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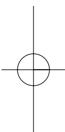
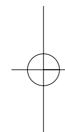
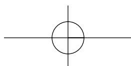
Missionary Tropics







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MISSIONARY TROPICS

The Catholic Frontier in India
(16th–17th centuries)

Ines G. Županov

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
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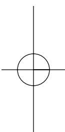
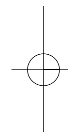
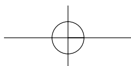
For Ante and Christophe

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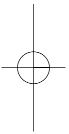
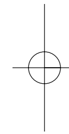
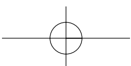

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Abbreviations and Note on Transliteration and Spelling

AHSI	*Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu,* Rome
AN/TT	Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, Lisbon
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome (Jesuit Archives)
BNL	Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon
DI	*Documenta Indica*
EX	*Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta*
MHSI	*Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*
MI Epp	*Monumenta Ignatiana, Scripta de S. Ignatio*
MX	*Monumenta Xaveriana*
SR	*Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Portugês do Oriente, India*

For Latin, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish words, I have used both contemporary orthography and, when judged necessary, the orthography of the documentary sources.

In principle, Tamil words (names, places, and concepts) are transliterated according to the system used in the Madras University Tamil Lexicon. The exceptions to this rule are (1) commonly accepted forms in English usage and (2) transcription into Portuguese, Italian, and Latin found in the primary sources.

Map of Southern India (sixteenth century)

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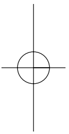
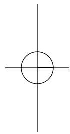
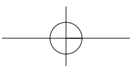

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Introduction

Cartography of Jesuit Early Modernity in India

Tropics refers in this book to two particular spaces: a geographical space—India and the Indian Ocean—and a metaphorical space in which texts about India bring home to Europe a sense, sensibility, and knowledge of what lies out there.[1] *Tropics* is also used in this book as a metaphor for time, that is, for movement, change, and turning to or turning away from established routines and practices. Finally, the term may also help us think about the formation of new identities that mushroomed on the frontier between the Portuguese Indian world and the vast "gentile" and "infidel" subcontinent. In fact, the Portuguese themselves already established the connection between tropical climate and the oversensual bodies and minds of the Indians.[2]

The tropical world in my book, whether metaphorical, textual, or geographical, consists of people, commodities, and ideas in motion, circulating in the sixteenth century from one part of the globe to another and back with unprecedented speed and unimaginable consequences. How these multiple "mobilites" changed the ecological, cultural, linguistic, social, and economic face of the earth in the long run has been at the heart of a number of studies falling roughly under disciplinary titles such as *world history, the age of discovery,* and *area studies*. None of these disciplinary approaches, however, has provided a satisfying framework for approaching religious mobility beyond narratives of conversion and histories of particular missions. Sociological and anthropological literature may be helpful at this point, although it often underestimates historical dimension and context. In addition, there is a crucial question of sources. Historians are condemned to rely mostly on the archival jetsam and flotsam, and when it comes to writing a history of a radical religious transformation such as conversion, the sources may turn into demons of imagination and fantasy. The historical sources used in this book may also be partly demons of imagination and wishful thinking, but they are

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no less reliable than a bill of lading of a transcontinental Portuguese carrack on its way to Mozambique or a list of drugs to be bought for the Royal Hospital in Goa.

My approach to religious encounters in India during the sixteenth century between the most mobile and the most literate religious specialists—the Jesuit missionaries—and their various local converts and interlocutors can be provisionally called *cultural cartography.* By attentively reading documents produced by the Jesuits and other Catholic Europeans in and about the Indian peninsula, I located Jesuit cultural itineraries under the royal patronage (*padroado*) of the Portuguese and Spanish monarchies. The panorama thus pieced together by way of cultural cartography may not be exhaustive, but it is representative.

Why study Jesuit cultural itineraries and not Franciscan, Augustinian, Dominican, or those of other Catholic religious specialists? The reasons are many, but the most decisive is that the Jesuit historical sources, preserved mostly in the Archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome, provide a documentary feast for historians. In fact, Jesuit studies have recently become one of the fastest-growing interdisciplinary fields within the "federation" of early modern history.

Jesuit missionary history is far from a new historical field. It started with a rich tradition of hagiographic vitae and mission chronicles written from the sixteenth century on. Documents and details abound more than for any other early modern missionary order. With the purpose of self-celebration, most of the Jesuit historiographies, besides being either polemical or edifying, have always been unabashedly partisan. A decisive turning point in terms of methodology and genre of history writing had to wait until the twentieth century, when a number of Jesuit historians produced massive and mostly extremely useful scholarship that can be classified in three historiographical formats: (1) the edition and publication of documents that run into hundreds of volumes, (2) meticulously pieced-together national histories, and (3) monographic portrayals of specific Jesuit institutions or personalities. Joseph Wicki, Georg Schurhammer, António Serafim Leite, Francisco Rodrigues, and many others were the giants in this larger-than-life project of collecting, editing, translating, and compressing the archives. However, while these historians prescribed and carefully obeyed the formality of these oeuvres—to inverse Michel de Certeau's famous shortcut—due to a "mobility hidden inside the system," the content of some of the histories, especially of those that one might call *minority histories,* migrated

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back into the hagiographies.[3] Apologetic scholarship of this kind is unfortunately always dangerously close to falsification. For example, Schurhammer's masterpiece biography of Francis Xavier appears on first glance to be an objective historical narrative. However, as one plunges into its four volumes with thousands of extensive footnotes, it becomes clear that the narrative itself is a sort of apotheosis of this saint's life.[4]

The late twentieth century saw a sudden burst, both quantitative and especially qualitative, in Jesuit historiography. Under the banner of *disenclosure* (*désenclavement*), a group of French historians combined their efforts to open up Jesuit history to essentially secular topics in order to project it in capital letters onto the mainstream historiographical checkerboard.[5] Simultaneously, across the Atlantic, senior historians like John O'Malley and Dauril Alden and their successor Gauvin Bailey produced synthetic and secular works along the lines of a grand tradition of the older generation of the Jesuit historians, like Schurhammer. In their footsteps, younger historians who have yet to publish their first books, like Liam Brockey, are closer in their approach and interests to the trends set up and followed by the European historians. The order of the day is, therefore, a more cultural approach informed by anthropological reflection in the late twentieth-century style combined with critical reading in postcolonial studies and inspired by the cultural analysis of the texts developed in the work of Michel de Certeau.

