

The Roman Jesuit Archives

(from Robert Danieluk SJ, ‘Michał Boym, Andrzej Rudomina and Jan Smogulecki – Three 17th-Century Missionaries in China: A Selection of Documents from the Roman Jesuit Archives’, ‘Venturing into Magna Cathay’, *Monumenta Serica* (2011), number 59, here, pp. 417-424 copyright)

The Roman Jesuit Archives (*Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu* – ARSI) are the archives of the general government of the Society of Jesus. Situated in Rome in the General Curia of the Order, their purpose is to preserve, to put in order, and to make available for research the documents related to the general government of the Society of Jesus and its activities from the beginning of its history in the sixteenth century up to the present day. As a privileged witness to such a long past, ARSI is composed of three sections:

1. Documents of the so-called “Old Society” (1540-1773)
2. Documents of the so-called “New Society” (after 1814)
3. Archives of the Jesuit General Procurator (referred to in Italian and cited as the *Fondo Gesuitico*).

Besides these three main sections, there are also other materials that are not directly concerned with the general government of the Society of Jesus but which, for practical reasons, should be considered as the fourth section of ARSI; we will call them here “Other archives”).

Each of the three main sections of ARSI as well as most of the “Other archives” section provide general inventories compiled by former archivists, who extended their work also to more detailed inventories of many sections, or parts of a section, or even folio by folio descriptions of single volumes. Some of these inventories are “by topic”, e.g. the inventory of the Japanese and Chinese books¹ or of the documents relating to the history of Poland.² As a result, we have at our disposal a series of inventories and indexes that are of great help for the purposes of research. Some of these have been published, while others remain in typed or manuscript form, both of which are available in the reading room.

The table below illustrates the structure of ARSI and also gives a general indication of the different categories of documents preserved in each section and with special reference to the inventories. Excluding the indexes of single volumes, * indicates that for the section or series in question either a general or detailed inventory is available.

¹ Cfr. Albert CHAN, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome. A Descriptive Catalogue Japonica-Sinica I-IV*. Armonk/New York/London, An East Gate Book, 2002.

² Cfr. Andrzej Paweł BIEŚ, Robert DANIELUK [t. 3-5], Ludwik GRZEBIEŃ, Marek INGLOT, *Polonica w Archiwum Rzymskim Towarzystwa Jezusowego*, t. 1-5. Kraków, Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna Ignatianum/Wydawnictwo WAM, 2002-2008.

Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu

“Old Society”*	“New Society”*	<i>Fondo Gesuitico</i> *	Other archives
<p><u>Assistancies and Provinces* documents:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formulas of Final vows * 2. Catalogues 3. Letters received (e.g. <i>Indipetae</i>*) and sent 4. Annual letters and other relations 5. Necrologies <p><u>Other documents*:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Congregations* 2. Institute of the Society* 3. Spiritual Exercises 4. History of the Society* 5. Letters 6. Biographical materials (e.g. <i>Vitae</i>*) 7. Polemical Writings 8. Jesuit Manuscripts* 9. Miscellanea 	<p><u>Assistancies and Provinces* documents:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formulas of Final vows 2. Catalogues 3. Letters received and sent 4. Annual letters and other relations 5. Biographical materials <p><u>Other documents*:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Congregations 2. Institute of the Society 3. History of the Society 4. Secretariates of the General Curia 5. The Holy See 6. General Superiors’ personal files* 7. Jesuit manuscripts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Colleges* 2. Letters (e.g. <i>Indipetae</i>*) 3. Censures 4. Archives of Roman Jesuit houses and churches 5. Archives of the General Procurator* 6. Manuscripts 7. Necrologies 8. Printed books 9. Miscellanea 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Archives of the Jesuit Historical Institute 2. Photographs* 3. Archives of the <i>Gesù</i> church in Rome* 4. Archives of Saint Ignatius church in Rome* 5. Archives of the <i>Caravita</i> oratory in Rome* 6. Plans of Jesuit buildings (19th-20th Century)* 7. Chinese and Japanese books* 8. Seals and medals* 9. Other materials (printed books, microfilm*, etc.)

