow of information, as well as an exchange of objects and gifts.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of the extent to which Torres was successful in maintaining contact with Goa and Rome, by 1565, he felt that they needed better manpower: he requested to the General and to the Provincial a “learned and virtuous Father, to elevate the Law of God to its place”, who was neither too old nor too young, who could inherit the supervision of the mission.<sup>4</sup> His task would be “to rule and govern and harmonise (*pôr em concerto*) the Fathers and Brothers who reside here [in Japan], and this new Christianity too, which has great need to be arranged with virtuous Fathers now at the beginnings, but also with Fathers whose work won’t need to be undone later” (*MonJap*, 77). From this passage emerges Torres’ worries about the Japanese Christians, the Jesuits who lived in Japan, and the future of the mission in general.

On the one hand, the passage “harmonise... this new Christianity” confirms that the Jesuits were struggling with identifying a common policy to govern the Christian communities of the country that could grant a solid foundation for the future.<sup>5</sup> Seeking an authoritative opinion, Torres asked for help, at least twice, from Francisco Rodrigues and Antonio de Quadros, the first time in April 1559, the second between 1563 and 1568. Many questions deal with the accommodation of the officiation of sacraments to Japanese culture but matters of the Christian community’s daily life are discussed as well (Ehalt 2019; Pinto, Pires 2005).

On the other hand, Torres also mentioned the need to reach harmony among the missionaries. This statement brings to the fore the importance of conformity in the mission in the mind of Torres, who clearly found it lacking. This echoes a common Jesuit stance. It is possible to identify two elements of the mission behind these internal tensions: Father Gaspar Vilela and Father Baltasar da Costa;

<sup>2</sup> “Every year we send letters”, Torres states in his letter to the General, Yokoseura, 20 October 1563 (Schütte 1968, 42). The same idea is repeated later in 1566 (*MonJap*, 75).

<sup>3</sup> Many Jesuits left the Japanese mission to return to India in this period (Schütte 1968, 43-4), enabling a certain connection. For a statistical analysis, see Costa 1999, 20-31. On the exchange of gifts, see Gonoï 1997, 101.

<sup>4</sup> Torres to the General Lainez, Kuchinotsu, 20 October 1565, printed in *MonJap*, 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> In this period, the missionaries were also looking for a safe port to make it the destination of the Macao carrack, which may have been another reason for the recall of Vilela (Hesselink 2016).

perceiving two priests out of six as escaping his control could have been enough for Torres to lament a state of emergency. Arriving in Japan in 1556 with Barreto, Vilela was described by the latter as “innovative”<sup>6</sup> even before landing in Japan. By 1566, Vilela had accrued five years of experience in the mission of Miyako, apparently having scarce news from Torres.<sup>7</sup> He was pushing adaptation to the Japanese culture too far for the liking of his superior, who recalled him to Kyūshū in 1566. In 1570, Visitor Gonçalo Álvares called him to Cochin, officially to provide an eyewitness report on the Japanese mission; and later to Goa, where he died in 1572 (Boscariol 2012). Another disrupting figure could have been Father Baltasar da Costa, in Japan since 1564 and responsible for the mission of Hirado. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, before leaving the country in 1576, Costa not only broke the vows of poverty and chastity but also stole from the mission. He appeared to have been engaging in this behaviour regularly at the beginning of that decade, which suggests that it had already begun under Torres’ superiorate.

Both Rome and Goa were already aware that some troubles plagued the Japanese mission in the early 1560s: in 1563, General Laínez suggested Provincial Quadros send someone to investigate;<sup>8</sup> Francis Borja allowed Quadros to proceed in his visitation to Japan in 1565 to solve the “grave necessities of those parts”.<sup>9</sup> Recalled to Goa mid-voyage, Quadros designated Spanish Father Pedro Ramírez as his delegate, to be initially Visitor and then superior of Japan, but he died *en route* (*DI*, 6: 15\*). Thus, in 1568, it was Francisco Cabral who was nominated for the role.

Cabral demonstrated his typical reticence when he hesitated to commit to paper the specific reasons behind his mission to Japan; the most detailed recounting of the events is found in his letter dated 6 September 1571,<sup>10</sup> written in Nagasaki and addressed to the

**6** “Decretista”, as described in Barreto’s 1560 letter (*DI*, 4: 511), in Ribeiro 2007, 22.

**7** “I have news of Fathers Torres and Frois only once a year; I wish very much to see them, but it is not possible, due to the many difficulties [of organizing this]”. Gaspar Vilela to the Fathers and Brothers in Goa, Miyako, 17 July 1564, in *EVORA*, 1: 139v.

**8** As communicated by Juan Alfonso de Polanco (Trent, 4 December 1563), in *DI*, 6: 66.

**9** General Borja to Antonio de Quadros, 29 November 1565, in *DI*, 6: 527.

**10** Other two letters return on the topic, both sent to the General: the first is written in Macao, on November 20, 1583 (*JapSin* 9, II, 186-8v), is transcribed in Correia, “Francisco Cabral and Lourenço Mexia”, 72-7. The second, written in Cochin, on December 15, 1593, is transcribed in *DI*, 16: 547. Both these texts aim to oppose the reforms introduced by Valignano in Japan, presented as too expensive and as promoting the return to silk garments, and to depict a positive image of Cabral’s work in Japan while remaining vague on the details: “the superior of Japan [...] could not deal with [the problem of silk], to the point that it was necessary to inform the Father Provincial of what was happening” (*JapSin* 9, II, 187r).

Assistant of Portugal in Rome, Diego Mirón (JapSin 7, I, 23r-24v).<sup>11</sup> Here, Cabral purports that he had been sent to do a visitation to Japan following some rumours that had arrived in Goa.<sup>12</sup> Even if it was not explicitly stated, the text suggests that the source of this news were the Portuguese merchants, who were reputedly scandalised by having been rudely welcomed in the country by Jesuits dressed in purple silk and waving golden fans. While it appears that the Indian Provincial already held some knowledge about the Jesuits' silk garments, according to Cabral, the gravity of the matter had not been clear due to the standing orders of writing only about edifying topics (JapSin 7, I, 23r-v).<sup>13</sup> Some news of this question had reached Rome, too, although in how much detail is not clear (Schütte 1980, 1: 215). In the end, after being forced to stop in Macao, Cabral had been reached there by Organtino Gnecci-Soldo, who had informed him that the newly appointed Visitor, Gonçalo Álvares, had ordered a complete ban on any interactions of the mission with silk.<sup>14</sup>

One topic that Cabral does not elaborate upon in his initial correspondence is the Jesuit practice of selling a share of the silk brought by the Portuguese merchants from Macao.<sup>15</sup> This trade, begun with a donation by merchant Luís de Almeida at the time of his admission into the Society in 1556, was identified by Cabral as the cause for the flourishing economics of the mission and the consequent abandonment of customs of poverty. This minimal reference to it could be

**11** Spanish Jesuit Diego Mirón (Mirão, Miró, or Miro) held important positions in the Society: he had been rector of the colleges of Valencia and Coimbra, Visitor to the Provinces of Aragon and Portugal, and Provincial of Portugal in 1552-55 and 1563-65. During this period, he had close contacts with the court, and was asked by Dom João III to be his confessor. From 1569 he was in Rome as Assistant of Portugal to General Borja. He was therefore an important reference for the Jesuits in the Asian mission.

**12** Cabral states that the personal use of silk by the missionaries had started six or seven years before 1571, which puts it around 1564-65. This timeframe corresponds however to Antonio de Quadros' push to visit Japan, so it indicates more probably the date when the news reached Goa.

**13** Cabral mentions that there was a standing order to prioritize only edifying events when writing from the missions but avoids saying that it had been given by Francis Xavier himself. Ignatius Loyola warned of the perils that this practice could entail (Torres Londoño 2002, 23). Valignano too reported this inadequacy of the Jesuit correspondence, even as late as 1579 (JapSin 8, II, 243).

**14** This decision was rather extreme, considering that Álvares had no first-hand knowledge of Japan to be able to take such a decision (Schütte 1980, 1: 212-13). However, it seems that, according to Quadros, the Visitor had displayed a tendency to ignore the context completely and try to apply the *Constitutions* inconsiderately. Considering that he ordered the whole mission in India to wear mid-length trousers and boots all year round when outside the residencies, he might as well be a case of extreme obtuseness.