There is another kind of enclosure that is yet to be properly opened. What I have in mind is the invisible but concrete line that divides Jesuit history into European and non-European. Moreover, with a sudden blooming of Jesuit studies, European mainstream historiography increasingly celebrates its own tradition and achievements, both as historiography and as history. All major epistemological moves, according to this view, originated in interaction between Rome and national peripheries (Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, etc.). The crudest argument is that Ignatius of Loyola wrote all the founding documents in Rome and that just about everything that made a Jesuit a Jesuit emanated from the General Curia. And, predictably, in the same centripetal movement, the responses and everything else returned to Rome and were reprocessed there at one point or another. In this scheme of things, Rome became the center of calculation, while the rest of the Jesuit world was a series of peripheral laboratories.[6]

From within national historiographies, the centrality of Rome is

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amply questioned, but rarely the centrality of Europe as the historical cradle of early modernity, whose creation is attributed to Jesuit protoscientific practices. Without first trying to "provincialize" Europe, it might be more helpful to recenter and reinscribe Jesuit territories beyond Europe around and in a differently conceived historical world cartography.[7] It should be drawn as a polycentric, gridlike space on which, at different periods and due to willed or contingent events in the Jesuit world, different cultural and geographic sites suddenly gained in importance and visibility. Thus, the cutting edge protoscientific research or innovative social practice can appear far away from Europe, at the edge of the world.[8] Since the map in question has not yet been established, we still tend to proceed to draw our conclusions along the convenient Eurocentric path.

The historiography of the Indian Jesuit missions is one of the most neglected fields in Jesuit studies. In spite of intersecting in a significant way with the historiographies of early modern Europe and modern Indian history, it was never considered a fashionable line of research.[9] The relative absence of interest shown by non-Jesuit historians is not surprising. To those specialists whose research centered mainly in or around Europe, including a bit of shopping in or borrowing from the field of European "discoveries" and commercial enterprises of European companies (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), the field of the Indian mission and what remains of it physically and culturally was embarrassingly unsuccessful, politically naïve, and backward. Discontinued by the order of the Portuguese crown and Rome in the latter part of the eighteenth century, subsequently covered with a lush tropical growth of local superstition, or captured by evangelicals in later centuries, Jesuit mission territories are at times almost untraceable. On the other hand, the large majority of historians of modern India (1500–1947) have consistently dismissed the Portuguese and other European presence on the continent as unimportant in the larger picture, inhabited by British colonialism/imperialism.[10]

The poverty and haphazard nature of the historiography of the Jesuit missions in India, especially compared with that of other major Asian missions such as those to Japan and China, posed and still pose two problems to those historians imprudent enough to cross into the field. The first is methodology; the second is language, or rather languages. The languages one would have to muster to encompass the whole missionary territory within the unified field of research are too

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many and too different. They require time and intellectual investment almost equal to that eloquently complained about by the Jesuit missionaries themselves.

The question of methodology is, first of all, a question of an Archimedean standpoint. Should one use the lever to lift the many layers of the history of the Jesuit mission in India by standing firmly on Eurocentric and missiological ground? Can one employ the lever while standing on Indian and "Indological" ground? Choosing one or the other is reductionism; choosing both is difficult, if not impossible. Second, a historian has to decide nolens volens who the principal actors in his or her history are: the Jesuits, the converts, or their local enemies. Even these social categories can be divided into subcategories of elite and commoners. If one combines these various methodological choices with the choice of Indian languages—Persian, Konkani, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil, Urdu/Hindi, Gujarati, Telugu, Sanskrit, and so forth—the task appears both gigantic and epistemologically demanding.

As a preliminary cultural cartography of the Jesuit missions in India in the sixteenth century, my account does not cover all the territory, but it does, I hope, build miradors for glancing at the whole landscape.[11] To do so, a certain amount of eclectic borrowing and analytical shortcuts were in order. My own approach, therefore, may resemble a tropical tree with tendrils and branches growing in all directions. Wherever there is an interesting, an exemplary social conflict to unravel, a cultural encounter to document, a linguistic confusion to clear up, or simply a story of failure or success to tell, there is a stitch to add to the early modern Jesuit texture of time in India.

Nicholas Standaert, one of the most learned contemporary (and, incidentally, Jesuit) historians of Christianity in China, recently defined his "descriptive and phenomenological approach" through the image of "texturing a textile." Thus the interaction between the Chinese and the Jesuits was, he said, a complex interweaving of different threads and fibers. In the process some fibers have to be removed or replaced by fragmented threads of many different textiles. "The metaphor of texture allows us to look at what happens to specific fibers, but also to look at the usage, meaning, form and function of the textile as a whole."[12]

Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam conjured up the same image of texturing in their study of early modern political cultures in South India (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) and their understanding of the past.[13] What is textured here is

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not merely historical narrative, the most cherished vessel for entrapment of experience, but also and more importantly, as the authors insisted, historical time. The agencies of this temporal texturing, according to the authors, are early modern historians who belonged to the karaṇam culture of village record keepers and accountants in early modern South India. With a grain of irony and a bundle of self-consciousness, and by bending and twisting time, the karaṇams produced narratives following a particular logic of sequence and causation that eludes a linear historiographical reading. British colonial, positivist historiography shunned all genres of karaṇam histories as mythological inventions and therefore not history at all. The people who practiced this literary production and their audience were, the nineteenth-century positivist argument goes, devoid of historical consciousness. The authors' vigorous and rigorous analysis of the texts was intended to debunk just such Eurocentric and teleological assumptions.

