



انٹرنیشنل ایسوسی ایشن برائے لداخ اسٹڈیز

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LADAKH STUDIES  
13<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM  
7-11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2007

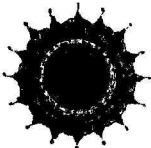
ABSTRACTS



FACOLTÀ di STUDI ORIENTALI  
UNIVERSITÀ di ROMA «SAPIENZA»

With the support of:

Il Rettore dell' Università di Roma «Sapienza»  
Facoltà di Studi Orientali  
Dipartimento di Studi Orientali  
Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente  
Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale «Giuseppe Tucci»  
Carlo Crsti – Arte Orientale Tessili



FACOLTÀ DI STUDI ORIENTALI  
Via Principe Amedeo, 182/b - 00185 ROMA  
Tel. 06 44704366 - w3.uniroma1.it/studiorientali

### Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi—*Ippolito Desideri's first comments about Ladakh*

The reception of the knowledge contributed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit Ippolito Desideri on Ladakh and Tibet has had a curious history. Desideri's considered assessments, the fruit of years of study, remained hidden for centuries within the manuscript collections of the Rome archives. On the other hand, his initial impressions of Ladakh, which were recorded in a private letter, were widely known, having been published in the popular *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* and then reproduced in all the main collections of travel narratives appearing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

For these reasons, together with a complex series of unfavourable events, the missionary's work has not been highly regarded, even though many important works have stressed its importance: these include the works of Puini and De Filippi, and—following Tucci's directions—Petech's edition of Desideri's travel narratives, and Toscano's translation of his Tibetan works. Perhaps the fact that—with the exception of De Filippi's text—these works were written in Italian is one reason why Desideri is not more widely known, together with the mistaken view that, after more than two centuries, his analysis of Tibetan could no longer be valid, and that his first impressions on Ladakh deserved no further consideration. Only a few scholars such as Janet Rizvi have appreciated Desideri's narrative as a precious source of information on Ladakhi history, particularly dwelling upon the wool trade and Ladakh's transport links with Kashmir.

This paper reviews the missionary's impressions of Buddhism in Ladakh, and its relations with Tibet. It places Desideri's contributions in the context of earlier Western descriptions of Ladakh, starting with Francisco de Azevedo's account in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which was undoubtedly the first, even if it appeared after a long delay. In particular, the paper discusses Desideri's discovery of the *om āḥ hūm* mantra and of the three jewels (*triratna*), finally giving due recognition to the analysis of the first European to deal with these subjects.