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Foreign jesuit indipetæ. Mathematical teachings and mathematical books at the colégio das Artes in Coimbra in the 2nd half of the 17th Century


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FOREIGN JESUIT INDIPETÆ.
MATHEMATICAL TEACHING AND MATHEMATICAL 
BOOKS AT THE COLÉGIO DAS ARTES IN COIMBRA 
IN THE 2nd HALF OF THE 17th CENTURY

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Abstract

This contribution tends to show three interrelated points: (1) the reputedly 'low' level of mathematical instruction in Coimbra was not all that exceptional, even in a larger European context. Moreover, (2) it offers new prosopographical evidence on the engagement of non-Portuguese Jesuit Indipetæ in mathematical instruction at the Colégio das Artes in Coimbra, who so far were not recognized as such; (3) it discusses some evidence on the presence of up-to-date mathematical books in the same milieu. All three observations are limited to the 2nd half of the 17th century, especially the period 1656-1692.

Resumo

Este estudo procura apresentar três pontos que estão interligados: (1) O suposto 'baixo' nível da instrução matemática em Coimbra, não era algo assim de tão excepcional, mesmo num contexto europeu mais alargado. Para além disso, (2) apresenta novas provas prosopográficas do envolvimento de jesuítas Indipetæ, não portugueses, no ensino da matemática no Colégio das Artes em Coimbra, que até agora não eram reconhecidos como tal; (3) discute algumas provas da presença de livros de matemática actualizados existentes no referido meio. Estas três observações estão limitadas à segunda metade do século XVII, em particular ao período que vai de 1656 a 1692.

要約

本論文は、三つの相関する論点を明らかにすることを試みるものである。すなわち (1) コインブラの学院における「悪名高い」数学教授法のレベルは当時のヨーロッパの事情からみても、とりわけ低いというほどではなかったこと。 (2) これまであまり知られていない、非ポルトガル人のインド布教志願者
A correct appreciation of mathematics in 17th century Portugal and within the Portuguese Province of the Society of Jesus, the forms and structures of mathematical instruction and the personnel involved etc., all this has a more than average importance because of the monopolistic role of Portugal—through the padroado—in the connections between Europe and China, and because of the privileged part of mathematics in these connections as a ‘door-opener’ to make China and its intelligentsia (the literati) accessible to Europeans, i.e. mainly European Jesuits. Under normal circumstances, one would have expected, from a combination of both premises, that Portuguese Jesuits, institutions as well as individuals, would have played a considerable role in the development of this Chinese mission, and that the instruction of mathematics would have had a prominent place within the educational landscape of the Society in Portugal, primarily in view of this missionary target. That such was not the case, at least as far as its mathematical aspect is concerned, is well known, although the historical reasons for this deficiency are complex and hard to recognize. Recently, H. Leitão has described this ‘deficiency’ in terms of Portugal’s peripheric position in 17th century scientific communication.1 Moreover, one can find a most circumstated picture of the whole matter in the recently published The Practice of Mathematics in Portugal, edited by H. Leitão and L. Saraiva, especially in the contribution of U. Baldini,2 more than before, the insufficiency of mathematical training in the Lusitanian colleges of the Jesuits in the period 1640-ca.1690 is here abundantly shown with documentary evidence.

That is the background for the following observations, of which the first (1) tends to show that the reputedly ‘low’ level of mathematical instruction in Coimbra was by far not all that exceptional, even in a larger European context. Moreover, I wish (2) to offer new prosopographical evidence on the


engagement of non-Portuguese Jesuit Indipetæ in mathematical instruction at the Colégio das Artes in Coimbra, who so far were not recognized as such, and (3) discuss a question which is related to the level of the same instruction, viz. the availability (or not) of up-to-date mathematical books in the same milieu; all three observations are limited to the 2nd half of the 17th century, especially the period 1656-1692.

1. **The insufficiency of mathematical instruction in European Jesuit colleges, according to F. Verbiest (1677-1678)**

   When discussing the Jesuit role in the transmission of European mathematics in early-Ch’ing China, it is hard for a modern scholar to come to a correct understanding and assessment, especially in individual cases. Therefore, contemporary assessments made by the Jesuits in China themselves with regard to the ‘output’ of this instruction, i.e. the level of the candidates, are very important. One such assessment – completely overlooked so far – was made by one of the ‘top-Jesuits’ of the 17th century mission, Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (1623-1688). It may be expected to be particularly revealing for our purpose, as Verbiest was very well acquainted with both sides of the picture. On the one hand, he was well aware of the conditions in contemporary European colleges, for he himself – during his formative years – had visited several of the SJ colleges (Lovanium, Bruxellis, Roma, Hispalis, Genuae, Conimbrica, to name just the most important ones, where he had stayed for one year or more). On the other hand, he was, since 1669, wholly involved in the ‘mathematical’ aspect of that mission in China itself, in different situations and positions: as the official head of the Imperial Observatory, responsible for the Calendar and the calculation of eclipses, etc.; as the builder of a set of ‘new’, Tychonian instruments on top of the same observatory (1669-1674); as the private ‘mathematical’ teacher of the Emperor, esp. in the period May-October 1675; as the constantly challenged engineer (ingeniarius) of public works and builder of all kind of ‘instruments’ and engines, all in the field of mathematicae mixtae. He knew that, in order to consolidate the fickle position which mathematics had acquired for the mission, and because of the problems of health and age of the individual missionaries, the arrival of new Western mathematicians was needed, as assistants and potential successors to the Head of the Astronomical Bureau. But also the urge for ever new