With all this in mind, we can, as I do in this book, cast a glance toward the other actors inhabiting the strips of coast who on various occasions interacted in one way or another with the mostly continental elite of the karaṇam histories. Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam already wrote about these elites in their earlier book *Symbols of Substance,* where they focused on the Telugu-speaking Nayakas in the heart of the Tamil country.[14] For the Portuguese and the Jesuit missionaries, these military chieftains "were gentile kings" who were to be converted sooner or later. Thus they were feared, respected, and often likened to the famous gentile kings of the early apostolic times of the primitive church. In Jesuit narratives, such military specialists were, therefore, either potential converts or instruments of missionary martyrdom.

In their histories, the Jesuits were following literary and historical protocols that differed from those used in karaṇam histories—as did their cultural tasks—but they were neither less nor more "mythological" then the *caritramus* and *kaifiyats* (historical texts) of the Telugu kings. They are simply differently mythological.

What kind of textures, if any, can be woven out of fibers containing different cultural mythologies, assumptions, traditions, and dreams? Should one simply shrug one's shoulders and deem the whole enterprise of cultural translation to be inauspicious, as Jacques Gernet's *Chine et christianisme* does, for reasons of conceptual and linguistic "incommensurability"?[15] In India, the context of cultural, religious, and political interaction was very different from that in China, and there was precious

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little written by the local literati about or against the missionaries. Therefore, Gernet's formula is impossible to implement in the Jesuit missionary field in India. But, even if it were a viable proposition, it was methodologically unsound from the start.[16] Cultural transmission or cultural translations do not function as a perfect transfusion between two parts. As in the process of translation, so skillfully elucidated by George Steiner, the transfer between source language and receptor language presumes "a penetration" of "a complex aggregate of knowledge, familiarity and re-creative intuition." Even if some "penumbras and margins of failure" continue to persist in the process, it is a good start. It can be negotiated next time around since, in cultural translation in particular, the point cannot be a definitive translation but retranslating as an ongoing process. Jesuit missionary translations—whether into European or Indian languages—set a plethora of linguistic and cultural fibers resonating. Their hybridity bears witness to an unbearably impassioned pursuit of self-effacement. Why so? Well, because, as Steiner and the maverick postcolonial studies academic Homi Bhabha both sensed, translation is replete with desire for the other and thus feeds on and, in the same move, annihilates cognitive and affective discrepancies.[17]

Cultural translation and desire for one another is crucial in all encounters and in particular in the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. These concepts are, however, of limited use for historians. They can serve as evocative cognitive props and psychological shortcuts but do not help trace the Jesuit cultural itineraries that I map in this book. Hence, I proceed instead by listening carefully to the sources and by bringing to light and to discussion those still obscure areas of history (and historiography) in India in which I detected an accelerating sense of cultural mobility. These special spaces where people, things, and ideas moved, collided, or intertwined with the speed and determination of self-conscious historical actors can also be seen as exemplary sites of Jesuit early modernity. A historian of colonial Peru has recently called them sites of "effervescence" that stimulated new methods of approaching both the natural and the social world.[18]

The way the Jesuits acquired, processed, and used such effervescent knowledge, from mathematics to psychology, from shipbuilding to accountancy, from social engineering to pharmacology, for missionary purposes and *ad majorem Dei gloriam* (for the greater glory of God) developed into a most impressive, if in the long run self-defeating, epistemological tool.[19]

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The intellectual and emotional discipline, the social and psychological accommodation described and prescribed by Ignatius of Loyola in such founding texts as the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* and elaborated and elucidated throughout the sixteenth century by Jesuit theologians anchored the members of the Society of Jesus in the field of active social engagement.[20] Confronted with the real and encouraged to weave multiple relations between "us" (Jesuits) and "foreigners" (non-Jesuits), these early modern "religious stockbrokers" were supposed to have their feet on the ground, often in the cultural mud or dust of some unpronounceable geographical spot, and to keep their eyes directed upward to the celestial abode from which uninterrupted mystical and divine inspiration trickled down. A task bigger than life for most mortals.[21]

Tropics as Climate and Metaphor in Portuguese India

When Francis Xavier, already a Jesuit rising star and a future saint of the church, stepped onto the Indian subcontinent in the Portuguese colonial enclave of Goa in 1542, his first discovery was that the whole country was spiritually sick, "subjected to the sin of idolatry," and wearisome (*trabaxosa*) because of the great heat.[22] Historians have rarely seen the topos of the dangers of the tropical climate, repeated over and over in Jesuit letters, as anything but a statement of fact. However, in fact, there was and is more to it. The association of the tropical climate with idolatry worked as an instant bridging method to distinguish and incorporate the foreign into the Catholic frame of references, and it served as the first possible explanation of idolatry. The terms *tropos* in Greek and *tropus* in Latin designate, besides and before their ecological semantic fields, a rhetorical move of "turning," re-turning, and twisting the sense of a word, such as in a metaphor or in similar figures of speech. Thus the Jesuit missionaries, and not only they but all studious and curious European writers scattered around the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, were subjected not only to the geographical tropics but also to the "tropics of discourse."[23]

One of the usual complaints about the tropics was the fertility of nature and of imagination, combined with the opposite effect of excessively rapid (over)growth, aging, decline, and finally rot. Indian women, animals, and plants were all perceived as excelling in beauty and other

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"useful" qualities (exchangeable, profitable, comestible, etc.), but at the same time, their value was endlessly uncertain due to corrupted and corrupting tropical airs, according to the generally accepted humoral axioms of the Hippocratic-Galenic medical theory. These same objects of pleasure and trade, the argument went, were also potentially dangerous and poisonous. *Mestiças* or other Asian women married to Portuguese *casados* were under suspicion of feeding their husbands dangerous drugs and substances, such as datura, an otherwise important medication against diarrhea.[24] Corpses of elephants left to rot in the city of Goa, combined with such unhygienic practices as leaving excrement on the rooftops to be cleaned by birds and ants, were held responsible for exuding smells that provoked virulent and contagious epidemics decimating the town population.