**15** An overview of the silk trade as a manner to finance the mission is presented in Vu Thanh 2021. For a discussion of the trade of silk by the Jesuits in China and Japan, its moral implications, and the solutions suggested in the following century by Visitor Palmeiro, see Brockey 2014, 228-9.

because Cabral believed that the ban on trade by the single missionary houses, which had been common until that point, was more relevant. Álvares' orders on the silk trade were to limit it until alternative resources were found and it could be halted (JapSin 7, I, 21r). To this end, Cabral had sent the capital of the Japanese mission to India, to be invested in lands that could provide rent and support to it; the funds deriving from this rent, however, were never forwarded to Japan, as will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5. With no other income available, the use of the totality of the proceeds from the silk trade was legitimate in Cabral's eyes as long as the missionaries ceased their personal use of silk and other luxuries. In later correspondence, indeed, he would refer to it as the "alms from the carack". Thus, he could justify the Jesuits' investments in the trade as a necessity in the service of God; such understanding did not prevent him from criticising Valignano, years later, for not suppressing it.<sup>16</sup>

As Cabral had been appointed Visitor to Japan in response to a crisis, in the first years of his stay there, he focused on solving specific problems, conditioned by the instructions he had received from the Indian Visitor in written form. Álvares' intentions, before his death in 1573, were to take control of the mission personally after his arrival, possibly leaving Cabral free to return to India. For the first three years of his stay in Japan, Cabral remained dedicated to this plan, and his correspondence attempted to demonstrate to his superiors how he was following orders and disposing of the silks.<sup>17</sup> Even later, when it became clear that this plan would not come to fruition and Cabral had to undertake a bigger role in governing the mission (Schütte 1980, 1: 216), he still shows signs of being psychologically dependent on instructions from his superiors on major decisions.

## 2.2 The Religious Dress

To fully understand the scandal that was threatening the Asian missions of the Society of Jesus, and the relevance of the garments their members were wearing at both a social and spiritual level, it is fruitful to digress about the relation between religion and clothes.

Garments have always occupied a position closely connected with the building and performance of identity. The (gender-neutral) dress, defined as "an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human

<sup>16</sup> Cabral censured Valignano on this matter because he did not consider the expenses of the Japanese mission as legitimate anymore, believing that the missionaries had return to a life of luxury. See Chapter 5.

<sup>17</sup> His letters might be considered even redundant on the silk affair, if not considering the chance that they might not reach their destination, a danger Cabral was aware of.

beings" (Eicher, Roach-Higgins 1992, 15),<sup>18</sup> engages all senses to communicate the social identities and positions of its owner, often anticipating other types of communication (Roach-Higgins, Eicher 1992, 5; Barnes, Eicher 1992, 3; Eicher, Roach-Higgins 1992, 17). The twelfth-century technological evolution caused a slow change in Europe in the understanding of the body and augmented its social importance: "public appearance and behaviour established and maintained identity". The new shape of clothing also modified the way in which people moved and felt, strengthening the control it imposed on the body (Rublack 2010, 7; 16-18).<sup>19</sup> During the Renaissance, the regulation of social divisions was supported by sumptuary laws that limited the spending and public flaunting of luxury clothing items (Heller 2004, 318; Paresys 2006, 252-3). Public denunciation of fashion trends were also connected to morality and were part of the social construction of gender and class (Heller 2004, 313). In a moment of perceived social change, sumptuary laws facilitated the identification of the other and the presentation of the self (Hunt 1996, 7-13).

'Fashion' can be '*deeply* put on' or, in other words, [...] clothes permeate the wearer, fashioning him or her within. This notion undoes the opposition of inside and outside, surface and depth. [...] To understand the significance of clothes in the Renaissance, we need to [...] understand the animatedness of clothes, their ability to 'pick up' subjects, to mold and shape them both physically and socially, to constitute subjects through their power as material memories. [...] Clothing is a worn world: a world of social relations put upon the wearer's body. (Jones, Stallybrass 2000, 2-3)

Clothes are, therefore, an integral part of the person on all essential levels; they could contaminate the wearer in the depths of their soul, with spiritual and moral consequences (Rublack 2006, 261; Ribeiro 2003, 15).

Regulation of dress in Christianity can indeed be traced to its origins, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Calls for distinct (but not specific) clothing for clergy began in the third century, even if resistance to giving importance to dress over pious behaviour was strong until at least the pontificate of Celestine (422-32 CE). In time, officially sanctioned dress became richer and more complex, while

<sup>18</sup> They based their work on Stone's theoretical framework (1962) which incorporated "communication via appearance (which he defined to include dress as well as gesture and location) and highlighted the fact that dress, because it may be seen in social encounters before conversation can be initiated, has a certain priority over discourse in the establishing of identity".

<sup>19</sup> On the psychological influence of materiality of clothes on performances of identity, see also the considerations in Eco 1987, 191-5.

its connection with sanctity grew in the form of relics and mystical characterisation; still, dedicated to divine service, it was not considered a sign of vanity (Mayo 1984, 15-27). Regardless of the theological appreciation Christianity displays towards poverty, there was a direct, if uneasy, connection between this sacred luxury and the earthly power of the Church (Goody 2006a, 342).

The secular clergy's dress began to be regularised in the Middle Ages, even if it was common to disregard it in favour of more worldly, colourful, and luxurious clothing, against which there were many attempts at regulation by the same ranks of the Church (Hume 2013, 16; Ribeiro 2003, 32-5). Even if it had debuted as the official garment of the clergy in 572, the cassock<sup>20</sup> took some time to be actually normalised as such, and its colour was regularised for the lower clergy only in the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Regular clergy presented a different but parallel situation; debate on their dress was mainly centred on colour, shape, and the material used to produce it. The specific dress required by religious orders had a social role, just like all garments, and communicated the belonging of the wearer to a specific religious group and with it their personal faith. However, religious dress was also deeply influenced by the idea of the permeability of the soul by clothes. In the tradition of the *contemptus mundi*, "clothes are called soft because they will make the soul soft" (Twomey 2007, 123). Religious dress, holy in itself, consecrated the wearer's body, marking their abandonment of the world (Kuhns 2003, 45). The monastic habit thus has its historical roots in the penance and mortification of the self, such as that practised by desert ascetics. The main aim of this type of dress was to cause discomfort in the wearer, who would be reminded of the suffering of Jesus and incited to conquer worldly inclinations (61-2):

The internal body is controlled, in that emotion is restrained, voices and laughter are muffled and appetite for food, knowledge and sex are constrained. The external body, however, is more visibly restrained. Strict dress codes are enforced because dress is considered symbolic of religiosity. [...] While a person's level of religiosity can not be objectively perceived, symbols such as clothing are used as evidence that s/he is on the 'right and true path'. (Arthur 1999, 1)

**20** The cassock is "an ankle-length sleeved tunic which can be held at the waist by a narrow belt, or buttoned from neck to foot [...] It is universally worn by clergy underneath the Eucharist vestments and all other liturgical garments but it is not in itself a vestment; although worn as an undergarment in services, it is also an overgarment for wear indoors and outdoors; further the cassock is not an exclusively clerical garment and may be worn by servers, choristers and vergers. [...] The general look of the cassock has not altered very much although the full cassock with a train was fashionable for prelates in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (Mayo 1984, 140).

**21** See Hume 2013, 13-17; Hollander 1993, 369; Mayo 1984, 73.

This dedication could be endangered if this dress was abandoned or even if the wearer was exposed to other people's luxurious clothes (Kuhns 2003, 122).

Still, it was quite rare for religious orders' rules to describe in detail the dress of their members. Generally, they stressed uniformity and poverty of dress; specific shape and colour were often ignored (Warr 1999, 80-4). At the same time, if opinions on colour varied through the history of the church (Kuhns 2003, 5; Pastoureau 2009, 60-1; Pleij 2005, 63-6; Gage 1993, 79), by the fifth century, there was a tradition of monks dressing in black, and by the ninth century, it was the most common dye of monastic garments (Harvey 2013, 75).<sup>22</sup> Being the colour of mourning, it was considered apt for monks, whose role included grieving and doing penance for the death of Jesus and the sinful state of humanity. Since deep, permanent black was extremely expensive, the colour is to be understood as symbolic and approximating more a grey or blue in reality (Harvey 2013, 42; 54; 68-76).<sup>23</sup>

Symptomatic of what would become the modern Western chromophobia, coloured garments had assumed a negative characterisation by the Renaissance, "unworthy of a good Christian" (Pastoureau 2009, 98). Black was now often found in clothing: the priestly black cassock and cape had already expanded to the secular world around the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the clergy had become the managerial structure of the new nation-states and the teaching staff of universities. Students wore similar gowns and kept using them after graduation if they became lawyers or physicians. This black dress thus assumed the new meaning of professionalism, austerity, and virtue (Pastoureau 2009, 95; Harvey 2013, 97). By the time of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528), the splendid blacks and stiff forms of the Spanish Crown had prevailed over Europe's nobility as well (Harvey 1995, 71-8).<sup>24</sup>

This was the context in which Ignatius of Loyola lived. Having spent the first thirty years of his life among courtiers and nobles, he was certainly conscious of the social importance of proper dress. He must have also been aware of the specific significance of dress in relation to religion:<sup>25</sup> he marked the beginning of his conversion by donating his rich, colourful garments to a beggar. He then decided to

<sup>22</sup> See also Johnston 2000, 309.

