

G 2021

# DIGITAL INDIPETAE DATABASE NEWSLETTER

A YEAR AFTER THE LAUNCH

“With the common and universal sadness of this city, or rather of the entire Kingdom, we find ourselves for the second time infected with that contagious disease, from which at this very time last year we were more afflicted than at any other time.”  
–Pietro Drago, Dec. 20, 1625

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

THE DID EDITORIAL BOARD

The Digital Indipetae Database (DID) was launched on March 26, 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. During that year, despite the uncertainties, hundreds of people worked with us to contribute to this “symphonic” project. Entering the second year of our project, we would like to spotlight some witnesses of this work.

The

More than 500 students from Italian high schools have been working on the transcription of the *indipetae* in Italian, Spanish, and Latin.

The second section is dedicated to the world of **colleges and universities**. During this academic year, university students (from Milan to Yale) have written their M.A. theses or Ph.D. dissertations on topics connected to the *indipetae* in collaboration with the DID. Additionally, we started the “Indipetae Lab” at the University of Macerata (planned also for next year) and an internship at the University of Padua. Other university projects are ongoing (we will cover them in depth in our next Newsletter): Andreas Motsch (University of Toronto) is working with his graduate assistants on Latin and French *indipetae* and

studying early modern Jesuits who left Europe for New France. Monika Miazek-M czy ska (Institute of Classical Philology, Poznań, Poland) and her students are focusing on the Latin *indipetae* written from the Polish province. They started their work with the letters by Michał Piotr Boym (1612–1659), a Jesuit missionary to China and a famous scientist and explorer. Bruno Pomara (University of Valencia) is planning to work with his students on the Spanish *indipetae*.

The third section is dedicated to **publications**, with several texts published or forthcoming in connection with the DID.

The fourth section is dedicated to the translation of **an *indipeta* written in Arabic**—a simple way to show the richness of this source.

Finally, the fifth section is an **update** on the transcription of the letters—we are very happy with the number of letters already transcribed that will be soon uploaded to the DID.

We want to thank all the people who have supported our work during this year!

In a vocational school, history does not occupy a prominent place in the curriculum. Those who enroll in our school aspire to a quick professional start, and they often find any non-technical instruction superfluous. So, when I proposed to my students to transcribe seventeenth century letters and to discuss the lives of the authors and their human journey, it was only out of respect for me that they did not laugh out loud.

I began the project animated by a selfish pleasure, much more akin to my first career as a researcher than to my current job as a teacher. After so much dedication to my students, I said to myself, now they can make me happy by working on this project just to please me.

When I first showed a letter on the interactive whiteboard, I was ready to entertain them with all the usual weapons of a teacher struggling with boredom among his students. But at the sight of the incomprehensible seventeenth-century handwriting, I saw my students lean forward, in the gesture of people sharpening their eyesight. The initial astonishment was soon followed by the excitement of the challenge of understanding a letter or a word before their classmates. After the first few lines, which were difficult to understand, the students began to

## FULL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE IN MERANO

ELISA FREI, INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED JESUIT STUDIES

Another aspect, less playful, fascinated my students: the stories of seventeenth century missionaries were somehow similar to their own stories. Like the authors of the *indipetae*, my students want to leave, in search of fortune, for the pleasure of the journey, or to escape from something. The hope of going far away ideally unites two apparently distant worlds.

The Indipetae project has fulfilled an extraordinarily important task: to offer passion to young people. This was perhaps an unorthodox use of the sources given to us. One would have legitimately expected that the interest of the project would reside in its ability to shed new light on the history of the Jesuits and their missions—something that certainly happened, and in a very rich way. But the most impressive result, especially in my vocational school, was the fact that through the *indipetae* we felt life in history, and for this we are enormously grateful.

I would like to conclude with a comment written by one of my students, Enorà Poretti. “A few months ago, my teacher, Mr. Livio Ciappetta, proposed to my class a new experience: the transcription of some letters dating back 400 years. Personally, I was immediately interested in this project, and I was quickly thrilled and fascinated by it. I was amazed and at the same time enchanted by my ability to understand a letter, at first unknown and incomprehensible compared to the usual writing I am used to, and I found myself reading it with ease and spontaneity. While transcribing these stories I noticed that even though they are ancient, they were still part of our everyday life.”

The Indipetae Full Immersion Experience took place at my former high school, the Liceo Classico Gandhi in Merano. A group of 3rd-year students worked on early modern Latin *indipetae* from the Austrian province. The students spent the mornings of an entire week working on the *indipetae* with their teachers (in particular Laura Speranza, teacher of Latin) and myself.

Every day we had a guest speaker: Sabina Pavone, Guido Mongini, Marco Rochini, Claudio Ferlan and Marina Massimi all helped the students to understand different aspects of the *indipetae*. The schedule included a basic paleography training and group discussions, led by Emanuele Colombo. Students were thrilled about the project.

First of all, it allowed them to experience Latin as a “living” language, used by young men of their own age. Second, they were challenged as potential “humanists” in their attempt to transcribe and translate the letters. Third, they were intrigued by the history of the Society of Jesus as it emerged from the sources. The feedback was very positive: the school plans to repeat the experience, and the students are looking forward to seeing their names on the DID.

“the *indipetae* project has fulfilled an extraordinarily important task: to offer passion to young people”

Alessio Cavazzini, *Il desiderio delle Indie: gesuiti candidati alle missioni nel Seicento*, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Piacenza.

