

Sidotti in Manila (1704-1708)

INTRODUCTION

This is the last of a series of three essays concerning the Italian missionary Giovanni Battista Sidotti. The other two have already been published in "Philippiniana Sacra" N. 42, vol. XIV of Sept.-Dec. 1979 and in N. 45, vol. XV of Sept.-Dec. 1980, with the titles of "The adventurous Landing in Japan of Abbé Giovanni B. Sidotti in 1708", and "Giovanni Battista Sidotti in Japan", respectively.

The following study deals with the sojourn of Sidotti in Manila from 1704 to 1708, before leaving for Japan to preach the Gospel.

The years spent in Manila were very intense for Sidotti, whose character always urged him to devote himself completely to the promotion of the faith. In the following pages I have tried to summarize briefly the events in which he was involved.

The sources used for this study are the result of my research in two directions: Manila and Spain.

1) Manila. Universidad de Santo Tomás. Archivo de la Universidad.

i) Sección de Libros. Tomo 59, pp. 293-294v; 319-320; 327-330v.

Tomo 60, pp. 1-2. (pp. 1-1v contain the letter written by Sidotti attached in the Appendix).

ii) Sección de Becerros. Tomo 24, pp. 14v-16; 54v-56;

2) Spain. Sevilla. Archivo General de Indias. Filipinas 308 A 6 I.

Noticias privadas de Manila, Capital de las Islas Philippinas con relaciones que hace un vasallo de Nuestro Amado Monarcha Phe-lipo Quinto, que Dios guarde. Manila, Junio 22 de 1702 años.

(Noticias pribadas de Manila sobre las operaciones del Abad Sidotti, uno de los Compañeros que llevó el Patriarca de Antiochía don Thomás Carlos de Tournon.)

Sidotti arrived at Cavite (near Manila) on September 19th, 1704, via Africa and India, together with the special envoy of Pope Clement XI, Thomas Charles de Tournon, who was entrusted with the task of investigating the "question of the rites"¹ in China.

The Philippines, discovered by Magellan in 1521, had become a Spanish colony in 1565 and the organization of the local religious community dates from the last part of the XVI century. By the XVII century, the Philippines had become the bulwark of the Christian faith in the Far East, thanks to the evangelical effort of the Spanish clergy.

Sidotti remained in Manila for four years, from 1704 to 1708 waiting for a favourable occasion to cross the sea to Japan.² During this period, he was engaged in intense activity that I shall sum up roughly according to what is reported in the documents known so far.

While in Manila, Sidotti carried out three major activities: 1) the restoration of the San Juan de Dios Hospital using the alms that he himself collected; 2) the study of the Japanese language and 3) his concern for the foundation of a Seminary.

As to the first point, there is nothing else to add since there is no extant documentation on the matter, as far as I know.

¹ The "question of the rites" has its origins in the fact that in China, some European missionaries saw it fit to adapt in some matters the doctrine of the Christian faith to the local customs. Hence the worries of the Pope for possible deviations from orthodoxy.

² Though there are no sources on the subject, it seems that Sidotti tried twice unsuccessfully to go to Japan. On the matter see: Pedro Rubio Merino, *El Arzobispo Camacho y Avila*, Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, Sevilla, 1958, p. 425, note. 73.

The second point has been a subject of investigation by Prof. Miyazaki³ who confirms that Sidotti busied himself with the study of the Japanese language in order to be able to preach the faith in Japan. More interesting are the words of Prof. Matsuda⁴ who says that Sidotti got in touch with the descendents of the Christian refugees who had fled from Japan to the Philippines, and who, however, by that time had almost forgotten the language of their ancestors. Consequently Sidotti could not find adequate teachers. His only help was provided by the books on the Japanese language printed by the missionaries in Japan at the end of the XVI century and the beginning of the next.

Anyhow, he obviously did not progress very much as later Arai Hakuseki, his Japanese cross-examiner reported that "(Sidotti) could distinguish only such words as Nagasaki, Edo and Japan".⁵

The third point concerning his activity for the construction of the Manila Seminary is better supported by written evidence.⁶ It is a rather complex question, therefore I shall try to report the most relevant points.

When Sidotti arrived in the Philippines, in 1704, Don Diego Camacho y Avila (1695-1706) was Archbishop of Manila. He requested from the King of Spain, Philip V, the authorization for the founding of a Diocesan Seminary in Manila, in accordance with what the Council of Trent (1545-63) had established, that is, the compulsoriness of founding a Seminary in every diocese.

The King replied favourably to the request for the foundation of a Seminary in which eight young Filipinos would be lodged. The Seminary was to be built near the Cathedral. The purpose was that of creating a base for a local clergy who would take charge of the evangelization of the natives. However, the opposition to the project by the Governor General of the Philippines, Don Domingo Zababuru, was strong enough to cause continuous delay to the starting of the works.

When Sidotti arrived, therefore, things were at a standstill. Sidotti with his typical apostolical zeal took the matter to heart

³ Miyazaki Michiô, *Arai Hakuseki no Yôgaku to Kaigai Chishiki*, Tokyo, 1973, p. 206.

⁴ Matsuda Ki'ichi, *Shidotti no Nihon Sen'nyû*, p. 130-131, in: *Dai Kôkai Jidai no Nihon*, N. 3, Shôgakukan, Tokyo, 1978.

⁵ Arai Hakuseki, *Seiyô Kibun*, Toyo Bunko, Heiboncha, Tokyo, 1976, p. 3.