<sup>23</sup> For various examples of the connection between black and evil or sin, see Bloch 1986, 157-8. Pastoureau 1988, 17-18.

<sup>24</sup> For the influence of Spanish dress on European courts, see Boucher, Deslandres 1987, 224-7.

<sup>25</sup> See the incident in which clerical immunity was denied to him as he did not have the tonsure (Brodrick 1998, 45-6).



imitate the models offered by the lives of the saints in the *Legenda Aurea* even more closely, embodying them by letting his nails and hair grow unkempt (Mongini 2014, 50-3; 62).<sup>26</sup> His clothes too were used to signify his conversion and, like his body, he treated them following the *contemptus mundi* philosophy. His spiritual search brought him to ascetic extremisms that had a heavy impact on his health, until he concluded that this behaviour was harmful to his soul as well, being a form of vainglory (Levy 2011, 138). The *bigello* garments he wore during his activity as preacher (Mongini 2014, 67),<sup>27</sup> while studying theology at the University of Alcalá de Henares, attracted the attention of the Inquisition more than once, and he was ordered to wear the same clothes as the other students (Loyola 1904, 74). As explained above, all students, both clergy and laity, wore the same dress, similar to a cassock (Glorieux 1984, 117). After his first companions joined him, they would move through Paris and travel in Reformed French regions wearing the same dress (O'Malley 1993, 32).

When it came to writing the *Constitutions*, Ignatius never gave a description of the Jesuit dress aside from the fact that it should be proper, conformed to the place, and poor (See *Cons.*, [577-9], [18], [19], [81], [296], [297]). The first is given in Latin as *honestus*, meaning anything from 'respectable and dignified' to 'decent and appropriate' - basically, nothing that would cause scandal, in a similar vein to the second characteristic. At the same time, religious dress attributed new meanings to the religious body, and Loyola maintained a specific idea of how the Jesuit body should appear. A collection of miscellaneous rules illustrates how a Jesuit needs to control his body's movements: do not turn the head on one side or the other, but lean it only slightly forward; keep your eyes down, do not stare at your interlocutor's face; keep your lips closed but not too tightly, nor too loosely; keep your hands still, etc.<sup>28</sup> Loyola was indifferent towards dress,<sup>29</sup> as long as garments followed the rules for modesty and humility written for the body, whose appearance needed to follow stricter guidelines, reflecting the seriousness and spirituality of the Jesuit himself and of the whole Society of Jesus.

Loyola also recognised some additional benefits of having dress guidelines, as quoted above: garments fostered the sense of

<sup>26</sup> See also Glorieux 1984, 116.

<sup>27</sup> The word *bigello*, to indicate a rough wool of greyish colour, comes from *bigio* (Italian for 'grey'); it probably assumed a negative connotation when associated to the *beghine*, female members of grassroots movements of Christian reform, who were found in most of central Europe since the thirteenth century, and who wore the same dress, supporting the more extreme section of the Franciscans.

<sup>28</sup> As cited in Câmara 1992, 53-4.

<sup>29</sup> On Ignatian indifference regarding clothes in mission, see Menegon 2020.

community, belonging, and solidarity of the Society; they permitted instant recognition of the Jesuit as such, performing an important social role. At the same time, it was not so distinct as to set the Jesuit apart from the secular world, as had the greyish habit Loyola worn in Alcalá. This facilitated the Jesuit goal to become “everything to everyone”, an aim helped by the rule that the dress should blend in with local use (Levy 2011, 140-1). Loyola’s choice was the black cassock of the secular clergy, similar to the student dress of his days in Paris; no distinctive white collar was yet in use. To cover their heads in the house, a black beret cap, or *biretta*, was generally used.<sup>30</sup> Aside from this common dress, however, there were some local variations in the early years: for example, the Spanish Assistancy’s was a brown robe, except in Aragon, where they wore fine black robes until 1630 (140).

### 2.3 Tensions Surrounding Silk

Cabral did not judge the state of the mission positively when he reached Japan in 1570. His initial impressions of the country and of the mission are unfortunately lost, as the first letter he sent after landing is not extant anymore.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, a brief description of the situation of the Japanese mission by Cabral can still be found in his 1571 letter to Mirón:

With the capital growing, the commerce too grew, until seven or eight years ago they started introducing colourful silks and clothes, together with the couple of servants they had now. As this required eating well and sleeping well, even some bed pillows and cushions were made of silk; a father I saw even had a mattress in damask. (JapSin 7, I, 23r)

Thus, the degeneration of the missionaries, in Cabral’s eyes, included more than the use of silk for their garments: the clothes were colourful, which was not proper for religious men; the Jesuits had personal servants, who looked after their needs and after the house; they ate rich food and owned rich cushions of silk. Cabral does not need to write explicitly that none of these were the markers of a holy life and that the spiritual state of the mission was in shambles.

<sup>30</sup> “[A] biretta is stiff square hat [...] Birettas have three or four semicircular peaks attached on top [...] diocesan clergy [wears a] black [one]. Some religious orders such as the Jesuits (Society of James [sic]) and the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Nero also wear black birettas with no pompon” (Chico 2013).

<sup>31</sup> He mentioned a description of his visitation that was sent the previous year in his 1571 letter to the General (JapSin 7, I, 21v); in the latter, too, it is possible to find Cabral’s first impressions of Japan’s geographical and political landscape (Cabral to the General, Francis Borja, 5 September 1571, in JapSin 7, I, 20r–22v, transcribed in Schütte 1958, 461-8).

While making a show that his hands were tied by Álvares' orders, Cabral's correspondence never suggested that he did not agree with the principles behind them. He presents the use of silk as an "excessive licence", a habit "based on vanity" (JapSin 7, I, 20r). He expressed no hesitation about the necessity to dispose of the silk clothes and to return to the black cassock that was in use in the Portuguese Assistency and went on to demonstrate it in his letters to Rome. On the one hand, he meant to show that he was of one mind with the Visitor, which represented the highest form of obedience. On the other, he was aware that some important elements of the mission held different opinions and that they might themselves write to the General, as was their right, to attempt to persuade him that silk clothes were a necessity in Japan. To support his reform, Cabral provided three points against these excesses, as he understood them: that the coloured silk clothes were not in accordance with the poverty and humility of the Society; that this pomp caused major expenses that the mission could not afford; and that the subsequent self-centred behaviour prevented the good care of the Japanese Christians (JapSin 7, I, 21r).

Unfortunately for Cabral, these considerations were not accepted by his brethren, who refused to change back into the cassock. As described by Cabral, the rationale behind the missionaries' opposition was that:

to remove the silks was to close the doors to the conversion of these lands, because the Japanese only look at the exterior.... And if we wore black not only no gentile lord would pay us any attention, but not even the Christians [would]. (JapSin 7, I, 20r)

Although superior of the mission, Cabral's lack of experience with the Japanese context meant that his interpretation carried less weight than his senior brethren's opinions. Still, this defiance came also from missionaries who were not veterans of Japan and for whom the use of silk was not a habit, such as Organtino. According to Cabral, initially Organtino had declared that he could not believe that fathers of the Society were wearing silk and, after landing in Japan, had headed to Miyako to convince Luís Frois to stop the practice. However, even before reaching his destination, he had changed his mind, donned a colourful silk *kimono* and written a strong letter to Cabral against the reform.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Frois, Melchior de Figueredo, and Baltasar da Costa (the protagonist of the above-mentioned purple robe accident with the merchants) were discovered still wearing silk in 1571. This excess was not limited to the clothes used outdoors: during his

<sup>32</sup> The accident is dramatically described by Cabral in both JapSin 7, I, 21v and 23v: "in which [Organtino and Frois] gave me a [verbal] beat down and treated me as I deserved".

visitations to the Jesuit residences, Cabral had had to destroy silk pillows and a green sleeping gown made of Chinese damask (JapSin 7, I, 23v).<sup>33</sup> Due to these incidents, Cabral perceived the refusal as coming from the mission at large:

I would not be able to describe to Your Paternity the work I had to do for this, and the temptations, because, aside from Father Cosme de Torres and Father João Baptista [Giovanni Battista de Monte], to whom also it did not appear a good thing, most [of the Jesuits] were against [changing clothes]. (JapSin 7, I, 20r)

The heavy rhetoric found in these letters (“I would not be able to describe”; “gave me a beat down”) shows how Cabral was deeply troubled (and, considering his irascible character, quite possibly angered)<sup>34</sup> by the whole ordeal. The lack of respect for obedience that he observed in his brethren, together with his inability to control them, were not compatible with his understanding of what it meant to be a member of the Society of Jesus.