Supervisor: Prof. Marco Rainini

Martina d'Amato, *Scrivere il desiderio. Per un'analisi linguistica delle indipetae del 1640*, University of Milan.

Supervisor: Prof. Giuseppe Polimeni

Michele Bulgini, *Il progetto Coindico. Fonti archivistiche per una storia digitale*, University of Macerata.

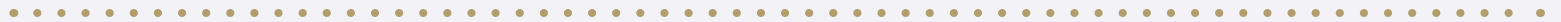
Supervisors: Profs. Federico Valacchi and Sabina Pavone

Filippo Bertolasi, *"Sotto la cenere sta il fuoco nascosto". Indipetae italiane del Seicento*, University of Pavia.

Supervisor: Prof. Miriam Turrini

Nicholas Lewis, *The Reformation Beyond Borders: Nicolas Trigault SJ and the Broadening of Early Modern Catholicism*, Saint Louis University, St. Louis (MO).

Supervisor: Prof. Charles H. Parker



Marco Camellini and Marco Vaccarini—to decide to continue working on the *indipetae* for their thesis project.

The Indipetae Lab will be offered also next year, with the collaboration of Elisa Frei, a member of the editorial board of the DID and now a research fellow in my research group at the University of Macerata.

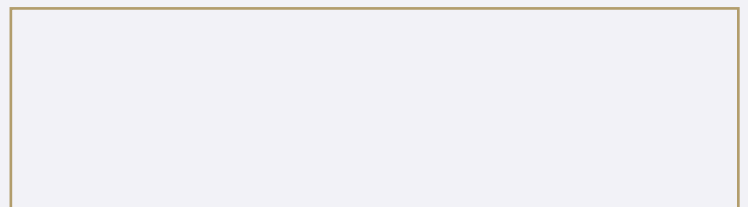
The workshop has also been included in the initiatives of the European project DiTemp (Digital Transformation and Employability: acquiring transversal competences in curricular education) as a good practice in the effort to involve students, and a webinar held by Emanuele Colombo and myself has allowed us to disseminate the results to a wider audience.

The Digital Indipetae Database is not only an important research project but has also proven to be an opportunity to build new forms of teaching by involving students in the transcription of the letters. Within the Cultural Heritage Tourism major at the University of Macerata, taking advantage

of the presence of Emanuele Colombo as a visiting professor, we organized a workshop entitled “Reading Sources: from Paper to the Screen” that we initially promoted through a video made especially for this occasion and distributed on the web.

In the workshop, students were engaged not only in transcribing a group of letters of a single Jesuit but also in reconstructing the history of “their” Jesuit through the internet and other tools made available to them.

The students enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to work on some primary sources, and they learned to read seventeenth century handwriting and to confront themselves with historical methodology, but they also left space for the emotional element in the reconstruction of the biographical path of the *indipetae*. The success of the workshop also led two students—



This term I gave the students of my class at Yale an option to submit a translation assignment for their final project. One of my students, Jocelyn Chau, opted to translate letters from the DID. The DID is a fantastic resource from which she was able to easily locate texts and filter through the database to narrow the scope of her project. Ultimately, she did a very fine translation of all the collected letters sent from Jesuits at the college at Chambéry to Superior General Jan Phillip Roothaan from 1831–1846. She accompanied her translation with a very helpful introduction as well as useful commentary. A project like this would simply not be possible without a resource like the DID.

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of my students, Filippo Bertolasi, in his thesis project on a selection of *indipetae* by eight Jesuits (1628–1650), one of whom alone, Sebastiano Berni, left for the missions.

This allowed me to look at this epistolary genre with new eyes and to conduct a further reflection with respect to issues addressed so far mainly from the perspective of academic historiographic research: what is the meaning of the Spiritual Exercises? What was the life horizon of a



# UPDATES ON THE DID

THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY COLLECTION

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NEXT STEPS

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The **Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies** seeks to deepen an understanding and appreciation of the history, spirituality, educational heritage, and pedagogical approach of the Society of Jesus through courses, workshops, publications, and scholarly symposia.



The **Digital Indipetae Database** allows for the free exploration of the Jesuit petitions for missions (or the *indipetae*) from the Old and New Society. The growing collection will allow users to search by a number of facets and to see scans of the original documents.

## NEWSLETTER EDITORS

Sonia Isidori  
Elisa Frei

## CREATIVE DIRECTORS

A. Taiga Guterres  
Katherine Palko

## CONTACT

Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies  
Boston College  
140 Commonwealth Ave.  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467  
bc.edu/iajs | 617-552-2568

## UNA FONTE LUNGA CINQUE SECOLI: LE LITTERAE INDIPETAE

*Una fonte lunga cinque secoli: le Litterae Indipetae*, ed. **Girolamo Imbruglia, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Guido Mongini** (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, forthcoming)

In 2021, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu (IHSI) will be publishing a collection of essays dedicated to the *Litterae indipetae*, edited by Girolamo Imbruglia, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Guido Mongini. The multi-language volume (in Italian, French, and English) presents chapters from leading and emerging scholars of the *indipetae*. The forthcoming publication brings together for the first time in one volume studies that view from multiple angles the thousands of petitions written by Jesuits who sought a missionary appointment—historiographically, chronologically, and thematically—thereby presenting a view

**VISIT THE  
DIGITAL INDIPETAE DATABASE**