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3 On F. Verbiest in Coimbra, see my contributions on “Two overlooked letters of Ferdinand Verbiest to Athanasius Kircher (...)”, in Humanistica Lovaniensia, 2005, pp. 279 ff., and “F. Verbiest’s mathematical formation (...), in Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences, 54 (nr. 153), 2004, pp. 29-47.
engines and applications from the Chinese Emperor and the Mandarins required the regular recruitment of new candidates, the continuous acquisition of new Western books etc. By his own curriculum and subsequent experiences in China, he was, therefore, well placed to realize the gap between the level of the arriving candidates and that which was required in the Chinese context. The reason of this insufficient level was, according to Verbiest’s analysis, a widespread lack of real interest in mathematics in (most of) the Jesuit colleges of Europe: on the part of the students, but – more fundamentally – also in the ‘curricula’, whereby the problem was situated on the institutional level. In spite of the 1599 Ratio Studiorum, in most Jesuit colleges throughout Europe – not only in Portugal – Jesuit pupils, i.e. potential candidates for the Jesuit mission, spent most of their time and energy (acc. to Verbiest) on unfruitful ‘rhetorical’ exercises, in emulation of ancient models and following codes of education primarily driven by personal ambition, with an eye to a Europe-bound private glory. Therefore, the most evident advice which the author could suggest to the Jesuit authorities, with a view to substantially increasing the number of novices for the China-mission and countering the constant lack of appropriate personnel, was “to upgrade ‘mathematics’ in the curriculum of (most) Jesuit colleges”. The direct reason for this assessment – which is quite unique within the Chinese context – is not immediately clear. It is certainly to be explained partly by the unexpectedly rising opportunities for the mission in the 1670s, which made the shortage of (appropriate) missionaries particularly palpable and painful. Another aspect was probably the problems which F. Verbiest had had, since the beginning, in finding capable potential successors; in fact, almost immediately after his appointment in 1669 he was looking for such valuable candidate successors among the European Jesuits. After all, it may have come to his mind that

4 See the many notices in Verbiest’s Astronomia Europea (Dillingen, 1687), the Litterae Annuae, and the other contemporary Jesuit correspondence from China.

5 Verbiest’s particularly plastic and strong words – too long to be quoted here in extenso – are to be found in his xylographically printed letter to the Socii in all European colleges; cf. H. Josson & L. Willaert, Correspondance de Ferdinand Verbiest [from now on: JW], Bruxelles, Palais des Académies, 1938, pp. 236-237). Precisely the use of the (time-consuming, extensive) Chinese xylographical process for a Latin letter to Europe points to the explicit intention of the author to give a broad renown to his ideas and message, as this processus guaranteed an in principle unlimited multiplication.

6 Cf. JW, p. 151.

7 A first indication of this need dates back already to January 1669, and is found in the long letter of G. de Magalhães to Canton (JW, p. 151): “Que em todo cazo se vão preparando hum ou dous padres para a mathematica, porque o Padre F. Verbiest unico e homem e como tal sojeito as Leys de Lybytina [the Roman goddess of burials]”; Pr. Intorcetta, when in Europe in 1671-3, engaged A. Aigenler and B. Amrhyn, two professional mathematicians from Ingolstadt (cf. infra), but both died in 1673 in via.
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2. Concerning the personnel: addenda to the prosopographical lists of mathematician teachers at the Colégio das Artes between 1640 and 1692

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the 'weak' presence of mathematics in the 'curricula' of the Portuguese Jesuit colleges, e.g. in Coimbra, are the very lacunary prosopographical lists of 'professors' appointed to this 'chair'; see the lists published by D. Maurício (1935) and U. Baldini (2004), both relying on the (incompletely preserved) Catalogi of the Portuguese Province and other sources. The very defective lists suggest a largely neglected discipline, and mathematical courses of a more or less 'occasional' nature. Yet, during my own research on Jesuit mathematicians in China, I succeeded in finding some new evidence which suggests that at least part of this picture may simply be due to the condition of our sources on the Coimbra Colégio, which, for obvious historical reasons (the suppression of Jesuit institutions in the Pombal era, precisely also in the Coimbra area), are very incomplete, if not lost altogether. It is, therefore, not by pure chance that the additional evidence on the Professors in the Colégio das Artes which I present in the next paragraphs comes from collections outside Portugal.

2.1. Ferdinand Verbiest in Coimbra (1656-1657)

The first name to bedded in this respect is that of Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), Flemish-Belgian Jesuit and the famous successor of Adam Schall von Bell at the Head of the Astronomical Bureau in Peking (1669-1688). His presence in Coimbra had so far escaped the attention of both the Belgian and Portuguese researchers, but can now be confirmed without
any doubt for the academic year 1656-1657. The sole, but unequivocal, evidence for this is an autograph letter, written by Verbiest to Athanasius Kircher in Rome, dated "16 Decembris 1656/Conimbricae", and preserved in the *Epistolarium A. Kircherii* in APUG (568, f. 71). From this letter, set in the wider context of Verbiest’s activities in the period immediately preceding his departure for China, it can be inferred that he will have arrived in Coimbra in the Spring or early Summer of 1656, and stayed there until the Spring of 1657, with 4 April (the day he left Lisbon) as the ultimate *terminus ante quem*. From the varied contents of this letter, we catch a glimpse of his didactical responsibilities in the field of mathematics, and this within the context of an – unnamed – Jesuit institution (*nostri*), which can hardly be any other than the *Colégio das Artes*: “Ego solus Conimbricam missus sum, ut mathematicam nostris legerem”. For an assessment of the ‘personal’ aspects of F. Verbiest’s engagement in this mathematical instruction, and especially his confession of ‘learning’ mathematics more than teaching them, which under its ‘proverbial’ formulation may refer to his *studium privatum*, see my aforementioned contribution;⁹ to the access to specific ‘mathematical’ books in the margin of this (self)-instruction, also noted in this letter, I will return below (sub 3). Here I would mainly emphasize the contextual data of this commitment: the passive mood "missus sum" refers to the initiative of the then Portuguese Provincial, i.e. Antonio Barradas, who apparently took Verbiest’s presence as a welcome opportunity to send him to Coimbra;¹⁰ it appears, indeed, from U. Baldini’s lists that Verbiest’s instruction put an end to an interruption of at least 15 years, although it is not completely certain whether this lacuna is situated on the level of fact, or on that of our sources. At any rate, what is undisputed is that his instruction had no parallel competition on the part of the Coimbra University: according to a fragment of information quoted by U. Mauricio, it was in 1654, i.e. only two years before Verbiest arrived, that the mathematical halls of the university

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⁸ For the connotation of "nos(tri)" in Jesuit sources with the Jesuits themselves, see A. Brou, in *Revue d’histoire des missions*, 11, 1934, pp. 95 – 96 and J.W. Witek, *Controversial Ideas*, p. 28. The following abbreviations are used: APUG: Archivio della Pontificia Università Gregoriana; ARSI: Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Rome; BayHStA.: Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, München.

⁹ See the text in *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 2005, pp. 279-284.