As a result, Cabral’s feelings of isolation,<sup>35</sup> and his fear for the future of the mission, intensified, as he suggested in a letter written in 1571 to Juan Batista de Ribera. After rejoicing at the “particular love” the recipient had shown him in writing and how much this had consoled him, Cabral lamented the envy he felt reading of the quiet and consolation that Ribera enjoyed, exercising his saintly virtue in the college where he lived and hoped that he himself could be part of it before dying.<sup>36</sup> He also dramatically referred to the metaphorical “waves and storms” he had been weathering (JapSin 7, III, 36r). This letter shows how dearly Cabral missed his college life in India and in lands where Portuguese customs were the norm. Lacking the cultural milieu and the tranquillity to which he was accustomed, Japan was not congenial to his idea of Jesuit life.

Still, Cabral remained convinced of the righteousness of his mission and that the justifications given in support of the wearing of silk

**33** When recounting the matter in 1593, Cabral mentioned the opposition of Father Baltasar Lopes (*DI*, 16: 545-6); it is probable however that he meant Baltasar da Costa who, as will be discussed below, left the mission with much scandal; Melchior de Figueredo was sent back to India in 1591, where Cabral was not happy to receive him (*DI*, 16: 81).

**34** He is evidently irritated while writing the overview of the problem that he gives in his 10 September 1573 letter to the General (in JapSin 7, I, 166Ar-166Bv); this might be related to the fact that it was a report of the death of Álvares and the loss of all the human and economic capital he was bringing to Japan.

**35** A rather common emotional state among early modern missionaries, as shown by Strasser 2020.

**36** At this stage, Cabral could not know that Ribera had been expelled from the Society and he was still waiting for him to join the Japanese mission.

were worldly tools taken up by his brethren, in the wrong belief that they could facilitate the evangelisation of Japan. What Cabral hoped for was, instead, to obtain divine support for the mission through the upholding of the vow of poverty. Firm in his opinion on the incompatibility of the latter and silk garments, he set to work to rebuff the missionaries' justifications by demonstrating that they were not grounded. According to the many pages written by Cabral to detail his efforts, two were the occasions when the missionaries especially insisted that the standard black cassock could not be used: when their personal safety risked being compromised, and for reasons of prestige among Japanese people.

While not explicitly linked to the matter of Jesuit dress by Cabral, the use of luxurious garments during church rituals is worth considering to shed light on his understanding of the works of divine providence and the Jesuits' interpretation of certain Japanese practices. Since the beginning of the mission, with the growth of different Christian communities, the Jesuits had to assume the role of local secular clergy, in addition to that of missionaries.<sup>37</sup> As pastors of their flock, they would represent the Church during special occasions by being at the head of the religious processions or when visiting Japanese authorities. How they presented their bodies was part of the efforts to augment the solemnity of these occasions, and this was reflected in their garments.<sup>38</sup> Some instances that illustrate this attitude are linked to Gaspar Vilela and his "innovative" approach. Vilela put his ingenuity to use as head of the mission of Miyako and exploited systematically the pomp of public rituals to attract the interest of possible converts. For instance, on the occasion of the first public funeral of the local Christian community, to highlight the solemnity of the occasion, he headed the procession donning a brocade cape and riding a red litter (*Historia*, 2: 104).<sup>39</sup> Instructed by his fellow missionaries, Japanese brother Lourenço, and two *dōjuku*,<sup>40</sup> Damião and Diogo, he was aware of the importance of funerals specifically and of the impact they would make in the eyes of the wider Japanese public (Vu Thanh 2014, 121). In his *Historia de Japam*, conscious

<sup>37</sup> "We are forced to spend our whole lives like secular clergy", lamented Valignano analysing the setbacks affecting the Japanese mission in a letter to the General of the 27 October 1580 (1954, 134\*).

<sup>38</sup> The process is not dissimilar to the one described by Roach-Higgins and Eicher: "Leaders in a political structure like a monarchy take on public identities as representatives of their state when they present themselves in rituals with robes, crowns, and scepters" (1992, 6).

<sup>39</sup> Translated in Vu Thanh 2014, 121.

<sup>40</sup> The *dōjuku* were Japanese lay auxiliaries, whose help ranged from menial tasks to preaching and proselytising. An overview of the evolution of their tasks is found in Brockey 2014, 364-6.

of the possible criticism an excessive display could raise, Frois explicitly pointed out the reasons and context of this kind of behaviour: “[Vilela was] intrepid and zealous for the honour of God and knew how important this [ceremony] was, since it was the first public funeral done with solemnity” (*Historia*, 2: 104). This practice continued until the beginning of the seventeenth century, as can be seen in the grandiose funerals and memorial masses for the Christian lady Hosokawa Tama Gracia (Nawata Ward 2009, 235; 281-5; 324-5). The importance attributed to death rituals in Japanese Buddhism was such that it seems that initially many had refused to convert because they believed Christians did not have funerals (López-Gay 1970, 208-9).

The missionaries noted that these beautiful, foreign objects proved very successful with the Japanese Christians, and solemn rituals made thus common use of silks, gold, silver, and colours as decorations, not limited to the body of the priest. For this reason, decorative objects such as silk banners, used during funerals, were often imported from Europe (Vu Thanh 2014, 116-18). A funeral officiated by Giovanni Battista de Monte in the 1570s in Bungo, for instance, used a casket covered in damask, carried on floats decorated in golden damask with small painted windowsills; on its top was a reproduction of Mt Calvary made in gold and silver, together with a golden cross; on each side, a long silver processional candlestick (*cirial*), with a golden candle; and in front, twelve banners made of white silk, each with the depiction of one of the instruments of the Passion (*EVORA*, 1: 291r).

Solemnity was considered a key element in baptisms as well. In his *Historia*, Frois described a curious episode that aimed to demonstrate to the European public the relevance that, according to the missionaries, ritual opulence had in the eyes of the Japanese: in 1574, while Cabral was baptising some noblemen in the fortress of Takatsuki, an old Christian approached him, asking to be baptised again. When rebuked that he should know one receives baptism only once, the man replied that when he had been baptised by Vilela, the priest had just thrown some water at him, without all the pomp and luxury Cabral was displaying, so he was not sure if that was actually a valid baptism:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The same event, described by Frois in a letter dated 9 September 1577 (*EVORA*, 1: 392v) has instead Cabral wearing a surplice, which is a simpler white garment derived from the *tunica alba*, worn over the cassock (Mayo 1984, 174-5). This letter downplays the luxury described by the old Japanese man and highlights instead the solemnity of the rite, probably aiming to giving priority to the edification of the readers.

Seeing this altar so ornate, this cope<sup>42</sup> you are wearing, and these pieces for the baptism that are so lustrous and rich, I was envious of these gentlemen and I wondered if, because of the poverty in which the Father found himself, lacking all these things, I was baptised or not; but now that you calmed my fears, I am very thankful to God Our Lord to have let me live long enough to see these solemnities in these parts of Gokinai. (*Historia*, 2: 415)

The opulence of the rituals, described to liven the often-repetitive list of sacred exploits of missionary literature, was rhetorically justified by the approval expressed by the Japanese for the luxurious ornaments: on the occasion of the Easter procession of 1580, “everything was so perfect, and well organised, that everybody was impressed by the order, and the ceremonies, and by the rich ornaments [that Valignano] had brought [...], all of them decorated so that the Christians were happy and very satisfied with what they saw”.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with both European and Japanese traditions,<sup>44</sup> therefore, the use of luxurious items and cloths on special religious occasions appears to have been widespread since the 1550s. This aspect of the activity of the Jesuits in Japan appears to have been accepted in good order by Cabral, who seems to have never censored it. The fact that he himself was part of a rite that made use of luxurious instruments, decorations, and garments suggests that he understood both the role of the Jesuits as secular clergy and pastors of the Japanese flock, and the deep connection found between luxury and holiness in some Catholic traditions.

## 2.4 Debates on Silk Garments

The missionaries had therefore perceived a connection between the richness of their ritual clothes and decorations, and their success with the Japanese. However, while liturgical luxurious garments, among which some were made of silk, had been implicitly approved by Cabral as a tool for the greater glory of God, the same could not be said about the use of silk for other activities and social rituals.

<sup>42</sup> A cope is a “ceremonial version of an outdoor cloak worn during the latter days of the Roman Empire. It is basically a semi-circular piece of cloth held together at the front by a clasp or a ‘morse’. The cope is worn at non-Eucharist ceremonies (i.e., baptism, marriage, and procession) in the place of the chasuble [...] In the West the cope is a general ecclesiastical robe of splendour and has never been a distinctive clerical vestment” (Mayo 1884, 146).

<sup>43</sup> Lourenço Mexia to the General, Japan, 1580 (*EVORA*, 1: 465v).

<sup>44</sup> Jesuit descriptions of Japanese Buddhist funerals, with specific attention given to the clothes of the monks officiating, can be found in López-Gay 1970, 197-208.

Cabral held in contempt the garments the missionaries used to disguise themselves for reasons of personal safety, for instance, both because they were a trickery that hid their identity as Christians, and because, by the time Cabral arrived in Japan, the Jesuits could afford to have them made of silk. Lack of faith in the protection of God and vanity were the charges that Cabral moved against this practice.