In the same way, it was commonly held that the hostile humors of "infidel" or "crypto-Jewish" souls fabricated and disseminated "foul" discourses against the Christian religion. In 1539, a New Christian had the dubious privilege of being burned at the stake in Goa, eleven years before the arrival of the Inquisition.[25] His crime was blasphemy. While one might consider it a trope of individual resistance, the accusations of blasphemy were usually a collective fabrication that emanated in a true moment of panic since blasphemy and epidemic were seen as feeding into each other. In 1543, the year in which cholera decimated the population of Goa, a physician, Jerónimo Dias, was the second New Christian to burn in the "holy fire."[26] Appropriately, Governor Martim Afonso de Sousa, who presided over Dias's trial, supervised in the same year the first dissection for scientific purposes of a choleric corpse.[27] This mortal illness (*passio cholerica*), locally known as *moryxy,* had shrunk the stomach of the deceased to the size of a small "hen's gizzard and wrinkled it as leather put on fire."[28] Using a similar gastric comparison in his *Letter to the People of Israel,* Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira, the archbishop of Goa, claimed that "nature is satisfied when it eats and drinks, & lacking drink, it becomes dry: just like that, the soul that receives a false doctrine becomes dry."[29]

While pestilence reached the human body through the air, whence the custom of fumigating houses and spaces with incense and sweet-smelling herbs, the false doctrine made its way into the soul by way of the spoken and written word. Thus, in 1557, another Jesuit star of aristocratic Portuguese lineage, Gonçalo de Sylveira (or Silveira), wrought havoc among the New Christian merchant community in Cochin

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(Cochim de baixo or Santa Cruz de Cochim), whom he accused of dropping blasphemous messages against the Christian religion into the alms box of the church. The presence of non-Portuguese Jews in Cochim de Cima or Mattancherry, close to the palace of the raja of Cochin, who were well connected throughout the trade world of the Indian Ocean, triggered the suspicion of the apostasy of the Portuguese New Christians.[30] The accused Judaizers were swiftly removed to Goa and then to Lisbon for a proper trial by the Inquisition, against the official opposition of Diogo Alvares Teles, the captain of Cochin, and Francisco Barreto, the governor of Goa, both of whom understood the imminent economic loss involved in such an action. Sylveira wrote an indignant letter to Lisbon pointing out that the purging of the New Christians was necessary because of the "abominations that can be found in the spirits (*espirtos*) of Cochin against Our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is clear that the Jews and the Muslims (*mouros*) who live around us and deal with us deride our religion."[31] The derision (*escárnio*) of the Christian religion was like the foul air of Cochin.

Souls and stomachs were, therefore, in peril in the particular ecological and cultural environment of India, to which Portuguese and other Catholic Europeans came in pursuit of lucrative business, riches, women, pleasure, and, sometimes, knowledge. Reports, official and private, concerning the evil customs—pecuniary greed, concubinage and polygamy, even apostasy—in vogue among the Portuguese in Asia, with or without proposed remedies for the situation, piled up in Lisbon from the early sixteenth century and reached an apogee in the 1560s. The *idade dourada,* the golden age of Portuguese rule, seemed to have been left in the past, according to the critical voices of angry writers, the most articulate and eloquent of whom included Dom Jorge Temudo, the archbishop of Goa, and Diogo do Couto, the historian and the first archivist of the Estado da Índia (the State of India).[32]

Before these ominous voices of defeat became louder and canonized in informal and official correspondence, a different view found its way into a printed work, *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas he Cousas Medicinais da India* [. . .], written by Garcia da Orta and printed in Goa in 1563. This New Christian physician proposed his own method for surviving in the tropics.[33] In his optimistic and unabashedly secular view, the problem and the key to the solution lay in the body, that is, in adapting individual, male Portuguese bodies to the trying weather and to the pernicious geography of the Torrid Zone. The way to do that was

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by collecting information and constituting a body of ethnobotanical knowledge concerning local, Asian *materia medica*. The ingestion of mostly tropical substances combined with selected indigenous medical practices tested and approved by Orta himself was to infuse longevity and virility into the Portuguese corporeal constitution. For this crypto-Jew forced to wear many masks to fend off the suspicion of Judaizing, the body was endlessly adaptable to the exterior environment, and no higher medical or scientific authority was to be trusted than the senses and the experience.

Hence, without actually using the word, the method for surviving in the tropics, or anywhere else, was adaptation to local air, local plants, local customs, and local languages. This is, in fact, what the Portuguese had already been doing, in fits and starts, partially and un-self-consciously both in Asia and in Brazil. By the 1560s, however, the official voices against a too rapid indigenization of the Portuguese in India grew louder. Orta's naturalism, grounded in the dominant medical and biological ideas of his time, had been, though cautiously and ambiguously so, more a critique of Portuguese colonial experience in Asia than a factual description of the situation. To help establish and maintain an Asian tropical empire with perfectly adapted Portuguese men and eventually women as the central protagonists was what Orta proposed to the political and administrative authorities of the Estado da Índia.

Thus, extolling Orta as the first and the most daring proponent of some sort of Lusotropicalist theory *avant la lettre,* as Gilberto Freyre did, is not simply an anachronism but a downright mystification.[34] While the Brazilian sociologist, the founder of this ambitious mid-twentieth-century sociological movement, attributed the superior capacity of adaptation in the tropics to a specifically and exclusively Portuguese "being in the world"—that is, to Portuguese character shaped by a long history of mixing and hybridity of blood and of culture, with Arabs and with Islam—for Garcia da Orta adaptability was a universal human condition based on the humoral constitution of the body and of the world. Nevertheless, Orta's *Colóquios* served Gilberto Freyre to substantiate his own points about the extraordinary geographical and cultural mobility, miscegenation and acclimatability, of the Portuguese in the tropics and to celebrate their successful colonial enterprises in Brazil and in Asia.[35] True enough, cultural and social incorporation was as much Orta's concern as it was Freyre's, but the direction in which this interpenetration between various local factors

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and actors was to be carried out is completely opposite. For the Brazilian sociologist, it is Portuguese culture (and blood), strong and plastic as it was, that successfully integrated foreign and local elements. Orta, on the other hand, was surreptitiously smuggling in an entirely different interpretation: that it was out of weakness that the Portuguese were forced to adopt local drugs, food, and certain customs in order to survive. Unraveling Orta's covert theory further, it appears that he clearly saw that it was the Portuguese who were being incorporated and integrated into the larger networks of local Asian medical, economic, social, maritime, and religious networks and markets, not the other way around.