¹⁰ One year earlier, in 1655, the same Provincial sent François de Rougemont and Ign. Hartoghvelt to Coimbra, to complete their theology studies and do pastoral work in the Coimbra area. From Hartoghvelt’s hand we have a substantial and well composed description, from 1655, in Dutch, on life in the local Jesuit residence, the *Colégio de Jesus*, next to the *Colégio das Artes*, according to the perception of these two ‘French Fathers’ (as they were called there); as a rare extensive document on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Jesuits in Coimbra in this period, with relevance for Verbiest’s formative years, it is worth being published separately.
were closed, for lack of candidates to attend the courses: "havendo cadeira de Mathematica não há quem a estude".\(^{11}\) Finally, in the sentence "Ego solus Conimbricam missus sum (…)" in Verbiest’s letter, the qualifier "solus" shows he was the only one of the Martini-group – which was waiting in Lisbon for an opportunity to sail for China – to be sent to Coimbra, with the express intention to teach mathematics. This may have had the character of a certain ‘selection’, and thus pre-supposes that he already had some reputation in the field. Looking backwards through his Jesuit curriculum, I could not indicate any precise moment for such a ‘special’ training, so it is quite certain that Verbiest had acquired it as a result of\(^ {12}\) *studium privatum*, as was confirmed – many years later – by his colleague François de Rougemont.

2.2. The teaching by Adam Aigenler (1672-1673)

A second name which can be added to the ‘gallery’ of foreign Jesuits teaching mathematics in Coimbra is that of Adam Aigenler (1633), a Bavarian Jesuit, whose connection to Coimbra has thus far been completely overlooked as well. As in the preceding case of Verbiest, the scanty information also stems from extra-Portuguese sources, viz. (again) the correspondence of Athanasius Kircher, preserved in APUG (560 and 565), and some letters now in the *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv* (München). With Aigenler, appointed professor of mathematics and Hebrew in the academic year 1666-1667 at the Jesuit college of Ingolstadt,\(^ {13}\) a ‘professional’ mathematician and an ‘old’ cradle of recruitment for the Jesuit mission in China came to the fore. Before he left Ingolstadt for China, Aigenler had taught mathematics on a high level, as is demonstrated by some of his preserved courses,\(^ {14}\) and published two titles, one in each of his fields:


\(^{12}\) For the ‘building up’ of Verbiest’s mathematical experience, see my article ‘F. Verbiest’s mathematical formation. Some observations on post-Clavians Jesuit mathematics in mid-17th century Europe’, in *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences*, 54 (nr. 153), 2004, pp. 29-47.


\(^{14}\) From Aigenler’s instruction several courses still remain, through student annotations, now in the Universitätsbibliothek München: see Cod. Ms. 729, 4° *Opera Theorico-Practica / Varii Selectorum Mathematam Problematis Illustrata / Dictata a Rdo P(atre) Adamo Aigenler S.J. / Ingolstadii 1666 Inchoata 3io Novemb(ri)*, and Cod. ms. 728, 4° *Astronomia. P. Aigenler. Septem Miracula Mundi Siderei / sive / Tractatus Mathematicos de Admirandis / Planetarum / Praelectus à R.P. Adamo Aigenler S.J. / in Celeberrima Electorali Universitate Ingolstadiensi / Exceptus à Ferdi-
Whereas F. Verbiest, as a former student of the *Collegio Romano*, had had some personal acquaintance with A. Kircher, Adam Aigenler – who never studied in Rome –, approached Kircher as a professional scholar, being interested, a.o., in his Chinese studies. His approach appears first from his personal dedication, at an unspecified moment in 1671 (but cf. infra), of a copy of the aforementioned *Tabula Geographicco-horologa Universalis* (...) to A. Kircher. This complementary copy is preserved, and is now in Rome, BVE, as part of a compound (347 B 22,4); the title page has the autograph (?) dedication: "R.P. Athanasio Kircher se demisse comm(endavit?) Praescr(...) 1671". This presentation of a copy in omaggio to the coryphee of Jesuit science in Rome was part of a more intense approach by Aigenler to Kircher in this same year 1671, as some letters, still in APUG, demonstrate. One letter, sent on 4 March 1671 from Ingolstadt, was apparently the covering letter of the personal copy of two other manuscripts of the author, viz. his *Problemata Mathematica super Tabulam Universam* and *Grammatica Hebraica*. In another, of 17 November 1671, still sent from Ingolstadt, two more mss. were sent, viz. his *Magnum Semidiametrum a Centro Terrae* (...) and *Sacramentum Hebraicium*, and the author describes his first studies of Chinese; for a letter of 1672, see infra. Between both letters of (March and November) 1671, Aigenler received the permission to leave Germany for China. This coincides exactly with the arrival of Prospero Intorcetta, the *Procurator Missionis Sinicae* in Europe: after he had left Macao on 21 Jan. 1669, he had arrived in Lisbon and was since the Spring of 1671 in Rome. Apart from his diplomatic ‘mission’ to the Pope and the *Congregatio Propaganda Fide*,...
his commitment also included the recruitment of new, appropriate candidates for the mission, and the acquisition of money, books etc. This was the context in which Aigenler’s (and his colleague Beat Amrhyn’s) ‘desire to the Indian missions’ found its definite fulfilment. From a letter of Pr. Intorcetta, sent from Rome on 15 Dec. 1671 to Annibale Marchetti – another Indipetæ waiting for permission in the SJ college of Siena\textsuperscript{18} – we are informed about the engagement of some unnamed “compagni… della Germania, due ottimi matematici”, who were supposed to bring ‘mathematical’ books with them; these are certainly to be identified as A. Aigenler and B. Amrhyn.\textsuperscript{19} Intorcetta’s reference, in the same letter, to “il nostro P. Prefetto della Matematica”, i.e. F. Verbiest in Peking, as the final destination of these mathematical books suggests that the entire Aigenler-Amrhyn enterprise was set in the perspective of F. Verbiest’s urgent request for (well-trained) assistants and potential successors, which I have already signaled before.