The introduction of silk kimono<sup>45</sup> had been caused by the dangerous situation of Japan, which at the time was characterised by a nearly continuous state of war. The roads were often unsafe, and the political situation could change drastically and suddenly, which often left the missionaries no other solution than escape, leaving behind their belongings and their communities. To try to blend in more easily, they soon started the practice of disguising themselves as poor travelling monks. It was precisely during an emergency caused by the civil war that a record of a disguise appears for the first time, creating a curious precedent. Father Baltasar Gago and Brother Guilherme had been kidnapped in Hakata (Fukuoka) and, to enable them to escape from the city undetected, the local Christians had them disguised as *bikuni*, that is, Buddhist nuns.<sup>46</sup>

Gago emerged too traumatised from this experience to carry on his work in Japan. Keen to reopen the mission in the capital city, in 1559, Torres opted to send Gaspar Vilela in his stead. For this trip, Vilela states he was “not going [dressed] as a father, but as a house brother, and to be more secretive he [wore] the clothes of a Buddhist monk” (*DJ*, 2: 224).<sup>47</sup> Frois’ *Historia* explains that the group:

left for that new and strange peregrination [...] without taking with them the ornaments for the mass, to pass more freely among the gentiles, because they just went to explore the territory. They all went, as is the custom in the land, with shaved heads and beards, wearing their poor *kimono*, conforming to the intent of their pilgrimage. (*Historia*, 1: 137-8)

While the image of the pilgrim is used here by Frois to link these Jesuits to the Ignatian tradition, at the same time, it is the figure of Francis Xavier that he evokes: in the first preserved description of Jesuit dress in Japan, Xavier’s clothes were said to be too light for the cold Japanese winter and rather poor in appearance; he would wear a

<sup>45</sup> This is the word that Cabral’s letters and other sources used to identify the Japanese dress used by the missionaries in this period; kimonos are not, of course, the only Japanese garment made of silk.

<sup>46</sup> Luís de Almeida to Melchor Nunes Barreto, Funai, approx. 20 November 1559 (*DJ*, 2: 224). Not surprisingly, both *COIMBRA* and *EVORA* omit the reference to clothes of religious women, arguably not considered very edifying.

<sup>47</sup> This whole passage too is omitted in *EVORA* and *COIMBRA*.



Siamese *biro* (a kind of hat) but no shoes (*Historia*, 1: 35-6).<sup>48</sup> By creating a connection between Vilela and Xavier, Frois could validate and justify the travellers' decision to dress in this way, regardless of the general consensus on the matter at the time of writing or reading.

Just as he did when superficially describing Xavier's clothing, Frois followed the normal consuetude of Jesuit writings to not mention the colour or any other feature of Vilela's *kimono*, only its poverty. An exception to this tendency to avoid details that sheds light on the nature of the garments is the description by Luís de Almeida of his 1562 travelling *kosode* in northern Kyūshū:<sup>49</sup>

The way in which I travel through this land, and I speak with these noblemen is in the manner of their monks: with shaved head and beard, which you have to do every time you go to speak with a nobleman, in lands where we are not well known. The clothes [I wear] are like a gown, a bit shorter, except for the fact that they have much larger and very short sleeves. Everybody wraps themselves with their belts and, on top, they wear a black veil. I dress like this when I see it is necessary, because when the local people see our clothes, which they never saw before, they never leave you [alone] nor have that regard [that is] proper of those who enjoy receiving the law of God from you. In this manner we go among friends and enemies preaching the law of God in every place we find ourselves. And they respect this habit so much that everywhere the laity makes way for you.<sup>50</sup>

While he did not specifically mention safety as a reason behind the use of monk's attire, Almeida wrote that the travel clothes used by the Jesuits allowed them to pass "among friends and enemies". Furthermore, he highlighted the connection between the prestige conferred by the habit and the safety to travel anywhere.<sup>51</sup>

A similar reasoning is found in Francisco Rodrigues' answer, in the second half of the decade of 1560s, regarding the propriety of adopting a completely shaved head:

<sup>48</sup> As mentioned above, during his later travels Xavier created the precedent for wearing better clothes, possibly silk (since it was rather common), when in audience with daimyō or other authorities.

<sup>49</sup> The *kosode* was the model of all Japanese dress. It was a short-sleeved, loose robe that could be made of different materials (silk for the richer classes, rougher cloth or cotton for the poor). Perez 2002, 89-90.

<sup>50</sup> Luís de Almeida to the Jesuits in Europe, Yokoseura, 25 October 1562 (*DJ*, 2: 565-6).

<sup>51</sup> The occasions of these trips, connected to the funding of the first Jesuit port of Japan, are described in *DJ*, 2: 533-4. Cf. Hesselink 2016, 19-21. The paragraphs quoted here have been edited out of some manuscript copies and printed editions, highlighting again how the matter was considered delicate.

Question 44: Can a Father have his head and his beard shaved, as he seems to be conforming to Buddhist monks by doing so?

Answer: Considered that it is not just monks who are shaved in this manner, but also many honoured merchants, medics, and kings, and princes, and finally all those who refuse all honours and things of the world, and signal it in this way; and considered that all those who are shaved in this manner have more freedom to speak with the lords and with others about the things of God, and can travel more freely; and considered that those people of Miyako have little respect for men who are only tonsured, because among them it is a sign of being lowly people, and for this reason they do not accept the doctrine from them [...] I think there can be no doubt that a Father can have his head and his beard shaved, when he believes this is for the service of God...<sup>52</sup>

The previous authorisation obtained from Goa's theologian might be the main cause behind the insistence of the missionaries on this point of safety and liberty of movement, when defending their use of silk kimono to Cabral, even if neither the question nor the answer in this case mention garments.

However, Cabral was never convinced by this argument. It is possible to individuate two causes behind his refusal: the first was that he did not believe his brethren when they argued that Japan was a dangerous country for missionaries or, in other words, that no place was dangerous if one travelled with God's protection. Describing his visitation to Miyako of 1571, Cabral wrote to the Indian Provincial:

They tried to frighten me, and importuned me with reasons for changing my dress, and leave behind the cassock and the cape, and cover my tonsure so that I would save my life [by being] anonymous. But since I already had experience of fears and difficulties that were fantasies of faithless people, I trusted God, who can make fierce lions meek as lambs when He so wishes, and the virtue of the holy obedience which was the reason why I was undertaking that voyage. I decided that neither I nor the [Japanese] brother [João de Torres]<sup>53</sup> would change the garments of the Society, and so, without any silk or insignia of monks, we went on our voyage,

<sup>52</sup> "Resposta de alguns cazos que os padres de Japão Mandaram perguntar", transcribed in Pinto, Pires 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Japanese Brother João de Torres was Cabral's interpreter during this visitation and many others more. He had been baptised as an infant by Cosme de Torres around 1550 and had been dōjuku in Miyako in the 1560s (*Historia*, 2: 107). He entered the Society in 1569 or 1570 (*MonJap*, 113), but appears in the official catalogues of Japan only from 1576 (*MonJap*, 106). He was dismissed from the Society some time before 1612 (*MonJap*, 1313).

always declaring myself a Father of the Society, even if unworthy. And my hope was not misguided, and when we boarded the ship we started feeling the Lord's mercy, because not only the sailors and the heathen passengers did us no offence, but they treated us with politeness and courtesy.<sup>54</sup>

Cabral thus believed that his use of the cassock and his visual statement of being a Jesuit had had specific positive effects on the success of his missionary endeavours, as these actions granted divine protection. He states this explicitly in a later letter to a layman: both the Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshiaki and Oda Nobunaga had showed him favour, even if he was “dressed so poorly”; some important men converted, thanks to his poor appearance; and others asked to be sent a preacher.<sup>55</sup>

Cabral characterises his garments by pointing out two elements: they were not made of silk, and they did not have any “insignia of monks”. The latter feature is not mentioned often, and it does indeed seem secondary in the discussion on the propriety of missionary garments. Years later, when commenting on the adoption of Buddhist garb by Jesuit missionaries Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci in China, Cabral wrote: “As for the dress, there was no change, they went like before, in a completely proper way, following the uses of the land”.<sup>56</sup> The cause of this acceptance is probably to be found in the similarities between the Jesuit cassock and the Chinese Buddhist garb.<sup>57</sup> The second element of import in Cabral's garments was the lack of silk, which suggests that the clothes used by his brethren to travel were no longer like the poor kimono used by Vilela. It is therefore possible that, in the intervening years, there had been a change in the garments that the missionaries could afford when travelling, probably around the mid-1560s, coinciding with the beginning of the use of silks decried by Cabral.