The sections of the “Old” and “New” Society can be further subdivided into two parts: the first contains documents concerning the Assistances and Provinces (at the top of the table); the second is reserved for other documents (at the bottom of the table). Some of the titles mentioned above recur in the sections of both the “Old” and “New” Society (especially in the first of the two parts); other are more specific to only one section of ARSI.

The main categories of all these documents deserve a short explanation, which will also help the reader to understand what follows in the second part of the present paper.

- **Formulas of Final Vows** (*Ultima vota*): each member of the Society of Jesus who takes his final vows has to write the entire text in his own hand; one copy of the formula is then sent to ARSI.
- **Catalogues** (*Catalogi*): are lists of Jesuits from each Province. Some were compiled by year (*catalogi breves* or *annuales*) and contain only basic information about the members of each community of a particular Province. Others were compiled every three years (*catalogi triennales*) and contain more detailed information about each Jesuit. These are organised in three parts: 1) *catalogus primus* - more detailed biographical information, such as name, family name, origins, age, date of entrance to the novitiate, date of final vows, indication of ministries and offices held; 2) *catalogus secundus* - information about the human qualities

of each Jesuit, his health, character, experience, prudence, etc.; 3) *catalogus tertius* – short report of the financial situation of each community.³

- **Letters received and sent** (*Epistolae, Epistolae generalium*): from the very beginning of the Society letters were not only the main instrument of government (at the central or local level) but also a link of communion between the members of the Order dispersed in different missions throughout the world.⁴ Many of the letters pertaining to the activities of the General Superior are preserved in ARSI.⁵

- **Annual letters and other relations** (*Litterae annuae, quadrimestres, Historia domus*):

as part of their network of communications the Jesuits had to send regularly different reports from their communities, colleges and missions. They were copied and forwarded not only to other members of the Society but also to their friends and benefactors.⁶ One part of these ‘relations’ has been published (especially the relations from foreign missions became bestsellers and were reprinted in numerous editions and translated into several European languages).⁷

- **Biographical materials** (*Vitae, Necrologi, Summaria vitae*): testimonies about members of the Society of Jesus, including their necrologies⁸ (with the exception of the independent series *Vitae*, this material is usually found in the section of documents relating to the Assistancies and Provinces).

- **General, Provincial and Procurators’ Congregations** (*Congregationes*): acts of these three kinds of Congregations,⁹ held regularly from the beginning of the Society. They complement the officially published decrees of the General Congregations.¹⁰

- **The Institute of the Society** (*Institutum*): apart from the most precious relics of Saint Ignatius and his first companions’ autographs, this series is composed of several commentaries concerning the law and spirituality of the Society of Jesus.¹¹

- **The Spiritual Exercises** (*Exercitia Spiritualia*): several copies of the text of the Exercises, theirs directories and some other texts of spiritual retreats.

³ For more on Jesuit catalogues, cfr. *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-temático* [abbreviated as *DHCJ*], t. 1. Roma/Madrid, Institutum Historicum S.I./Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001, p. 967; Edmond LAMALLE “Les catalogues des provinces et des domiciles de la Compagnie de Jésus” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 13 (1944), p. 77-101; Thomas MCCOOG, *Monumenta Angliae*, t. I: *English and Welsh Jesuits: Catalogues (1555-1629)*. Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1992 (*Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*, vol. 142), p. XXVIII-XXXVIII.

⁴ For the importance and role of regular correspondence among Jesuits, cfr. Nicolás R. VERÁSTEGUI, *The Importance of Archives in the History and Spirituality of the Society of Jesus according to “Our way of proceeding”* [in:] “*Scriptis tradere et fideliter conservare*”: *Archives as “Places of Memory” within the Society of Jesus*. Rome, General Curia, 2003 [also in Italian and Spanish version], p. 25-47.