This particular tacit suspicion (and approval) by Orta was denounced after the 1560s. The Portuguese tropical colonies in India were increasingly perceived as having "gone native" in the religious and sociocultural sense. Surrounded with "pagan" and "infidel" territories, the boundaries of tropical Catholicism were forever under siege, or that is how the official discourse justified the measures of internal surveillance and oppression. The juggernaut of the Inquisition was therefore welcomed in 1560 as a prophylactic and surgical instrument of the Portuguese royal padroado designed to restore the purity of faith and blood. Of some 16,176 inquisitorial processes, according to the 1774 inventory, the majority of cases tried by the Holy Office were due to lapses into Hindu religious practices, and their number increased considerably in the eighteenth century.[36] This should not come as a surprise since the territory of Goa, where the Inquisition wielded the strongest authority and influence, was largely inhabited by a population converted to Catholicism from *paganism*—a blanket term for various local religious practices and sects identified as non-Muslim.[37] Many of these punishable practices were connected with healing rituals practiced by most Goanese, from the highest-ranking *fidalgos* (nobles), the viceroy's family included, to the slave converts.[38]

Moreover, from 1563 on, in a series of official instructions and regulations, non-Catholic physicians were banned from Portuguese territory, while the New Christian medical practitioners, under attack by the Inquisition, were increasingly suspected of wanting to poison and kill the Portuguese in a fit of revenge. Orta himself—or rather what was left of him twelve years after his death, that is, his bones—was burned at the stake in 1580, not for his medical ideas but for his crypto-Jewish religious beliefs.

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Depending on the nature of the Portuguese official presence in Goa and in other Asian enclaves during the early 1550s, a fundamental change took place in the religious culture of the Estado da Índia. It started with generalized tremors of the overexcited religious fervors that shook the Portuguese metropolitan scene and were subsequently brought to the colonial shores, where they readily fused with the locally generated sense of economic and moral crisis in the mid-sixteenth century. Whether there was an economic crisis in the mid-sixteenth century at all, or to what extent it was merely a temporary financial crunch and unconnected to the much-advertised literature on the decadence and decline of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, is still debated among economic and social historians.[39] One thing is certain: the Jesuit missionaries who arrived in Asia from 1542 on fed on and disseminated the idea of religious crisis and decadence in a most efficient and resounding way. Crisis management was a structural part of Jesuit institutional strategies, as if they followed the precept "if there were no crisis, it would have to be invented."

Effervescent Missions among the Gentiles

Although Jesuits were not the only crisis mongers of the mid-sixteenth century, they had a particular ability to make this into a coherent framework, to make crisis real or hyperreal, and to transform it into a work of art on the pages of their correspondence, histories, and treaties and on the facades and walls of their churches. What we are left with today are various layers—rich in exceptional details, fertile in imagination, tropical in overgrown intertextuality—of connected histories eroded or expanded through endless rewriting, and solidified or diluted into present social relations and material artifacts.[40] The range of Jesuit missionary activities, simultaneously destructive, innovative, conservative, and adaptive, was wide and far-reaching in Asia and particularly in India. In a geographical sense, of course, the Jesuit missions remained tiny specks on the face of this compact but culturally complicated subcontinent.

Closely connected and, to growing Jesuit dismay, associated with Portuguese colonial presence, the mission territories—along the west coast of India from Diu, Daman, Bassein, Thana, and Chaul to Goa and farther south along the Canara and Malabar coasts, and to a much

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smaller degree along the Fishery and Coromandel coasts and in the Bay of Bengal—were considered routine enterprises. These solid outposts also served as springboards for the "difficult"—one is almost tempted to call them *effervescent*—Jesuit missions, away from the protected Portuguese or Christianized coastal enclaves to inland territories where Hindu or Muslim (or Jain, for that matter) kings and chieftains ruled and vied with each other for supremacy. Not just any Jesuit was eligible for these special missions, such as to the Mughal or Vijayanagara courts or in Madurai or the exploratory missions to Tibet. Small numbers of Jesuits, usually handpicked in accordance with their academic accomplishments or linguistic proficiency and, according to witnesses, "their ardent desire to suffer," were posted in these politically volatile missions with, as a rule, very slow or meager evangelical success.

In these effervescent Jesuit missions in India, as well as in Japan and China, a new anthropological view of non-Christian religion came into being. At the core of this view was a crucial separation of the religious and the social phenomena. When Christianity itself came to be understood in the same manner, the divorce between theology and social ethics became irrevocable. In the expression coined by Max Weber, "the disenchantment of the world" was, therefore, the result of the simultaneous discoveries in the effervescent Jesuit overseas missions that were the early "laboratories of modernity."[41]

Not all that came out of the Indian missions was meant to be curious and edifying only for the European audience. In India, for a variety of reasons, certain social groups and lineage clusters were undoubtedly attracted to Catholicism and to Jesuit missions. Except in Goa—including the Ilhas, Bardez and the Salsete peninsula—unreflected physical violence was not expedient as a means of conversion and was studiously avoided, if possible. Rather, a new type of corporeal, spiritual, and social discipline working to reorder human relations within an older communal framework appealed, as a rule, to ascending social groups or strata.[42] One of the fascinating conversion stories concerns the Parava pearl-fishing communities in the Gulf of Mannar, evocatively called *Costa da Pescaria*.[43] A fishery of pearls for the Portuguese merchants and a fishery of souls for the Jesuits, this long sandy strip of land from Kanniyakumari to Rameshwaram in the extreme south of India across the sea from Sri Lanka was the first and, in many ways, besides Goa, the most successful Jesuit mission territory in India in the sixteenth century. It was neither a routine nor a difficult mission, but somewhere

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in between the two. Formally initiated as a special deal cut between the Portuguese and the Paravas—a chance to get their hands on the lucrative pearl fishing for the former, and, for the latter, military protection from their local rivals, such as the Labbai pearl divers and the Maraikkayar pearl traders, both of whom were conveniently Muslim and thus identified by the Portuguese as perennial enemies—the Jesuit mission was established with the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1544.