If the materiality of the disguises used by the Jesuits during their travels appears to be less important in these discussions, it is arguably because Cabral saw it as the initial cause of the sinful behaviour of his brethren. He appears to hold the worry over personal safety as a worse error because it was a demonstration of lack of faith. Framing his wearing of a cassock as evidence of his own zeal,

<sup>54</sup> Cabral to Antonio de Quadros, Nagasaki, 23 September 1572, in Cortes 9/2663, 85r-v.

<sup>55</sup> Cabral to a man outside the Society [Stephanus Laurantis], 29 September 1572, in JapSin 7, III, 99r.

<sup>56</sup> Cabral to Valignano, Macao, 5 December 1584, in Cortes 9/2663, 412v.

<sup>57</sup> These garments were only “slightly different” from the usual black cassock, according to Ruggieri (Brockey 2007, 33), while Ricci stated that they “dress[ed] in the manner of [Chinese] Fathers, which is a little different from ours” (Rienstra 1986, 37). Ricci will change into the silk clothes of the literati only in 1595, after realising that Buddhist monks did not enjoy social prestige in China (Brockey 2007, 43).

instead, Cabral strongly implied that Nobunaga, the Shōgun, and all the other lords honoured him not despite his clothes, but thanks to them. This perspective was made explicit in a much later letter to General Acquaviva:

And God Our Lord helped with this matter, so that immediately his law started to gain reputation, and the Fathers were honoured more by king[s] and lords of Japan when they were dressed with black cotton [*canga*]<sup>58</sup> cassocks, than when they wore silk clothes and carried all that paraphernalia.<sup>59</sup>

The Japanese favour and the many conversions were therefore interpreted as a direct intervention of Providence (just as it had been before, in the form of kindness from other travellers: “we started feeling the Lord’s mercy”). For Cabral, thus, regardless of the danger, the only proper way to live as a Jesuit was to announce oneself as such and to preach fearlessly the name of Jesus Christ while travelling.<sup>60</sup>

Another frame of reference in Cabral’s narrative is obedience: “I trusted God [...] and the virtue of the holy obedience which was the reason why I was undertaking that voyage”. The specific workings of Jesuit obedience will be the focus of the next chapter; for now, it suffices to say that it linked Cabral’s actions to the structure of the Society of Jesus and, through it, to God’s will. In his eyes, wearing non-conforming garments meant abandoning this structure. Instead, by choosing his cassock and following his superiors’ orders, Cabral meant to uphold his vows and to reaffirm his belonging to the chosen group of the Society of Jesus. His narrative presents thus earthly favour and conversions as a divine boon, given as a reward for his actions. These kinds of interpretations show that Cabral’s understanding of the work of Grace was influenceable by human action.

Cabral thus interpreted the Jesuit custom of travelling disguised as a lack of faith in God, in holy obedience, and finally in the Society. This faithlessness was particularly worrying because it also took the shape of a dangerous Nicodemism, both when refusing the cassock and when using a monk’s attire. This camouflaging would push the Society in Japan too far asunder from its origins and core values. Cabral instead believed that the correct way to show faith was to openly declare oneself a Jesuit, to dress like a Jesuit and, in so

<sup>58</sup> *Canga* (or *ganga*): heavy cloth made of cotton, often from China (Golvers 1999, 521).

<sup>59</sup> Cabral to General Acquaviva, Kochi, 15 December 1593, in *DI*, 16: 546.

<sup>60</sup> Far from being a universal opinion, his interpretation contrasted, for example, with that of his contemporaries in England, who dressed as laymen to avoid being persecuted in Protestant lands, and who were forbidden by the General even to own a cassock that could identify them (McCoog 1996, 137). See also Tutino 2006.

doing, to become “a true servant of this saintly Society of Jesus”. In Cabral’s view, this attitude, understood as following the way of proceeding, appeared to be the most important element in the creation of a successful mission, one where God granted many conversions.<sup>61</sup>

Cabral’s point of view is further clarified in his response to the second instance in which the missionaries would use silk clothes: to gain social prestige among the Japanese. This was articulated through two different but correlated aspects: the possibility for conversions and the Jesuits’ relationship with the higher classes. The first was a problem of prestige in the wider community:

Father Organtino and the Japanese Brother Lourenço came visiting me dressed in silks. Before changing clothes, they gave me some reasons, even [crossed out: telling] [overwritten: suggesting] me that we should not change. Summarizing their reasons: the hindrance it would be to the growing of Christendom for the ridicule we would be subjected to, since we wore a viler habit than [Japanese] monks. However, since I had experience that these were human fears and wrong persuasions, I wanted to see how many stones they would throw at me, and I went out in the streets of Sakai to sightsee, with my cloth garments, and Brother João [dressed] in the same way. Lourenço came with us with his silk dress, while Father Organtino stayed in the house. And walking through the main streets of the city, only in one some children followed me, without doing anything worse than looking at me as if frightened by a new thing, and sometimes they would call me [Deus]. (RAH, Cortes 9/2663, 90r-v)

The fact that this was a very limited experience, since Sakai had an established Christian community and was relatively safe, did not stop Cabral from drawing the conclusion that the Jesuits would not be ridiculed in the streets of the whole of Japan, and conversions would not suffer. To further support his position, Cabral asked for counsel from “some of the most important citizens of Sakai” who, it stood to reason, would know the Japanese context better. They all concurred that it would take some time for the Japanese to become familiar with the cassocks but that in the end they would accept them (Cortes 9/2663,

<sup>61</sup> The maintenance of the spirit of the Society as one of the keys for successful missions was not just Cabral’s interpretation. For instance, Luís Goncalves da Câmara expresses the same opinion in one of his letters of 1561: “Many souls depend on [the Portuguese Province], as many as are in the East, to whom nothing lacks to convert, except to send from here many people well taught and brought up in the spirit of the Society” (*DI*, 5: 18\*).

90r). Some days later, in Sanga, Cabral also consulted Sancho Sanga<sup>62</sup> on this matter:

Before leaving Sanga, I asked for Sanga-dono's opinion about this matter, since he is an old man of much experience, and also with much prudence and good sense. I asked him to answer me explicitly, with no reticence, for the obligation he had towards the things of God and His Church, what he thought about the change of clothing. If leaving the silks meant a difficulty for the service of God and the expansion of His Law, I would suspend this change until informing our superior in India. He answered that he believed that we should abandon the silks and let ourselves be known as religious [of the Society of Jesus], and we should not pay attention to the scorn we feared the gentiles would have towards us. (Cortes 9/2663, 94v–95r)<sup>63</sup>

This exchange is rhetorically construed to display, on the one hand, the willingness of Cabral to recognise the authority granted by direct experience to his brethren (both present and past) and to allow for an extension to consider further their objections. This fell within the acceptable practices of obedience of the Society of Jesus. On the other hand, the adoption of Sanga as a mouthpiece to present Cabral's point of view aimed to lend it credibility based on the deeper knowledge of Japanese culture and greater authority held by this venerable, high-ranking Christian. In the following lines, Cabral even uses Sanga's voice to rebuke his brethren ("If we, who were gentiles yesterday [...] wanted to be recognised as Christians, even if we are mocked, the more you, who are religious, and whose example we have to follow, should not refuse your specific clothing and to be recognised as such", Cortes 9/2663, 95r). Cabral was thus free to conclude that the assumption that the missionaries might lose their reputation with the population had no real foundation. As he had done with the concern about safety, he attributed it to misgivings and lack of faith.

The Jesuit relationship with the cultural elite of Japan, however, was a different matter. Regardless of their political decline, Miyako and its courts were still considered the cultural heart of the country, and to maintain a presence there was important for the prestige of Catholicism.<sup>64</sup> Public recognition by the city's authorities, expressed

<sup>62</sup> Sancho Sanga, head of the Shirai family who served in the nearby fortress of Iimori (Kawachi Province), was one of the oldest converts of the country.

<sup>63</sup> The missionaries often used the suffix '-dono' (from *tono*, lord) to address men in position of power.

<sup>64</sup> Miyako was also considered one of the most important cities for Buddhist institutions, and it was vital for the Jesuits to know how to move in the political landscape of the city to avoid being defeated and eradicated by their religious rivals. See Zampol

mostly through the granting of audiences, would facilitate proselytising among the higher classes, in the region and through the country. Francis Xavier's failure to obtain an audience with the emperor, due to his lack of gifts and poor appearance, had revealed the missionaries' initial inability to navigate the complex cultural milieu of the capital city, aggravated by the impossibility to summon there both the Portuguese carrack and the key support of its commerce.