On the subsequent phase of Aigenler and Amrhyn’s story, more precisely on their journey from Ingolstadt to Portugal, we are informed by another archive, through a joint letter sent from Genova on 13 February 1672, now in München:\textsuperscript{20} both Jesuits travelled from Ingolstadt over Munich, Hal (Tyrol) and Trento – all places with a Jesuit residence – to Genova, where the procura of the Indian Missions for Italia was. Continuing their way from Genova, they must have arrived in Lisbon in the Spring of 1672, witness a letter to A. Kircher of 11 April of that year sent \textit{Olyssipone}.\textsuperscript{21} Apparently arriving too late for the Portuguese fleet of the Far East (which indeed had left on 1 March),\textsuperscript{22} both had to wait in Portugal for the next opportunity. As in the case of Verbiest, the Jesuit authorities in Portugal now also looked for an appropriate activity, and after Easter (in 1672 on 17 April) A. Aigenler was sent to Coimbra to teach. The passage in question reads as follows:

"Post festa Paschalia concedemus Conimbricam, ubi ne – addiscendae linguæ gentis studio – matheoseos vel Hebraices obliviscar;"

\textsuperscript{18} APUG 292, f. 378
\textsuperscript{19} That also (Beat) Amrhyn – although not enrolled at Ingolstadt University as a mathematician – had at least considerable talent / experience in this field is indirectly proven, a.o. by the \textit{propempticon} (‘farewell-poem’) which his contemporary Jesuit colleague Adam Widl (1639-1710) presented to him: see \textit{Adami Widl e Societate Jesu Lyricorum Libri III Epodon Liber Unus}, Bambergae, 1760, pp. 230-233, referring to him (in fine): "Vade Collegâ RAPHAELAE cinctus: / Astra confertis onerato Sinis, / Utque praeclarâ es celeber Mathesi, sidera monstrâ.;" cf. also S. Huwiler, \textit{Das Professorenverzeichnis des Jesuitenkollegiums in Luzern (1573-1773)}, Stans, 1935, p. 10, s.v. Amrhyn: "auch tüchtiger Mathematiker, deshalb für die Mission in China auszurwählt".
\textsuperscript{20} Bay. HstA, Jes. 595/V/13.
\textsuperscript{21} APUG 365, f. 134r/v.
\textsuperscript{22} "Huius enim anni classis Lusitanica adventum nostro suō abitu integro paene mense antevertit"; see also J. Wicki, in \textit{Aufsätze zur portugiesischen Kulturgeschichte}, 7, 1967, p. 304.
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credo, R. us P. Provincialis cavebit; utraque enim cathedra iamdu-
dum vacat, docentium ob penuriam, ut audio” / "After Easter we
will go to Coimbra, where Father Provincial will take care that
I will not forget my (knowledge of) mathematics and Hebraic by
studying the language of the (local) people (i.e Portuguese); indeed,
both the chair of maths and Hebraic are vacant since a long time,
by lack of professors, as I have heard”.

This fragment confirms not only Aigenler’s didactical committment, but
also the vacancy, since a long while (“iam dudum”), of both chairs, math-
ematics and Hebrew studies, which here too appear as mutually linked;
the mathematical instruction at the Colégio had, therefore, periodical inter-
ruptions, even if some more professors would be identified in the future.
Finally, and most importantly, that Aigenler’s committment was not only
a plan (“cf. the future tense: “concedemus”) but had also been ‘realised’
is known with certainty through B. Amrhyn’s letter, written from Coim-
bra on 3 July 1672,23 which explicitly confirms that Adamus, i.e. Aigenler
(not: Amrhyn)24 taught “Mathematics” and Hebrew” to the local Jesuits
(“nostros”), apparently not without success:

”P(ater) Adamus nostros Mathesi & Hebraicâ instruct, sed
plerumque ad ianuam accurrunt è Patribus plures, ut ab eo dicta
excipiant. Diebus Dominicis selectius aliquod problema exponit,
affluente toto Collegio, quod eius laboribus uti mire delectatur, ita
vehementer applaudit." / "Our Father Adam (sc. Aigenler) is teach-
ing our (SJ novices) mathematics and Hebraic language, but often
a lot of our fathers are gathering at his door, in order to catch
from him his words. On Sundays, he expounds some more select
problem, and the entire college is concoursing, which is appraising
his efforts as strongly, as it enjoys them exceedingly.”

Most interesting in this fragment is the distinction suggested between
the more current “instruction” (“instruct”) to “our Fathers” and the “special

24 These are in all probability the letters which J. Beckmann (“Auf der Reise nach China
in the then Münchner Staatsarchiv, one of the previous names of the present day Bayerisches
Hauptstaatsarchiv; Beckmann – apparently from B. Duhr, Geschichte der Jesuiten in den Ländern
deutscher Zunge in der zweiten Hälfte des XVII. Jahrhunderts, III, p. 351 – refers to mathematical
and Hebrew courses given by Aigenler in Lissabon (sic), and to “Vorlesungen” of Amrhy in
Évora and Coimbra, not mentioned.
Sunday courses”, dealing with some “select” (mathematical) problem, attended by ‘the whole College’, i.e. also other, non-Jesuit students.

In a last letter to A. Kircher, of 10 March 1673, Aigenler reflects very briefly on some of his activities during his stay in Coimbra, which falls between Easter 1672 and the Spring of 1673, thus covering the Summer semester of the academic year 1671-1672 and the Winter semester of the next year 1672/1673. Also in this letter, one paragraph refers to activities in the field of “mathematics”, viz. the composition of a work, titled *Rota Astronomica*, to be published by the Coimbra Jesuit college, and a Portuguese Grammar, to be published in the German Province:

> “Concinnavi hoc anno Rotam Astronomicam aerique incidi cum sua elucubriatuncula, edenda typis a Collegio Conimbricensi, si R.P. Provincialis dare licentiam potuisset, necnon Artem Grammaticam linguae Lusitanae, forte in Germania imprimendam. Et hanc et illam commendendo R.P. Assistenti Germaniae ut eas mittat in Provinciam etc.” / “I have finished this year the ‘Rota Mathematica’, together with its small explanation, to be published by the Coimbra college, if the Provincial has given the authorization; I (also finished) my Grammar of the Portuguese language, probably to be printed in Germany. Both texts I will recommend to the Assistant of Germany, in order to send them to the German province, etc.”