The first Jesuit tool for the conversion of the "pagans" on their own ground and in their own language, that is, without the direct help of the Portuguese secular arm, was put in place in the mission among the Paravas, all the while comparing notes with other early Jesuit implantations within the Portuguese colonial cities and "fortresses," such as the College of St. Paul in Goa and residences-cum-colleges in Kollam, Ormuz, Melaka, Bassein, and São Thomé de Meliapor. The most favorable set of circumstances, based on the relative weakness of each of the major actors in the story, contributed to the establishment of a lasting Catholic community. On the one hand, the Paravas continued to require Portuguese military backing, in spite of their resentment of certain violent practices that turned at times against their own interests. On the other hand, the Portuguese never fully controlled the region, and their military presence was sporadic in time and scattered in space. In addition, both of the partners were able to fend off the threat (if there really was one) of the Muslim pearl fishers and traders, who remained in charge of the northern part of the Fishery Coast.

Without overwhelming Portuguese authority, and yet with the willing converts, the Jesuits were in a particular position to test both their persuasive capacity and their spiritual jurisdiction. Through the command of Tamil, which they transformed into a privileged medium of Christianization—at the expense of Portuguese and Latin, considered the key to understanding the Christian message, at least in the beginning in Goa and other Portuguese towns—the Jesuits created a tailor-made Catholicism specifically matching Parava social and cultural needs, such as the reorganization of the different lineages into a full-fledged caste structure. Various printed works in Tamil, for example the *Confessionairo* and the *Flos sanctorum,* bear eloquent witness to the multiple linguistic negotiations that took place between the Paravas' sense of what the new religion could do for them and the hermeneutic intuitions of the Jesuits.[44]

By the close of the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century,

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the Jesuit literary persuasion machine in various Asian languages, often equated with the strategy of accommodation first elaborated by Alessandro Valignano for the Japanese and then by his disciple Matteo Ricci for the Chinese mission, was only an extension of these first insights into the alchemy of "true" conversion. There are several reasons why this accommodationist strategy came to be associated with the Far East and not with India, in spite of Roberto Nobili's famous experiment.[45] But one detail, at first sight insignificant, may hold a grain of explanation. From Xavier to Valignano, the Jesuits were all convinced that the Japanese mission was "cold" and the people were "white" and thus, the argument goes, "endowed with the light of reason."[46] India, on the contrary, was seen as a "hot" land populated by "blacks," roaming around "naked," most of whom lived according to their "passions" rather than reason.[47] At this point in Jesuit and in Portuguese descriptions of the land and people they encountered in the Orient, of course, ecology, race, psychology, and religion were inextricably braided together, to the point of serving as general and permutable metaphors of undistinguishable otherness. These descriptions, however, were being rapidly divested of fantasy, although the marvelous and wishful thinking were much slower to vanish.

Forced to elaborate and write down their experiences systematically and in minute detail so that they could be easily understood and possibly transmitted further as strategic information, the Jesuits employed all their senses and their intellectual (scholastic or commonsense) abilities to analyze foreign phenomena.[48] Thus, the individual Jesuit experience of the ecological shock represented by India turned into a literary subtopos in a larger narrative of pilgrimage and separation from the European (Catholic) *oikoumene*. The passage to India was elegantly developed in Jesuit correspondence into an unavoidable tripartite narrative structure. The journey itself, with storms, rough seas, illness, and basic human misery, reminded the travelers of their own mortality. Upon arrival, almost as a rule, the newcomers discovered the unbearable monsoon heat and humidity, also considered a major health hazard. Thus, once they touched land, high fever or some such virulent ailment often literally swept them off of their feet. They did not yet feel that the soil "rejected them," as E. M. Forster expressed his own and British ambiguous feelings about tropical colonialism. For the Jesuits, the initial suffering was a divine ordeal and a test of their bodily and spiritual strength to be employed in the future "for the greater glory of God."

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The harsher the heat of the tropics, the stronger the Jesuit will, determination, and, surely, the divine grace bestowed to survive, only to suffer more, according to the famous Ignatian formula. It is when ecology slips into culture that the narrative of pilgrimage comes to its apogee and conclusion. Consequently, climate and environment plunged into a discursive twilight zone, while paganism resurfaced in all its demonic, monstrous, yet splendid textuality. From the 1570s until the middle of the seventeenth century, priority in the Jesuit missionary tasks in India was given to containing the non-Christian religious practices through deep and thick description and understanding of their innermost impulses and mechanisms. While the Indian pagans continued to be "black," they kept on acquiring layers of new ethnographic outfits, such as the taxonomy of caste distinctions accompanied by founding myths of the lineages inhabiting a given region. Still mostly considered to be excessively given to passions, the Brahmans and various other social groups of literati were perceived as lacking nothing in terms of the "light of natural reason," in spite of their gentility. In the course of time, even color lightened for some of them. Thus, Afonso Pacheco wrote at the end of 1577 that the Brahmans of Goa were "important people, whiter and well-proportioned, ingenious and smart."[49] By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Brahmans would become the *docti,* the learned men, who controlled their bodies through vegetarianism, sexual continence, and social exclusion and who were experts in "cold," logical reasoning.