It is therefore not surprising that it was in Miyako, away from the control of the Bungo superiors, that most of the cultural experimentation of the missionaries took place (Ribeiro 2007, 22). Luís Frois gave a detailed explanation of the problem about clothes that arose there:

Aside from the common obligation that existed [to visit the Shōgun for the New Year], the gentiles would not have a great concept of the law of God, nor regard the fathers with esteem, if they saw them defrauded or excluded from this visitation, that is so honourable and solemn to them. And also because the Japanese commonly do not esteem foreigners more than their exterior and the dress they wear, because even the monks in these days work to make a great display of themselves: therefore, the old Christians of Miyako, following whose experience the father [Vilela] had to behave, insistently begged the fathers to allow as much [flexibility] as possible in the clothes, since these great lords were proud, and would be affronted and insulted if the fathers had appeared in front of them with common and ordinary clothes. [Good clothes] would reflect better credit and reputation on the Christians, at least in those initial origins, when the gentiles did not know yet the dignity of the clergy and of Christian religion. (*Historia*, 2: 13)

If this passage, as the one quoted above on zeal, is structured to exonerate Vilela's actions in the eyes of the reader, the impact that the Japanese converts' requests would have had on the missionaries cannot be underestimated. There was, however, another problem to overcome before complying with court etiquette: the mission of Miyako was very poor (2: 415). Since Vilela did not have enough funds to buy silk Japanese clothes, he used what he owned already: clerical and liturgical vestments. The mission had recently been endowed with rich Western clothes that Barreto's group had brought to Japan with them. A 1554 list shows how among them there were many pieces made of brocade and other rich materials and colours

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D'Ortia, Dolce, Pinto 2021. Moreover, the people of Miyako were regarded as the most apt to convert to Christianity because they were the most refined (Cortes 9/2663, 106v).

(white and crimson velvet, blue camlet, etc.).<sup>65</sup> Thus, on his first visit to the Shōgun, Vilela wore a surplice and a stole; then a mantle and a new cassock of cloth of Portugal; for his third visit, in 1565, he wore an open cassock made of camlet,<sup>66</sup> an old cope with orphreys,<sup>67</sup> made of brocade of Hormuz,<sup>68</sup> and his hat. On this same occasion, Frois wore a mantle, a cassock, and Chinese slippers of twisted sewing silk (*chapins de retroz*). They both were riding in a litter, with a retinue of fifteen or twenty Christians each, carrying precious gifts for the Shōgun, among which there was a European wide-brimmed hat (*sombreiro*) (*Historia*, 2: 13-14). Once new funds were acquired, however, it seems that the Jesuits preferred to use local silk clothes. It is possible that the belief that “[good clothes] would reflect better credit and reputation on the Christians” prompted them, later, to commonly use silks when outside the residences, instead of only when visiting upper-class people, which would be then extended also to incognito travel, slowly substituting the poor monks’ disguises.

Miyako was the main destination of Cabral’s visitation of 1571. There he called for a consultation on the matter of the silk garments, together with fathers Organtino and Frois, and brother Lourenço. When they expressed their reticence, Cabral decided to do the same experiment he had done in Sakai and walked out in the middle of the festivities for the Gion *matsuri*, the major festival of the capital. Since nobody appeared to react negatively, even when he showed up among the people waiting to see the Shōgun, he went back home and had cassocks made for all his brethren in the area. Cabral’s satisfaction is evident as he describes the other missionaries accepting his orders “as obedient children [in the Lord]” (Cortes 9/2663, 95r).

The Jesuits’ new clothes were the cause of some friction during the visit they made to the Shōgun, since some of his attendants did

**65** “Rol do fato que o Padre Mestre Melchior levou pera o Japão o anno de 1554”, in *DI*, 3: 196-205. The most luxurious pontifical set was returned by Torres to India, because the small dimensions of the Japanese Christian community did not justify its use in Japan (Cabral to the General Mercurian, Usuki, 15 October 1578, in *JapSin* 8, I, 203r).

**66** An open cassock (*loba aberta*) is an “old scholastic dress; composed by an open tunic, which overlaps at the front, sleeveless, and a cowl”, in Silva, “Loba aberta”. As for the material (*chamalote*), “camlet was originally 100% mohair [silky material made of hair of Angora goat], warp faced, and with a distinctive glossy finish [...] Camlets woven in Europe always contained at least some fiber other than mohair” (Jirousek 2008).

**67** An orphrey (*savastros*) is a “highly elaborate embroidery work, or a piece of such embroidery. More specifically orphrey is an ornamental border, or embroidered band, especially as used on ecclesiastical vestments. Orphreys often utilized cloth of gold, gold trimming, or gold and silk weft, or filling. They were frequently woven several bands wide and then cut apart” (s.v. “Orphrey”).

**68** Brocade (*borcado* in the text) is a “woven fabric having a raised floral or figured design that is introduced during the weaving process [...] usually made in a satin or twill weave. The background may be twill, satin, or plain weave. The rich, fairly heavy fabric is frequently used for evening dresses, draperies, and upholstery” (s.v. “Brocade”).



not consider them fit to be admitted in the presence of their lord. However, in the end, the Shōgun welcomed them with “many compliments”. Cabral attributed this success too to divine favour: “the virtue of holy obedience and the poverty of Christ were more powerful”, he wrote, than any “secular silk” (Cortes 9/2663, 95v).<sup>69</sup> In any case, the Shōgun was very interested in the form of the European clothes, particularly the sleeves, which seemed better suited to the cold than the larger sleeves of the *kimono*. In a scene that would in time become rather common,<sup>70</sup> he had Luís Froís remove his cape, to better see his cassock, and studied its buttons attentively.

After briefly discussing their tonsure, the Shōgun asked why, during his previous visits, he had his head shaved and was wearing different clothes. Froís replied that had been a strategy not to shock the people, in the manner of “a hunter dressed in green to catch his prey”. The Shōgun then commented that he did not think that was the reason; rather, it was that, since their superior was present, the Jesuits had not dared to dress differently from him. While this remark shows a less friendly aspect of the conversation, the visit was presented as a great success in Cabral’s letter, who attributed its favourable outcome to the “great honour Our Lord wanted to bestow upon our new poor clothing, to show that it is only He who can move the hearts, not the silk” (Cortes 9/2663, 97r).<sup>71</sup>

The party (without Organtino) then moved on to Gifu (in Mino), to visit Oda Nobunaga, who had just recently burned to the ground the nearby complex of Enryaku-ji, one of the main Buddhist institutions of the country.<sup>72</sup> Nobunaga too received them in a friendly way and showed interest in their change of clothing.<sup>73</sup> Cabral himself had just discovered that Nobunaga too wanted his retinue to be dressed in rough clothes, instead of the more common silk, an order that appears to be in line with Nobunaga’s renowned disregard of

<sup>69</sup> It is possible that the gifts the Jesuits brought with them also helped: ten quires of paper, a golden fan, an oxtail, a piece of damask, and a small trinket made of gold. While the abundance of the presents is due to the rank of the host and to the fact that it was Cabral’s first visit, it is interesting to note that with time the Jesuits would greatly reduce the quantity and quality of their gifts, under the orders of Cabral himself.

<sup>70</sup> The scene is strongly reminiscent of Shōgun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi asking VOC merchants to take off and put back on their outerwear to show him the use of the buttons (Carlotto 2013, 11-12).

<sup>71</sup> The Shōgun’s comment on not wanting to dress differently from their superior is struck through in the manuscript, as are most unedifying elements.

<sup>72</sup> The visit to Nobunaga is described also in *Historia* (2: 359-63), where it is specified that he had everybody dressed finely on this occasion, in honour of the guests “from India”.

<sup>73</sup> In the *Historia*’s narrative, instead, Nobunaga makes only a passing comment on how he cannot give them silk clothing as a present, since it does not agree with those who wear black cloth (2: 362).

social norms.<sup>74</sup> As Cabral's letter put it, Nobunaga believed that, if his generals and soldiers wore clothing that was too fine, they would become effeminate. Far from being a casual statement, the fact that no additional comment is given to it hints that Cabral shared Nobunaga's assumptions about the negative effect of silk garments. This connection was not unknown in Europe, where for example foreign items of clothing were seen as jeopardising the "valour of the Spaniards" by making them effeminate (Juárez Almendros 2006, 22-3). This connection added a troubling element to the Jesuit association with silk because femininity was held to be more corruptible by the Devil and more easily persuaded to sin (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006, 83). In any case, coming from the highest authority in the country, whom the missionaries at the time believed to be guided by Providence, such an opinion was reported in Cabral's letters to lend support to his reform of Jesuit dress as well. Indeed, the meeting with Nobunaga sealed Cabral's opinion on the matter: if the local elites were amenable to the cassock, and the supreme authorities of the country agreed with the principles behind it, the other missionaries had clearly exaggerated the importance of fine appearance.