⁵ For more on the correspondence preserved in ARSI, cfr. Edmond LAMALLE, “L’archivio di un grande Ordine religioso. L’archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù” *Archiva Ecclesiae* 24-25 (1981-1982), p. 96-100.

⁶ About *Litterae annuae*, cfr. Markus FRIEDRICH, “Circulating and Compiling the *Litterae Annuae*. Towards a History of the Jesuit System of Communication” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 153 (2008), p. 3-39 and Jörg ZECH, “Die *Litterae Annuae* der Jesuiten. Berichterstattung und Geschichtsschreibung in der alten Gesellschaft Jesu” *ibid.*, p. 41-61. About *Historia domus*, cfr. Edmond LAMALLE, “L’archivio di un grande Ordine religioso. L’archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù” *Archiva Ecclesiae* 24-25 (1981-1982), p. 106-107.

⁷ Cfr. László POLGÁR, *Bibliography of the History of the Society of Jesus*. Rome/St. Louis, Jesuit Historical Institute, 1967, p. 130-137.

⁸ For Jesuit necrologies, cfr. Alfred PONCELET, *Nécrologe des jésuites de la Province Flandro-Belge*. Wetteren, Jules de Meester, 1931, p. CLX-CLXI; *DHCJ*, t. 1, p. 967.

⁹ For more on the three kinds of Jesuit Congregations, cfr. *DHCJ*, t. 1, p. 907-914.

¹⁰ These decrees were published in the original Latin version (*Institutum Societatis Iesu. Volumen 2: Examen et Constitutiones. Decreta Congregationum Generalium. Formula Congregationum*. Florentiae, Ex Typographia A. SS. Conceptione, 1893) and in an English translation (John W. PADBERG, Martin D. O’KEEFE, John L. MCCARTHY, *For matters of greater moment. The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations*. St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994).

¹¹ For more on the meaning of *Institutum* in the Society of Jesus, cfr. *DHCJ*, t. 3, p. 2039-2048.

- **The History of the Society** (*Historia Societatis*): manuscripts of Jesuit historians from the 16th to 18th centuries and the files of their successors from the time of the “New” Society (notes, card catalogues, copies of documents used by them).
- **Polemical Writings** (*Polemica*): documents related to different polemics concerning the Jesuits).
- **Jesuit manuscripts** (*Opera Nostrorum*): works by many Jesuit authors from both the “Old” and the “New” Society; most of these are on philosophy and theology.
- **Holy See** (*Sancta Sedes*): documents pertaining to the Society’s relations with the Holy See.
- **General Superiors’ personal files** (*Praepositi Generales*): their personal correspondence, notes and other personal articles.
- **Secretariates of the General Curia** (*Commissiones et Secretariatus*): documents concerning several Secretariates and Commissions of the General Curia, e. g. for Jesuit education, spirituality, Christian Life Communities, Apostleship of Prayer, etc.
- **Miscellanea**: a small series of manuscripts that do not belong to any other category.

The third section of ARSI is the *Fondo Gesuitico*. It contains for the most part documents from the time before the suppression of the Society. This section is organized into 20 series and includes the following kinds of documents:

- **Colleges** (*Collegia*): mostly financial and legal documentation related to Jesuit colleges.
- **Letters** (*Epistolae*): several collections of letters, including many letters by those who petitioned the General to be sent to foreign missions (the *Indipetae* letters).
- **Censures** (*Censurae*): censures of Jesuit authored works (the censures were written by other members of the Society before permission was granted by the General to publish a book).¹²
- **Roman Jesuit houses and churches** (*Romana Domus Professa, Collegium Romanum*, etc.): documents concerning Jesuit churches and houses in Rome.
- **Archives of the General Procurator** (*Procura Generalis*): the whole *Fondo Gesuitico* was the archives of the General Procurator, whose responsibility was to look after the financial and legal issues related to the central governance of the Society; this accounts for the division of the documentation into several series.
- **Necrologies** (*Necrologia*): Italian Jesuit necrologies from the 17th to 18th centuries.
- **Miscellanea**: mostly biographical and hagiographical material about Jesuits.