Although these and all the other ms. texts cited before show the author, precisely in the period he was preparing himself for the journey to China, in a particularly prolific phase of his scientific production, nothing of that was published. Yet the ms. of the *Rota Astronomica* was not lost without any trace, as it is mentioned as part of the private collection assembled by Count Carlo Archinto (Milano, 1610-1665) and sold in Paris in 1863. The catalogue of this action indeed, mentions the autograph manuscript *Rota Astronomica, Ope cujus Praecipua Astronomiae Proble mata a quovis etiam Matheseos Ignaro Dicto Citius Resolvi Possunt Constructa et cum Scientifica Ejusdem Analy sis in Lucem Educta per P. Adamum Aigenler Societatis Jesu. Anno 1673, in-4°*; acc. to the same catalogue description, the preface was dated: “Conimbricæ, Kal(endis) Januarii 1673”, and was signed by the author.27

25 (APUG; 565, f. 95 r/v.)
26 Catalogue d’une petite collection de livres rares et précieux (...) provenant de la bibliothèque de feu M. le Comte Archinto de Milano, Paris, 1863, nr. 32.
27 Another indication on the autograph ms. runs as follows: “Mathesi Ingolstadianae transcribit auctor, 1673”. This enables us to reconstruct the story of the ms. with great probability: after
Although the unknown place of conservation of the ms. of the *Rota Astronomic*ica deprives us of the possibility to check in dept the contents of this mathematical book, the title itself seems to refer to a ‘pedagogical’, practical and probably also elementary course, which may also reflect the level of the mathematical courses Aigenler taught at the *Colégio das Artes*; the *problemata* in the title may even refer to the *problemata* signaled by Amrhyn, and discussed before a great audience during Sunday sessions. At any rate, with this evidence the reality of Aigenler’s mathematical instruction at the Coimbra College, in the period Summer 1672 - Spring 1673, is sufficiently ascertained; unfortunately, this cannot be confirmed from the Coimbra Catalogi of the relevant years, which now seem to be lost.  

### 2.3 Antoine Thomas in Coimbra (1678-1680)

The presence of A. Thomas in Coimbra was already noted by D. Mauricio, on the basis of the observation of Francisco Rodrigues, who was certainly himself informed by Henri Bosmans (1852-1928), the Belgian historian of Jesuit mathematicians. The latter relied on a document, then in Brussels, *State Archives, Jesuits, Prov. Flandro-Belg.*, 1162-1170, now transferred to the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* in Antwerp (same shelf number). This autograph letter, dated 24 April 1679, indeed confirms A. Thomas’s engagement in the teaching of mathematics in Coimbra, a.o. to Jesuit candidates for the China Mission, which certainly refers to the context of the (unnamed) *Colégio das Artes*:

The model, the author had made a transcription for the *Mathesis Ingolstadiana* (cf. for this indication also supra); Carlo Archinto will have found it in the same University; he was, indeed, registered as a student of mathematics etc. at Ingolstadt University, in 1685: see the name of Carolus Hieronymus Archintus in the Immatriculation lists of that year (*Die Matrikel der Ludwig-Maximiliansuniversität Ingolstadt - Landshut - München, Teil 1. Ingolstadt, Bnd. IV: Personalregister, von Ladilaus Buzas, 1. Halbband, p. 35, s.v.*). Thus the ms. arrived in his precious collection in Milano, which was described, a.o., by G. Mazzuchelli, *Gli Scrittori d’Italia (...), Vol. I, Parte 2, Brescia, 1753*, p. 954 - 955, and C. Frati, *Dizionario bio-bibliografico dei bibliotecari e bibliofili italiani dal sec. XIV al XIX*, Firenze, 1933, pp. 32 - 33, with addenda by M. Parenti, *Aggiunte al Diz. bio-bibliogr. di C. Frati*, Firenze, 1957, pp. 48-9. *According to the copy of the sales catalogue in Paris (BnF, Ex. Delta 19048) the copy of the “Rota” was not sold (“retrirée”), and I have not been able to trace it after this moment.*

28 *For the Catalogi of the Coimbra Jesuit colleges,* the situation – as far as can be seen in the ARSI collection – is as follows: the *Cat. Triennales* 1649-1676 are present (*Assist. Lusit.* 45), but the annotations for 1656 and 1657 are lacking; the *Cat. Breves* are only available for 1579-1623 and 1686-1687; the *Litt. Annuae* of 1656 are in *Assist. Lusit.* 54, f. 25-52; the part on Coimbra (f. 42v.-43r.) only deals with building works, and has no information on instruction, etc.

"Ego hic servus inutilis, lectiones mathematicas prosequor vix alio fructu nisi quod aliquot e discipulis meis mecum sim advecturus, quibus me specialiter impendo" / "I am here a futile servant; I am pursuing my mathematical lessons, with nearly one result, viz. that I will take some of my students with me, for whom I am applying myself in a special way".

While this document confirms the China-vocation of some of his pupils in the Colégio, it does not say much about the actual content of Thomas’s instruction. More recently, other autograph documents have come to light, thanks to the temporary re-appearance of the former Lancashire archives in the 1920s, including the letter collection of Maria de Guadalupe de Lencastre, the Duchess d’Aveiro (1630-1715), the main moral and financial support of Antoine Thomas’ mission;30 in the 1960s, this collection finally arrived in Japan, distributed over two private collections, viz. the Tenri University and the Sonkei kaku Library (Tokyo), where they are still now.31 Among the letters in these two collections – available now thanks to the published photographs – several items offer some glimpses of A. Thomas’s stay and instruction in Coimbra, to begin with the autograph of 28 March 1678, which describes the conditions of this instruction in some more detail:

"Perveni Conimbricam vigesimâ quintâ huius [i.e. 25.03.1678], a R(everen)do Patre Provinciali [i.e. Lud. Alvares] missus ad docendâs scientias mathematicas hoc anno. Quare, intra paucos dies illas inchoabimus, omnium quidem fere librorum subsidio destituti, eo quod in his regionibus vix ulli mathematici libri reperiantur. Plurimum in hac annua mora solatii habeo, quod inter discipulos meos eosque Soc.tis nostros plures sint ardentissimi Missionis nostrae Sinicae candidati, et aliqui, ut opinor, futuri itineris eiusdem Socii" / "I arrived on the 25th of this month in Coimbra, sent by the Provincial to teach, this year, mathematics. Therefore, in a few days I will start my courses, almost destitute of all possible support of books, because in these areas almost no mathematical


books could be found. I will have much moral comfort during this one-year delay, because there are, among my pupils and the students of the Soc. Jesus some who are very ardent candidates for the Chinese Mission, and some of them, I suppose, will become my fellows on the journey thither”.

Moreover, these letters shed some light on the chronology of his stay (at least from shortly before 18 March 1678 to March 1680, covering thus more than two consecutive years). A last letter sent from Coimbra, on 25 March 1680, refers to the hesitation of the “Princeps” (i.e. the Regent Don Pedro), whether to retain A. Thomas or his friend / colleague Adam Weidenfeld in Portugal to teach mathematics at the Coimbra college, or to send them to China. This shows the royal interest – through his private “Confessarius” / Confession Father (i.e. Manuel Fernandez, S.J.) – in mathematical instruction in Coimbra, and his active involvement in it. Shortly later, both candidates left for Japan.