The devilish Hindu practices and superstitions that appalled (and probably frightened) the early missionaries wherever they chanced to witness their mise-en-scène and efficiency continued to haunt Jesuit correspondence, but they had been considerably diluted and cooled off by a proper analysis of their "essential" parts and structures, developed and hotly debated among the Jesuits in the course of the early seventeenth century. And while, as Manuel (or Emmanuel) de Morais vividly put it in 1547, the unbearable heat continued to "bake alive" the Jesuit fathers who walked long distances on their pastoral visits along the Fishery Coast, their interest in the veritable bestiary of pagan "saints," such as "clay horses, clay buffaloes, stone men and the figures of stone cobras, peacocks and crows," gave way to more sophisticated, though to the Jesuit mind equally enervating, theological ideas.[50] At first sight, this paganism appeared to the Jesuits to be an unpredictable mumbo-jumbo of every kind of brutality (*brutalidade*), which in the sixteenth-century

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meant pertaining to the nature of an unreasonable animal and worthy of Ambroise Paré's natural monsters, which were defined as products of different climates and of different humoral deficiencies at the moment of conception. At the same time, the Jesuits did their best to distill vestiges of the memory of the Gospel even from this kind of abominable paganism.[51]

Not all agreed on what this memory actually contained or to what extent the contamination with paganism was successful as a result of the power of persuasion exercised over simple minds by the "wicked" Brahman priests, who knew the truth but hid it for their own temporal profit and authority. Those Jesuits who worked primarily in the difficult missions and were only vaguely involved in the Portuguese colonial enterprise, like those who resided in Goa and in other major Jesuit college towns in the Estado da Índia, opted for an interpretation of paganism as a cultural and social phenomenon. The notion of religion, in this case non-Christian religion, shrank to an almost invisible shape, losing even its demonic and superstitious label. Emptied of religion, but not of religious sensitivity and yearning, paganism was to be charged with the true message and word of God. This is, in a nutshell, the basic theological justification developed by Roberto Nobili for his method of accommodation applied in the Madurai Mission.[52] The exterior facade of the Catholicism Nobili defended was permitted to acquire a vertiginous degree of resemblance with South Indian Brahmanism (*Bramanismo*)—a word coined by Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, Nobili's nemesis in the mission—but also remained open to other types of non-Christian theology.

Through this small theological opening, shaped and conditioned by the long-established and living tradition of the sacred and religious practices that would only later come under the heading *Hinduism,*[53] the indigenized or "tropical Catholicism" sent its roots firmly into the ground like a banyan tree, an overused but inexhaustibly precise simile.[54] The "tropicality" of Indian Catholicism is more of a metaphorical ruse or a hieroglyphic abbreviation than an analytical or methodological concept with promptly revealed subcategories and rigorous classification of traits and facts. On the most basic, visual level, tropicality is what initially comes to mind when one sees for the first time the exterior of the churches and chapels that dot the Indian landscape. Whitewashed after the monsoon or stained, moldy, and decrepit before the next one, they appear by turns strangely majestic and vulnerable.

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To ensure that the building survives from one season to another is a special art in the tropics, and not all do. Only those that continue to draw on the sacred energy of the site, identified long before as the crossroads between the divine and the human, continue to thrive. If the sacred vacates the site, which happens quite often, the structure is left without much ado to fall to ruin and ultimately disappears in nature. Tropicality in the interior of the prayer halls can be detected on pulpits decorated with local mythological creatures, such as snakelike Nagas, and on ornamental stucco or woodwork, where Christian saints are smeared with sandalwood paste and yellow and red powder and garlanded or strewn with flowers (figs. 1a–1d). The freestanding crosses (*kurucati*) in front of the churches, along or in the middle of streets and in graveyards, are usually dark and shiny, smelling of rancid *ghee* (purified butter), with which the devotees anoint themselves according to their own calendar of auspicious days or for the purpose of some urgent intercession.

Certainly, the imposing basilica, the Bom Jesus in Old Goa, "the Rome of the East," is not so different from the Il Gesù in "the eternal city," at least not in its architectural shell (fig. 2). The churches in Tamilnad, on the other hand, especially small side chapels from Uvari on the Fishery Coast to Kayatar, to Kamanayakenpatti, to Elankurichi, to Velankanni, and up to Chennai in the north, could be mistaken by an inexpert eye for unorthodox temples. And, inversely, for similar reasons of religious adaptation, the Shantadurga temple in Ponda, close to Goa, can equally be mistaken for a church.[55]

Indian Catholic Tropicality versus Lusotropicalism, Métissage, and Inculturation

Still in search of a proper word to encapsulate the religious encounter in the sixteenth century and a continuous coexistence of Catholic frames with or within a plethora of supernatural brinkmanship, sacred power sites, and learned and popular or intermediary religious sedimentation on the Indian peninsula, I believe that *tropicality* is a better suited anthropological term than others, such as *acculturation*, or the newest on the block, such as *inculturation* and *métissage*. It is, however, important not to confound it with Gilberto Freyre's *Lusotropicalism*, although his stimulating but completely wrong and politically dubious

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analysis of the Portuguese national character and its suitability to encounter (and conquer) other peoples added spice to sociological and historical imagination. If Portuguese merchants, royal officials, and ecclesiastics adapted rapidly (if at all) to the difficult climate and learned how to deal with the overpowering cultures surrounding them in Asia, partly by adapting to and partly by fencing themselves off from them, it was more because they had no other choice and simply managed to control their weakness, rather than because of the plasticity and compositeness of their character. And yet Freyre's acclamation of hybridity, although somewhat selective since he excluded Jewishness as a positive element in the Portuguese national essence, might at times appear fashionable and fit into contemporary debates.

Tropicalism in India is not solely, and is only accidentally, Lusitanian. It is used here to represent a colonial situation—bound to Christianization by the umbilical cord—quite different from the one that defined the history of Brazil, where the Portuguese established settler communities and in the long run a separate nation-state. The shock of the spiritual conquest, the cultural clash, and the colonization of and domination over indigenous imagination, even if willed by the missionary colonizer, followed multiple and quite different scenarios on the Indian subcontinent, sometimes through destructive physical and symbolic violence, but always on a scale that was too small and too ineffective in the larger, regional context. Zooming closer to ground level, social, cultural, and religious changes, as well as showcasing cruelties and juridical impositions, did affect the destinies of the local communities. However, one characteristic of tropical Catholicism is that it defies a unified analytical approach, even for one and the same region. It is as if the soil in which it was planted, a soil with a long and complicated history and already fertile with layers of seeds of other sacred landscapes and cultural configurations, deformed at every step the "young vineyard of the Lord," turning it into a garden of bitter "mustard seeds." Students of Jesuit missionary history know these and similar complaints from Jesuit correspondents all too well.