The fourth section of ARSI, designated above as “Other Archives”, properly speaking does not belong to these archives, for it contains documents that are not concerned with the general government of the Society. This section is composed of the archives of Jesuit Roman churches: the *Gesù*, Saint Ignatius, the Caravita Oratory, as well as those of the Jesuit Historical Institute. Besides these documents, there are also a number of special collections that are both interesting and useful for research: photographs, plans of Jesuit buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries, seals and medals, and very rich collection of rare Chinese and Japanese books. All these materials complete the three main sections of documents and artifacts that are most often consulted by researchers.

The very character of ARSI as an archive whose primary purpose is the central governance of the Society of Jesus has obviously influenced the typology of documents that we find therein: only those that are concerned with the activity of Jesuit General Superiors and their closest collaborators in the Curia are preserved. That is why it is not appropriate on the part of a researcher to expect ARSI to store the archives of all members of the Order from all over the world or to attempt any such research on the basis of such a false presumption. In actual fact, an investigation of a topic touching on the history of the Society of Jesus has to be undertaken not only in its central archives (ARSI), but also in local Jesuit archives (mostly in the archives of the provinces but also of

¹² For more on Jesuit censorship, cfr. *DHCH*, t. 1, p. 731-32.

the institutions where the individual members of the Order in question actually worked, e. g. in colleges or universities).¹³ It is easy to discern an example of such a multi-tiered structure of Jesuit sources in the city of Rome itself, where apart from ARSI there are also archives of the former Roman Province as well as those of the Pontifical Gregorian University and the German-Hungarian College. Depending on the particular topic of research, it will be necessary to extend the scope of one's archival explorations to one or more of these collections.

An obvious consequence of the aftermath of the suppression of the Society is that many Jesuit sources from the time before 1773 no longer belong to the Society of Jesus and can only be accessed in various public or private archives. No repertory of all available sources, both within and without the Society's present collections, has been compiled to date. This fact notwithstanding, a repertory of contemporary Jesuit archives throughout the world has been published.¹⁴

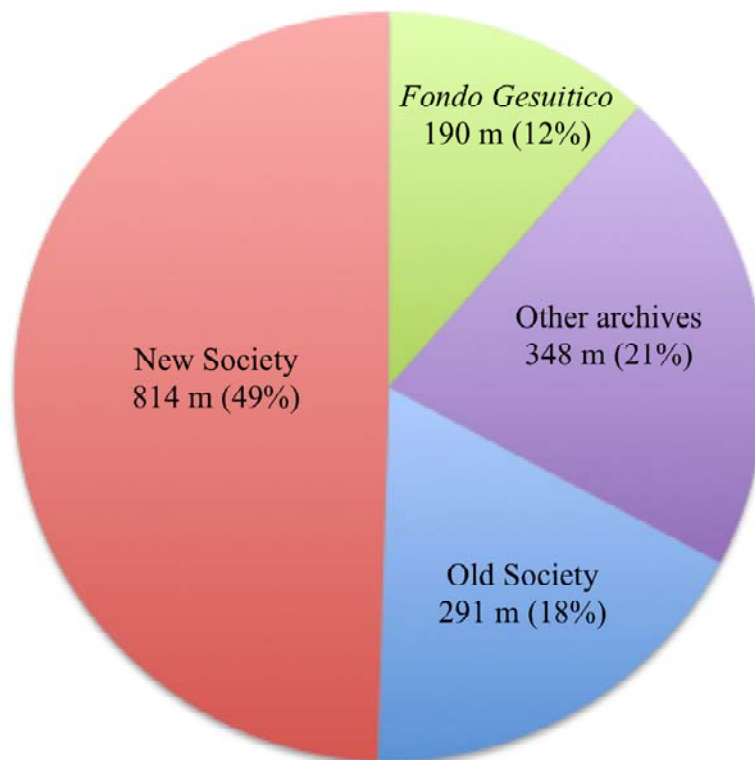
As for the actual physical dimensions of the ARSI collections, according to measurements taken recently, its entire structure is as follows: "Old Society" documents - 291 meters of shelves (18% of the total); "New Society" documents - 814 m (49%); *Fondo Gesuitico* - 190 m (12%); and other archives - 348 m (21%). Altogether, the ARSI documents occupy 1643 meters of shelves.¹⁵ The graphic below illustrates this structure.