⁶ See Introduction.

and did his best to carry on the founding of the Seminary. Above all, Sidotti endeared himself to the Governor General who dropped his opposition to the project. Thanks to the mediation of Sidotti, all kinds of difficulties were overcome. Now the Archbishop and Sidotti drew up a project, the purport of which was much wider than the original one: instead of restricting the Seminary to mere diocesan functions lodging only eight youths, they thought of a larger Seminary which was to serve the whole Philippines and that was even to become a centre of training for the missionaries of the whole Far East. According to this last project, the Seminary was to give lodging to eighty youths. It was undoubtedly an ambitious and costly project. Thus Sidotti devoted himself to the raising of funds. He was also entrusted with drafting the regulations of the Seminary, the name of which was to be St. Clement.

In the regulations, it was specified that the initial number of students was to be eight. The number would be increased to seventy or more in the course of time and in proportion to the revenues. Besides, it was clearly stated that the Seminary was to serve the missions in the whole of the Far East. It was the year 1706.

However, something unexpected happened. In the same year, the Archbishop Camacho y Avila was sent to Guadalajara in Mexico. Thus, Camacho the only man with sufficient authority and determination to carry out the foundation of the Seminary, left. The opponents to the project took advantage of the situation and gained the upper hand. They succeeded in convincing the Governor General to shelve the grand project drafted by Camacho and Sidotti. So it returned to its original dimensions, that is a diocesan Seminary with only eight students.

In the meantime, his antagonists endeavoured to discredit Sidotti and his activity in connection with the Seminary. An anonymous letter was written from Manila on June 22nd, 1707 to the King of Spain⁷ to the end of denigrating Sidotti's activity and behaviour. The charges were as defamatory as they were fanciful and groundless.

The following year, 1708, on August 22nd, Sidotti left the Philippines, bound for Japan.

⁷ *Carta del Abad Sidoti al Arzobispo sobre fundar un Seminario*. Hospital Real y Febrero 5 de 1705 años. In: Archivo de la Universidad de Santo Tomás. Sección de Libros, Tomo 60, p. 1-1v.

APENDICE

CARTA DEL ABAD SIDOTI AL ARZOBISPO SOBRE FUNDAR
UN SEMINARIO

Ilustrísimo y Reverendísimo Señor: Habiendo suplicado al señor Gobernador por la erección del Seminario de los niños indios de estas Islas, capaz no sólo de los ocho hijares ordenados por ahora por su Majestad, sino de ochenta, más o menos, según las rentas que yo podré recoger de la caridad de los vecinos, o que su Majestad en el decurso del tiempo fuese servido de ordenar se alimentasen de su Real erario, su Señoría con su acostumbrada piedad y singular celo por la propagación de la fe, y especialmente por el establecimiento de la Religión Católica dentro de los montes de estas Islas, que indubitablemente se conseguirá con la copia de ministros evangélicos: si se dignase Vuestra Señoría de condescender con mi súplica, entregándome los autos y cédulas reales pertenecientes a dicha erección, señalándome por sitio de dicho Seminario la casa detrás de su Real palacio, y, finalmente, ordenándome que, en conformidad de dichas reales cédulas y autos, suplique a Vuestra Señoría Ilustrísima — como lo hago — se sirva de consultar a dicho señor Gobernador como Patrón, para que su Señoría, *servatis servandis*, despache las órdenes y decretos necesarios para la formal y canónica erección de dicho Seminario, y provea de todo lo que necesitare, según su alta providencia y notoria piedad; y de la de Vuestra Señoría Ilustrísima espero su más pronta y acertada dirección para ver exceptuado lo que tanto desea su apostólico celo. Y quedo a la obediencia de Vuestra Señoría Ilustrísima con las veras de mi rendida voluntad. Hospital Real y febrero 5 de 1705 años — P.s de Vuestra Señoría Ilustrísima — B.L.m. su humilde Capellán — Abad Sidoti, misionero apostólico.

APPENDIX

LETTER OF ABBE SIDOTTI TO THE ARCHBISHOP
ABOUT THE FOUNDING OF A SEMINARY

Most Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor:

Whereas Your Excellency, in Your wonted charity and commendable zeal for the propagation of the Faith and specially for

the implantation of the Catholic Religion in the mountains of these Islands (which purpose will be undoubtedly attained more expeditiously the more the evangelical labourers there should be) had requested from his Lordship, the Governor, the erection of a Seminary for native boys of these Islands, spacious enough to accommodate not only the eight such boys already allowed by His Majesty, but eighty, more or less, in proportion to the funds I would be able to collect from the charity of the faithful, or to receive from the Royal Treasury, in case His Majesty may deign to see it fit in future;

So therefore, I beg Your Excellency to vouchsafe to my requests, namely, that a copy of such Acts and Royal Warrants pertinent to such an erection be conveyed to me; that the house at the back of the Royal Palace be intended or assigned as the location and premises of the proposed Seminary; and that in accordance with the said Royal Warrants and Acts I be ordered to request (as I do request) Your Excellency to deign to consult with the said Governor as Patron of this project so that His Lordship (all circumstances having been attentively considered) may issue the orders and decrees prerequisite to the formal and canonical erection of the said Seminary, and may provide it with everything necessary, as his high judgment and well-known piety may see fit.

And may I expect from Your Excellency the expeditious and specific directions in order that I may see to their implementation as what Your Apostolic Zeal so much desires.

I remain most truly submissive subject of Your Excellency whose hand I kiss.

At the Royal Hospital, February 5 of the year 1705.

Your humble chaplain,
Abbé Sidotti, Missionary Apostolic

ALDO TOLLINI