In the same letter collection, the author also indicates his engagement in finishing his ms. of *Synopsis Mathematica Complectens Varios Tractatus / Quos Hujus Scientiae Tyronibus et Missionis Sinicae Candidatis Breviter et Clare Concinnavit / P. Antonius Thomas è Societate IESU*, a handbook on elementary mathematics, the outline of which he already had in mind when teaching in Douai (…). Coimbra, and the context of the *Colégio das Artes*, with the author’s mathematical courses for future missionary candidates, had created the best conceivable occasion and atmosphere for accomplishing this plan. When the book was finally published in Douai in 1685, both its title (cf. supra), and its notice *ad Lectorem* refer to the (future) novices for the China Mission, and therefore may reflect, to a large degree, the contents

32 ARSI, JapSin 148, f. 23r.
33 “Ubi res fuit communicata Serenissimo Principi per confessarium, in hoc negotio zelosisimum, quamvis ante statuisset vel Patrem Adamum vel me pro docenda Conimbricæ mathematica retinere”; on Adam Weidenfeld (*Köln, 1645*) as a mathematician, I have no further information.
35 “Nactus aliquid otii in Lusitania ante navigationem in Regnum Sinarum, hanc scripsi Synopsim Mathematicam, quam ante in Belgio scribere meditabar, ut facilem aliquam viam aperirem ad scientias mathematicas. Etenim hae artes plerumque terrere solent tyronem in primo aditu, nisi ad difficiliores demonstrationes facilis quaedam via complanatur; quae incipientes non illico fatiget & absterreart a proposito. Si quid forte identidem occurrerit minus concinnum, properantem, quaeo, excusa et instante iam navigatione comparanti sese ad Orientales missiones ignoscse. Dum vero hoc exiguo labore prueris, Deum ora, ut singuli Spiritus Sancti assistentiä nostros pro divina gloria conatus promoveat, & multis ad succurrendum Chinae, in qua latissima putet Evangelio janua, mentem apostolicumque zelum inspirët. Vale”.
and level of Thomas’ mathematical instruction, for which I could find no other external confirmation thus far. An analysis of the mathematical contents of the Synopsis was given by H. Bosmans.  

As for the ‘recruitment’ of A. Thomas, although he was not a ‘professional’ mathematics teacher (his courses in Douai were limited to theological materials), he had studied mathematics and astronomy, and this apparently as studium privatum, with the explicit intention to be well prepared for the China mission. The most unequivocal testimony on the origin of his ‘vocation’ for mathematics and the China mission is to be found in his letter from Tournai, dated 24 May 1672 and addressed to the General, G.P. Oliva:  

“Interea, die S(ancti) Xaverii praeterito [i.e. 3 Dec. 1671] motus interius ad mathematicas ediscendas, quibus capiuntur Siniae, Euclidis Elementa, calculum motus solis et lunae et eclipsium utriusque cum Superiors facultate accurate didici, et modo perse-quor alias matheseos scientias, sperans occasionem adfuturam, in qua per astrorum motus deducere, Deo iuvante, possim aliquos infideles ad cognitionem et amorem Conditoris” / “In the meantime, on the past celebration day of Xaverius, driven from within to teach mathematics, by which Chinese people is ‘captured’, I have accurately studied – with the Superior’s permission – Euclid’s Elements, the calculation of the Sun’s and the Moon’s motion, and that of the eclipses of both planets, hoping for an opportunity to come, to be able, with God’s help, to bring some heathen, moved by the knowledge of the stars, to acknowledge our Creator, and to love Him”.

The start on an auspicious moment (the celebration of F. Xaverius), the deliberate missionary objective, and the systematic progress, from Euclid (certainly on the basis of Clavius’ edition), continuing with eclipse calculation: all elements are present to demonstrate A. Thomas’ intention to become a well trained China missionary; although it was apparently his private initiative, it was backed by the Superior, probably the Provincial of the Provincia Gallo-Belgica. We can follow slightly the further evolution of his mathematical studies through his correspondence of the next years (1672-1674), always referring to the China mission as the perspective of his devotion to mathematics. As a result, A. Thomas arrives in China as a more or less ‘fin-
ished’ (‘accomplished’) mathematician/astronomer, contrary to F. Verbiest. No wonder that his stay in Coimbra had given an opportunity not only to compose a ‘study book’, but also to undertake various astronomical experiments, a.o. an eclipse observation made there on 29 October 1678; because the results were communicated to the Jesuit mathematicians in the Collège de Clermont (Paris), the observation and its results were signalled in Journal des Scavans, and were thus received by the international scholarly scene.

2.4. Marcel Le Blanc, S.J. in Coimbra (1691)

After Antoine Thomas had left Coimbra, apparently in the Spring of 1680, no other name of a professor of mathematics in the Colégio das Artes is known, and it took ten years before a similar occasion occurred. This happened when the French Jesuit Marcel Le Blanc (1653-1693) arrived in Lisbon in 1691, as one of the socii of Philippe Couplet, who prepared the group’s journey to China. Le Blanc was also considered a professional mathematician, and already in 1687 he had been sent by Louis XIV as one of the mathematicians destined for the Court of the King of Siam, an enterprise which had come to a premature end. In the meantime, having returned to the Collège de Dijon, he had been appointed a teacher of mathematics. When in Portugal, the then Provincial of the Prov. Lusitana (i.e. Em. da Silva) was desperately looking for a candidate to teach mathematics in the Coimbra college. Already on 9 Febr. 1691, Spinola asked, in a letter to A. Estrix (the private secretary of the General, Thyrsus Gonzalez), to send a Jesuit candidate from Italy, fearing that Le Blanc would be retained in Portugal. It may come as a surprise, then, that Le Blanc, on 6 August 1691, sent a letter precisely from Coimbra; yet, as it does not contain any reference to his activities on the spot, we cannot positively confirm from it that he was indeed actively involved in any form of teaching during his stay there. From another letter of Spinola of the same period (23.07.1691) we hear, by the way, that at that time the general atmosphere in the Jesuit college of Coimbra was very ‘disappointing’, and, where some missionary.