¹³ Cfr. Edmond LAMALLE, "L'archivio di un grande Ordine religioso. L'archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù" *Archiva Ecclesiae* 24-25 (1981-1982), p. 91.

¹⁴ Thomas MCCOOG, *A Guide to Jesuit Archives*. St. Louis/Rome, The Institute of Jesuit Sources/Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 2001.

¹⁵ In 1970, the entire collection of ARSI documents occupied "only" about 900 meters of shelves. Cfr. Lajos PÁSZTOR, *Guida delle fonti per la storia dell'America Latina negli archivi della Santa Sede e negli archivi ecclesiastici d'Italia*. Città del Vaticano, Archivio Vaticano, 1970, p. 395. See also other statistics pertaining to ARSI in 1962, published in Josef TESCHITEL, "L'organizzazione dell'archivio generale della Compagnia di Gesù" *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 22 (1962), p. 192. The difference between 164 m of the *Fondo Gesuitico* (measure given by Fr. Teschitel) and the 190 m (measure given in the present article) is due to the fact that one part of this *Fondo* has been placed lying flat on the shelves, in order to assure the better conservation of that material.

ARSI structure

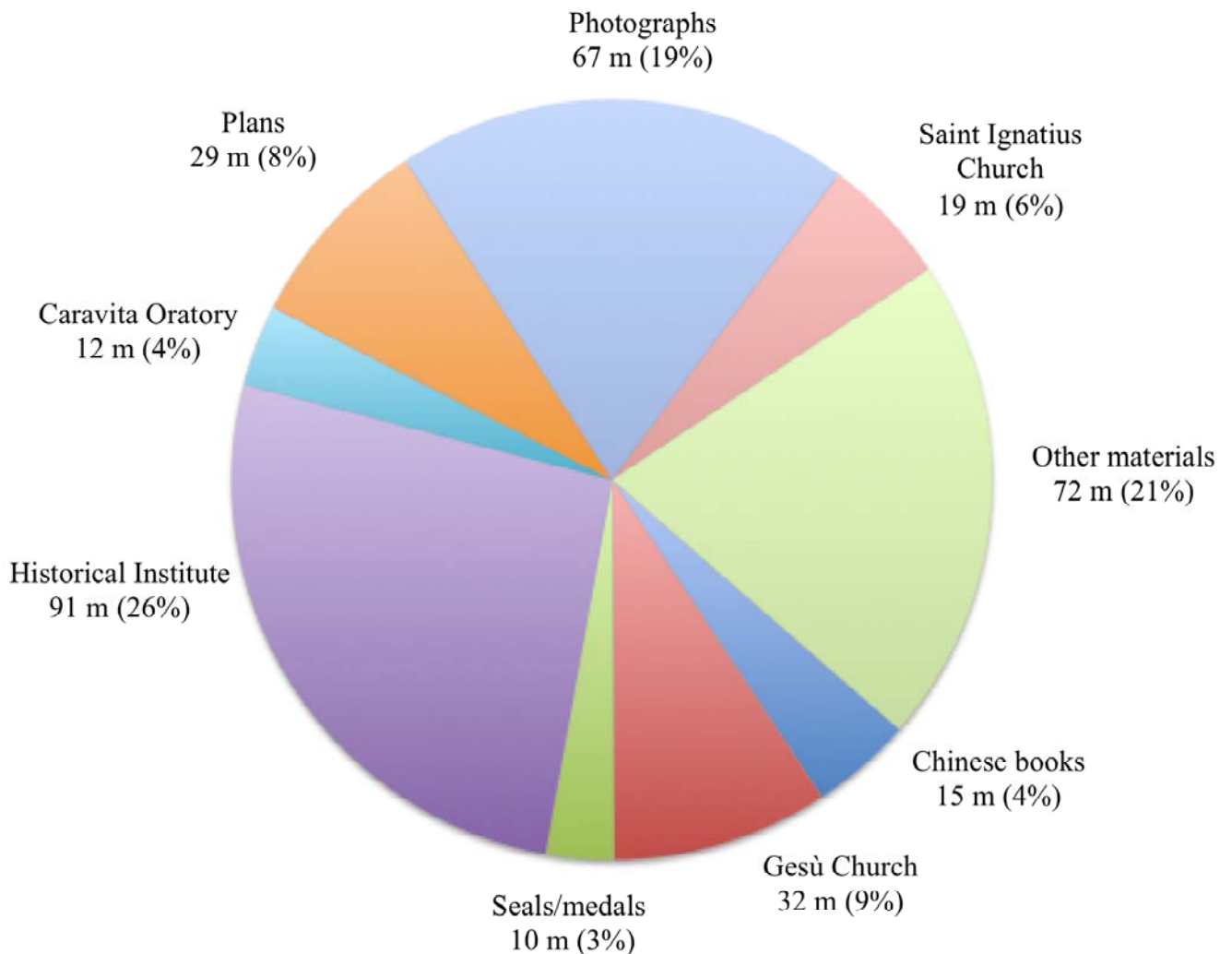


The section “Other archives” is subdivided into the following series:

- Archives of the Jesuit Historical Institute 91 m (26%)
- Photographs 67 m (19%)
- Archives of the *Gesù* Church in Rome 32 m (9%)
- Plans of buildings (19th-20th Century) 29 m (8%)
- Archives of Saint Ignatius Church in Rome 19 m (6%)
- Chinese and Japanese books 15 m (4%)
- Archives of the *Caravita* Oratory in Rome 12 m (4%)
- Seals and medals 10 m (3%)
- Other materials (printed catalogues of the Jesuit Provinces, etc.) 72 m (21%)

This data can be represented graphically as follows:

Other archives stored in ARSI