Cabral's decision to change the garments that the missionaries had adopted, either to disguise themselves during voyages or to respect local etiquette with sumptuous clothing, would be definitive until the persecutions forced them to hide and use disguises. The rules regarding garments that were established during the Jesuit first consultation (1580) in Japan read:

the ordinary and common garment should be the cassock and the dobuko with a raised collar in the manner of cloaks, with a round cap and tabi,<sup>75</sup> for this is commonly our habit and is accepted in Japan. (Valignano 1954, 247)

It is still possible to still see the full dress of the Jesuits in Japan in some *biombos nanban*,<sup>76</sup> Japanese folding screens that depicted scenes with European characters. In these screens, the missionaries wear a black cassock, which almost completely covers the undershirt, as per the regulation. Both garments are heavier than the light ones used in India, since Japan's climate is colder, and are made of heavier cotton (*ganga*). The most interesting detail is possibly the head

<sup>74</sup> On Oda Nobunaga's rather eccentric character, see Lamers 2000.

<sup>75</sup> A tabi is "a sock with a separate section for the big toe" (s.v. "Tabi"), worn with *shikirei* (sandals).

<sup>76</sup> In Japanese, *nanban byōbu*. See, for example, the untitled piece held at the Museu de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, attributed to the Kano school and dated between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century (description and photographic reproductions available in Curvelo 2024).

covering: the Jesuits of the Assistance of Portugal wore a *barrete redondo*, or *pileus rotundus*, that is, a rounded “cap which resembled in form a hat from which the brim had been removed” (Borges 1994, 31-2). Originally used by university students, it substituted the biretta in India (Osswald 2011, 507) and Japan. However, when they were travelling and visiting people of importance, the missionaries would also wear a long black cape and a wide brimmed black hat, which often appear on the Japanese depictions.

## 2.5 Devilish Presences and Absences

On 10 September 1573, Francisco Cabral sombrely informed the General in Rome that the ship of Visitor Gonçalo Álvares had sunk near the port of Nagasaki, with immense loss of missionary lives and funds. Despite this tragedy, at least the state of the Japanese mission seemed to finally be improving:

Thanks to God's goodness, there is no small improvement, especially in the matter of the silks that the Fathers wore, and the other luxuries they had, under the pretext that this was the better service of God and the preaching of His law; this was the cape that the Devil was using, to cover up the evils that [this practice] entailed. Now thanks to God's goodness they finally all wear clothes of black cotton with cassocks. (JapSin 7, I, 166Av)

By 1573, Cabral thus considered the matter of the silk garments closed. His narrative of the whole affair, summarised in this letter, interpreted it as a trick orchestrated by the Devil, who had insinuated himself in the mission and convinced the Jesuits that the grave sin they were committing was in service of God. Fortunately, it was implied that Cabral's heroic intervention had saved the mission from the attack of the cosmic enemy and allowed it to regain God's favour, granting its redemption.

The figure of the Devil appeared frequently in the *mise-en-scène* of missionary literature of the early modern period.<sup>77</sup> It was a flexible and effectual device in the missionaries' interpretive toolkit of extra-European cultures and landscapes. It allowed them to explain their familiar and unfamiliar elements alike and return them to a known, and vaguely consistent, framework. If violent weather and habits perceived

<sup>77</sup> European literature of the years from 1550 to 1650 made ample use of the figure of the Devil as a way to interpret the many destabilizing events of the period, from the Reformation to the uncertainties caused by European expansion (Muehlembled 2003, 151-2). See also Torres Londoño 2002, 23. For examples of the Devil's presence in early modern missionary literature, see Cañizares-Esguerra 2006; Goddard 1997; Sweet 2008.

as strange could be attributed to the Devil's malign influence over foreign peoples and lands, it was also true that the enemy of mankind could imitate, sometimes in a perfect opposite, the work of God. Religious practices, then, if similar enough to Christian ones, could be explained away by evoking the figure of the *simia dei*, God's ape (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006, 102-3; 124). The trope of the Devil as an imitating ape dates to the twelfth or thirteenth century, although it is traditionally attributed to the Church Fathers, in whose writings already appear fundamental elements that compose the trope (Zwi Werblowsky 1972; Rudwin 1929). The European encounter with new peoples in the early modern period reinvigorated it, making it an interpretative strategy that facilitated the condemnation of other religions and their discursive subjugation by assimilation into a Christian worldview.<sup>78</sup>

In Japan too, after a brief attempt at interpreting local religious practices as a long-lost memory of Christianity, the Jesuits established that they were instead an imitation created by the Devil: Francis Xavier believed Buddhas to be demons; in 1555, Baltasar Gago confidently wrote: "the devil [in Japan] has sustenance from ten sects he brought from China". By the following year, the so-called *Sumario de los errores*, a manual composed by a team of dedicated missionaries to denounce Buddhist doctrine, firmly established Buddhism as the work of the Devil (Zampol D'Ortia, Dolce, Pinto 2021, 73-8).

Cabral too perceived the country as being held in the clutches of the Devil. His letters often describe it as a physical presence, which needed to be exorcised by priests or by faithful Christians. Cabral positioned himself as a Christian hero who was fighting in the cosmic battle of Good against Evil, saving the mission from the influence of the Devil, with the help of God. This is, however, where this tendency ends. Contrary to the descriptions of other non-European peoples that appear in this century (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006, 84-6), Cabral does not appear to perceive the Japanese as slaves of the Devil, nor as generally under his influence. This does not mean that, overall, he described their national character positively: he considers them "very barbarous" in their manner of government due to the liberty he attributes to the masters to kill their servants without consequences. "They pride themselves of the fact that nobody can understand their hearts, and of deceiving others. Among themselves they use many praises, and always smile, and are very sly" (JapSin 7, I, 20v). Cabral thus felt that, excluding possessions, the influence of the Devil on Japanese people mostly related to Buddhism.

The whole debacle on garments took on, in this way, a cosmic dimension in Cabral's narrative: the enemy of humankind had found

<sup>78</sup> As such, it can be described as an act of exclusive similarity, as it "represent[s] diverging positions as aberrant imitations" (Josephson Storm 2012, 24; 28-9).

a way into the mission through the European missionaries. He had tempted them through the softness of silk, and their woman-like weakness had allowed them to discard their vow of poverty. Their sinful lust of the eyes, caused by their appreciation of silks, had led to proud behaviour, a search for vainglory, and a lack of humility: “[their] excuses seemed immediately to be founded on pride” (JapSin 7, I, 23v). This, in turn, had eroded their ability to respect their vow of obedience.<sup>79</sup> The negative influence of the world, in the specific form it took in Japan, had contaminated the missionaries, and they had lost sight of the way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits, as Cabral presented them, had become fearful and lost faith in God, and chose to carry out the work of evangelisation using human means, such as Japanese garments, rather than trusting in Providence. They had let themselves be tricked by the Devil.

In this context, the imposition of the black cassock was supposed to grant success for the future of the mission. However, Cabral's smooth narrative of success in his fight against the Devil met a hitch when the Visitor died:

I believed that, this year, I would write to Your Paternity again with better news on the abundant harvest that I was sure God Our Lord would do [through] us of the Society, who live in these lands. And [also] about the conversion of the gentility of this land, with the coming of the Father Visitor Gonçalo Álvares, and the fathers who were accompanying him, with whose arrival I hoped some of the need for workers in this land would be fulfilled. But since the reasons of God cannot be understood, and His secrets are so profound that there is nobody who can reach them, He wanted that everything was capsized, so that the only thing one can do is to close one's eyes to understanding and say, with the prophet, *judicia dei abissus multa*.<sup>80</sup> [...] God executed the sentence he had pronounced against the [Visitor's] carrack [...] pushed the carrack underwater, and killed those who sailed in it, among them the Father Visitor and all his five companions [...] we never found anybody, praise be to the Lord.<sup>81</sup>

Cabral's narrative, in this passage, explicitly indicates this disaster as willed by God. There is no suggestion that behind it there might be the Devil, who was known to cause natural disasters, especially deadly tropical storms (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006, 124). Still, Cabral,

<sup>79</sup> On the sins of lust of eyes and pride of life, and their connection to the religious vows, see Howard 1966, 45-55.

<sup>80</sup> “[God's] justice is like the great depths of the sea” (Ps., 36:7).

<sup>81</sup> Francisco Cabral to Francis Borja, 10 September 1573, in JapSin 7, I, 166Ar.

reticent as he often was, did not follow his own reasoning to the end and did not yet describe this as a divine punishment for the breaking of the vow of poverty. God's "sentence against the carrack" was a judgement that could not be understood by reason and could only be accepted. Cabral trusted God to provide for them still, after the loss of most of their funds, if they complied with their obligations (JapSin 7, I, 166Av). This sentiment appeared again in a missive to the Provincial of India on 8 September 1573:

I hope in the Lord that, if we labour to be as we are supposed to be, and build our foundations in humility, poverty, and obedience (me especially, as I need this more than anybody else), God Our Lord will make use of us, even if unworthy, as tools for the conversion of many thousands of souls.<sup>82</sup>

Cabral, however, did not know yet that Quadros had died the previous year and that his own hope would be short-lived.

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<sup>82</sup> Cabral to Antonio de Quadros, Provincial of India, 8 September 1573, in JapSin 7, I, 159r.