36 Noël Golvers

38 Ed. Amsterdam, 1679, pp. 63-64.
40 J.-P. Lobies, in Dictionnaire de biographie française, fasc. CXV, 2003, col. 242, s.v. 22 Le Blanc (Marcel).
41 JS 165, f. 118r.: “Di grazia V.R. procuri che venga un Italiano per leggere matematica, altrimenti il P. Prov.le mi disse che si fermarebbe il P. Le Blanc; V.R. ben vede i sconceti che porterebbe seco questa risoluzione”.
fervour was expected, some outspoken “tepidezza” reigned. At any rate, some months later the question of Le Blanc’s appointment was still unsolved, and the Provincial was always thinking of engaging him. Finally, it became Philippe Bourel (“Köln, 1659), who was acting as a mathematical professor for the academic year 1691-1692, as we know from the lists published by U. Baldini; on the other hand, the aforementioned evidence on the Provincial’s urge for Le Blanc makes it improbable that in the preceding year 1690-1691 Francisco Barbosa, who was appointed as a mathematician in Évora, acted indeed as such in Coimbra as well. At any rate, Le Blanc left Lisbon with the Couplet group, which set sail on 25 March 1692. Probably it was these quarrels about finding a capable mathematician teacher which inspired the General, Thyrsus Gonzalez, in April and August 1692, to write to the Provincial M. da Silva on that question.

3. About mathematical books in the context of Coimbra in the 2nd half of the 17th century

Good, up-to-date instruction necessarily relies on a basic supply of appropriate books, either in private or public collections, if not for the personal formation of the professors/teachers, at least for the students; also in the Jesuit Society – particularly book-minded as it was from the beginning – this adage will have been true, and this desideratum was fulfilled in the major part of the colleges. As for the Coimbra Colégio, the evidence which I could trace for this same period is meagre, and contradictory. Still, I think it is worth being added here, as the presence/c.q. absence of appropriate books largely determines the conditions for any form of teaching, periodical or not, its level and up-to-date character. Preliminarily, we should consider some questions which may complicate the picture still further: first, we should check whether there was a special bibliotheca for the Colégio das Artes and the Colégio de Jesus; I have not the slightest information on this, and the drawing of the Jesuit colleges, published by M. Brandão shows only one

42 Spinola, in JapSin 165, f. 65v.: “Nel collegio di Coimbra non ne ho ritrovato (sc. spirito per le missioni), ne pur uno, con mio grande disgusto, e si puo ben attribuire questa tepidezza allo spirito nazionale e divisioni, che regnano piu che mai in questa provincia”.
43 Spinola, ibid., f. 95r.: “Il Pe Prov.le mi disse l’altrieri che haveva tanta necessità d’un nostro p(er) leggere matematica in Coimbra, che se non gliene procurato uno d’Italia, il Pre Le Blanc correva rischio d’essere arestato. Io gli risposi, che scrivesse sopra di cio a VR, che in quando (?) al detto Pre Le Blanc VR voleva che partisse quest’anno meco per la Cina (…)”.
44 On Bourel and Barbosa, see U. Baldini, in: The Practice of Mathematics in Portugal, p. 314 and 400.
Moreover, it seems to be legitimate to enlarge the question beyond the limits of the Jesuit institutions in Coimbra, and to look for other, possible ‘sources’ of book supply, accessible to the Jesuit teachers.

A first, laconic but very negative, appreciation of the book supply available on the spot – expressed in general terms, not specifying how it was for mathematical books – stems from Ignatius Hartoghvelt, in the colourful description he presented in 1655 of ‘daily life’ in the College, i.e. the Colégio de Jesus, and which I already mentioned supra. According to I. Hartoghvelt’s perception, the condition of the library was ‘very poor’, in spite of the large income of the College:

“Alles ist soo rijkelijk ghefondeert van de Koningen van Portugael, dat dit college van Coimbra van Joannes den III, van glorifiee memorie, omtrent hondert duysent guldens jaers incoomen heeft, boven dat sjij rijkelijk volbouwt sijn, ende de kerck, bibliothek (die nochtans seer slecht is) groote jaerlijcxe incomen hebben” / “All is very richly funded by the Kings of Portugal, so that the college of C., since the time of João III, piae memoriae, has an income of about 100,000 florins annually; moreover, they (= the Jesuits of C.) are fully provided of buildings, and the church and the library (although the latter is very bad) have a large annual income”.

The appreciation as “very bad” is too general to be very useful, and it is only in the light of other, later information (especially that offered by Ant. Thomas, to which I have to return infra) that this appreciation becomes to some degree a useful indication.

At any rate, when, one year later; in 1656, F. Verbiest was installed as a temporary professor of mathematics, he does not complain expressis verbis about the working conditions on this point. Yet his statement, that A. Kircher’s books were only accessible in Coimbra through a ‘private’ collection, may implicitly confirm the rather poor condition of the Jesuit College library. In 17th century conditions, it is not rare that a shortage of books in ‘public’ collections was compensated by the consultation of private collections.

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46 M. Brandão, O Colegio das Artes, 1555-1580, Coimbra, 1933.
47 A possible document on the College library which I have not seen is titled Conimbricense Collegium R.P. Antonio Vieira pro Bibliothecae Ornamento admodum officiose gratulatur (ca. 1640; cf. the Catalogo dos manuscritos da Bibliotheca Publica Eborense (….), Tomo II, che comprehende a litteratura, p. 21).
libraries. In this case, it was that of a local physician: “doctorem medecinae (sic), huius Academiae praecipuum”, who owned copies of A. Kircher’s (pre-1656) editions, and eagerly wished to extend his collection with Kircher’s forthcoming books; unfortunately, I cannot identify this anonymous book owner: as a medical doctor, he was certainly not a Jesuit (as this profession did not match the Society’s institution); also his academic affiliation is unclear, although the *Academia* in question was in all probability in Coimbra (see the use of “huius”: ‘here and now’), and may even refer to the local University.48

But mathematical books may have been available through other private canals as well, even within the context of the Jesuit college. This is indirectly confirmed by a series of extant mathematical books, which we only know from the book inscriptions in the Pei-t’ang catalogue, compiled in the 1940s and published in Peking in 1949.49 In principle, most of these books stem from the pre-1773 Jesuit colleges and residences in China, mainly those of Peking (Hsi-t’ang/Nan-t’ang; Tung-t’ang; Pei-t’ang); these Occidental books have a European provenance, having been acquired either by purchase or by donation. The small collection referred to has in common their donator, viz. a Jesuit *coadjutor temporalis* (frater/irmão), called Francisco Pereya, and the context of the donation to the China Mission of the Jesuits, viz. Coimbra, in 1656. What makes this group of books interesting for our purpose is, (1) that the donator apparently lived in Verbiest’s immediate vicinity, as a Coimbra Jesuit, and offered these books to the mission in 1656, i.e. the year Verbiest stayed in Coimbra, and (2) that part of the books are precisely on mathematics. With these premises, it becomes plausible to surmise that these were accessible to him, during his stay at the *Colégio das Artes*. The titles (preceded by the corresponding number of the item in Verhaeren’s catalogue) are the following:

– nr. 1170: Nicolà Cabeo, *In Quatuor Libros Meteorologicorum Aristotelis Commentaria et Quaestiones Quatuor Tomis Comprehensa*, Romae,

48 *The term* *Academia (Superior)* is mentioned several times in some archival documents from the 17th century *Colégio das Artes*, kept in the University Archives of Coimbra (see the *Catálogo*, for instance cod. 1018 [pp. 111, 120, 123, 128, etc.]). The term *Academia* as an indication for the University – of which the *Colégio das Artes* was, in institutional terms, part – has nothing unusual in the 17th century, and also in Spain both terms are mutually exchanged as synonyms; for a terminological research, see Peter-Eckhard Knabe, “L’histoire du mot ‘Académie’”, in D.-O. Hurel & G. Laudin (eds.), *Académies et sociétés savantes en Europe (1650-1800)*, Paris, 2000, pp. 23-34, esp. p. 29.

1646 ("Aplicado à Missão da China ou ao Collegio de Macao. Fr(ade) Francisco Pereira. Coimbra 1656");
("Aplicado a Missam da Comp. de JESU da China, ou ao (Cat.: do) Coll.(egi)o de Macao. Fr(ade) Francisco Pereira. Coimbra 1636, i.e. 1656");
("Aplicado a Missam da Comp.a de Jesu da China, ou do (i.e. ao) Coll(egi)o de Macao. Ir(mão) Francisco Pereira. Coimbra 1656").
("Aplicado a Missao da China no novo Coll(egi)o de Macao. Fr(ade) Francisco Pereira. Coimbra 1656").

Apart from these four items, the collection includes four other, non-mathematical titles, viz. nos. 2283, 2677, 2879 and 3342 of the same catalogue. These add not only new aspects to the spectrum of Pereira’s private interest, but also three new data to the evidence on the donation: the full name of the donator, viz. Francisco Pereira de la Cerda; the year of his decease (no. 2677: “faleceo na Comp. Coimbra 1656”) and the date of the donation itself, viz. 20 August 1656 (no. 3342). All this enables us to identify him as the Franciscus Pereyra who is mentioned in the *Defuncti Secundi Saeculi Societatis Jesu 1641-1740*, Vol. IV of J. Feyer, p. 101, and in the annotation of António Franco, *Ano Santo da Companhia de Jesus em Portugal (...)* (sub die 20 de Agosto). Nothing of the information given there, however, contains any clue on Pereira’s ‘professional’ activities, nor on the circumstances in which he had collected these mathematical works, let alone his motives for doing so. The acquisition of the four titles – which probably represent only part of his private mathematical library – suggests a more than superficial mathematical interest, c.q. knowledge, and demonstrates that it

54 Pp. 468-469.
was possible, in mid-17th century Coimbra, to get mathematical books from such various European countries as Italy, Holland and England.\textsuperscript{55} At any rate, Pereira appears as a second ‘private’ owner of (more or less) up-to-date mathematical works in mid-17th century Coimbra; the least we can conclude from this is that there were indeed contacts – be it on an individual basis – with the rest of the European scene, outside Portugal, from which also the accidental/occasional Indipetæ could have profited.

This optimism with regard to the availability of up-to-date mathematical books in mid-17th century Coimbra must definitely be limited by the explicit statement of Antoine Thomas, who reports on his ‘didactical’ context in Coimbra ca. 1678. Indeed, in his letter of 28 March 1678, he refers, \textit{expressis verbis}, to be ‘destitute’ of appropriate ‘books’:

"Quare, intra paucos dies illas (sc. scientias mathematicas) inchoabimus, omni quidem fere librorum subsidio destituti, eo quod in his regionibus vix ulli mathematici libri reperiantur" / “And therefore, we will start, in a few days, although destitute of all book support, because in these areas almost no mathematical books can be found”.\textsuperscript{56}

Also this reference should be appreciated in view of A. Thomas’ personal experience and of his expectations; coming from the University of Douai, with its well-furnished library, he certainly will have been disappointed, when looking at the contents of the library of the Jesuit college(s) in Coimbra, already described more than 20 years before as ‘poor’. So far, nothing more can be said about this theme.

\textbf{4. Concluding observations}

In the preceding pages, it was possible to describe in detail the context in which the Portuguese Jesuits attracted foreign Indipetæ – temporarily staying in Lisbon, before leaving for China – for the mathematical instruc-

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Almost spontaneously one thinks again} of \textit{privatum studium} as the context in which Pereira acquired these books; quite obviously, nothing in his official biography points to this private study. One could also tentatively ask whether there might have been any direct connection with his job as a \textit{coadjutor}. Is there any possible relation with the repeatedly mentioned \textit{mechanicus (sed singulari ingenio)} in the 1650s in the Coimbra college (cf. ARSI, Assist. Lusit., 55, f. 237r.: “Albus (sic) scholasticarum tum Extremadurensium tum Interamnensium qui hisce annis in Societate admitti curaverunt nec obtinuerunt”: in 1654-55 the name of one Petrus da Maya is mentioned, in 1656-57 no name is given.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Far Eastern Catholic Missions}, II, nr. 51, p. 49 (Conimbricae, 28 Martii, 1678).
tion in the Colégio das Artes of Coimbra University, entrusted to them since 1555. At least two new names could be identified, so that the ‘gap’ between 1644-1692 is somewhat reduced. Both names stem from the Assistentia Germaniae, which may not really surprise. Both the Portuguese Provincial and the King were visibly interested in the matter; of the Jesuits selected, Adam Aigenler, Antoine Thomas and Le Blanc were proven ‘professional’ mathematicians; at least two of them were, during their stay in Coimbra also involved in the production of didactical handbooks on mathematics. All this may shed some light on the ‘selection’ of F. Verbiest, in 1656, and on the ‘origin’ of his mathematical reputation: from the comparison with his successors, we could tentatively surmise that also his selection was made on the basis of some proven mathematical competence, although in the sources nothing has thus far come on the fore. In all probability this may be the true content of his reputed "studium privatum", the reason for which he was selected as A. Schall’s successor, and which apparently already begun before he arrived in Coimbra. Of course, his stay there for approximately one year will have been the occasion for a further ‘concentration’ on mathematics, pace a poorly provided library, compensated by some private collections.