While a comprehensive history of ARSI has still to be written, several articles have been published that help to fill this gap.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cfr. Edmond LAMALLE, “La documentation d’histoire missionnaire dans le *Fondo Gesuitico* aux Archives Romaines de la Compagnie de Jésus” *Euntes docete* 21 (1968), p. 131-176; ID., “L’archivio di un grande Ordine religioso. L’archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù” *Archiva Ecclesiae* 24-25 (1981-1982), p. 89-120; Lajos PÁSZTOR, *Guida delle fonti per la storia dell’America Latina negli archivi della Santa Sede e negli archivi ecclesiastici d’Italia*. Città del Vaticano, Archivio Vaticano, 1970 (Collectanea Archivi Vaticani n° 2), p. 394-422 (especially p. 394-399); Georg SCHURHAMMER, “Die Anfänge des römischen Archivs der Gesellschaft Jesu” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 12 (1943), p. 89-118; Josef TESCHITEL, “Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI)” *Archivum* 4 (1954), p. 145-152; ID., “Das Generalarchiv der Gesellschaft Jesu in Rom” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 4 (1960-1961), p. 247-254; ID., “L’organizzazione dell’archivio generale della Compagnia di Gesù” *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 22 (1962), p. 189-196.

The archives are open for historical research and welcome scholars from all over the world.¹⁷ In keeping with the rules of the Vatican Archives, only ARSI documents from the period preceding 10 February 1939 (death of Pius XI) are available for consultation.

¹⁷ With regard to the actual opening times (from Monday to Friday: 9.00-12.45 and 14.00-16.45), from mid-September 2007 to mid-July 2008, 355 researchers visited ARSI 2965 times and consulted 3160 volumes of documents. During the past few years, the number of researchers registered as readers fluctuated from 412 in 2006 to 621 in 2004.