Yet recently, from another missionary-colonial-cultural field, Mexico, studied in recent decades by a number of talented historians of various academic and political colors and persuasions, came an invitation to revisit the commonplace historiographical folds and frills and to denounce terms such as the *acculturation, conquest, purity,* and *authenticity* of pre-Columbian cultures and many other sacred truths enshrined

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in not-so-old cultural and postcolonial studies.[56] Serge Gruzinski employed vigorously and with almost proselytizing zeal words like *métissage* and *le monde mêlé,* which resist elegant and evocative translation in English but which, for the time being, do sound right in French. His early, most stimulating work had some of its intellectual roots in a more anthropological, acculturalist idiom.[57] From the world of conquistadors and the conquered, he transported us to an uncertain, contingent, and porous world of give and take, of random or planned but always transformative violence, of cultural impurity and admixtures on all levels of words and images.[58] In focusing on the process of métissage under the auspices of the "Catholic monarchy" of the Hapsburgs, Gruzinski logically arrived at the point where the distinction between local and global becomes blurred and epistemologically useless.[59]

For the historians of the Portuguese colonial and Jesuit missionary presence in India, the globalizing effects of the Catholic monarchy are somewhat less immediately obvious. Certainly, multiple cultural borrowings across political and religious boundaries and mixing up things, words, and blood were not unusual, but on a much smaller scale and confined to frames defined by non-Portuguese actors, from the kings and small chieftains of Muslim Bijapur to the Hindu Vijayanagara, from the Nayaks of Madurai to the minor kings of Kerala, from Mughal emperors to sea pirates. In a word, the tentacles of the Catholic monarchy remained a peripheral, mostly coastal phenomenon in India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Continental and land-oriented political structures on the subcontinent configured their own history without necessarily taking hints from a European (Iberian) pattern. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's term *connected histories* might help better in composing an ever-changing puzzle of early modern political alliances, structures, and contacts. A view from afar and from a rooftop may positively identify the movement of the entities on the ground, but it cannot predict the exact consequences of this process. Applied to social, cultural, and religious aggregates with previously acquired degrees of cohesion, the outcome, that is, its local manifestation, is even more uncertain.[60] Notwithstanding the number of written documents that have been produced, the history of the Portuguese colonial enterprise in India still appears marginal in terms of the long-term dynamics of change and development and compared, for example, with the importance of the Mughal and British empires.

Christianization was perhaps the most comprehensive intentional

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effort at globalization by the early modern Portuguese Estado da Índia and the Catholic monarchy, although the missionaries in charge of it were far from being perfect partners in the game. Unlike in the Latin American context—except in a few special places like Goa, where Portuguese colonial life displayed morphological similarities in such areas as urban planning, religious and royal ceremonies, and production of art and artifacts—the missions in India were much more uncertain than, say, Salvador de Bahia, Merida, or Lima and more often than not dangerous territorial extensions. Due to the weak Portuguese presence, occidentalization never stood a chance there. This is why Roberto Nobili was able to present "his" religion and his own pedigree and nationality as completely disconnected from the Portuguese. Almost from the start of the mission on the Fishery Coast, not only did Francis Xavier and his local *línguas* or *topazes* (interpreters) translate Christian prayers into Tamil but an immediate reflection on what by the end of the century would be called *accommodation* came to be seen as an urgent task. At times, however, newcomers in the field who did not have an opportunity or the desire to experience the "dangerous" Jesuit mission territory, like the learned António Gomes in the late 1540s, behaved in a way judged reckless and insensitive to a particular local situation.[61] Non-Portuguese, in particular, often voiced an accusation of Portuguese nationalism in the Jesuit work-in-progress mission reports.

Generally, in fact, the Jesuits themselves exercised something of an autocensure of their own Euro- and ethnocentricity, lending an attentive ear (and eye) to their converts' responses. The limits of adaptation were thus stretched further, especially when no other European witnesses were there to voice their complaints. Finally, in the course of the seventeenth and, even more so, eighteenth century, protests grew louder from the rival missionary orders and from within Jesuit ranks as well. Even the justification of *accommodatio* as a temporary conversion strategy, a sort of acclimatization garden for the new plants in the Lord's vineyard, became suspect. The denouement of the Malabar and the Chinese rites controversies in the eighteenth century put a stop to these experiments because the grafting of Christianity onto powerful local religious traditions not only had very limited success but also threatened to produce irreversible effects of contamination—or at least this was feared. Finally, the boundary between paganism and Christianity had to be clearly signaled. Hence, the reason I prefer the metaphor of tropicality to métissage is in its implied sense of a turning—actually turning back into

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something that was already there before the arrival of Christianity. In addition, métissage is closely connected with the process of globalization, while the concept of tropicality privileges localization.

From a rather different milieu, that of the Catholic theologians and thinkers of the post-Vatican II era, came another, in many ways politically charged, concept—*inculturation*. It is announced as a prescription rather than a description of the evangelical process. The term itself was coined in the 1960s, and in 1977 it appeared for the first time in a papal document voicing the Vatican's concerns about bridging the gap between religion and culture.[62] The question was how to incarnate the Christian message in different sociocultural milieus. This is, obviously, a Jesuit method of accommodation revisited, but with contemporary anthropological hindsight. Reminiscent of Nobili's method in Madurai and Ricci's in China, inculturation is supposed to peel off all "foreign" characteristics, values, and expressions from the pure Christian message, which is then to be dressed in local colors. To do this, again—just like the early seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries—local religious and literary traditions were to be studied and were to provide the blueprint for the indigenized church. Moreover, inspired by Vatican II and its insistence on interreligious dialogue, the third world Catholic theologians who embraced inculturation enthusiastically went in search of "the seeds of good" or the seeds of the Word contained in other religions.[63] But the problem is that to incarnate Christianity—which is based on a universal and atemporal dogma—in a particular historical and local culture is both logically and sociologically complicated, if not impossible. In fact, the Incarnation in the Christian tradition is no less than a miracle.

As early as the 1990s, Rome came to consider the radical Indian theologians, with their strong stand on inculturation and dialogue, dangerous. Like Nobili before them, they were accused of religious relativism, and their actions were judged devastating from the point of view of evangelization. But unlike in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when no Indians were admitted to the Society of Jesus, today there are very few European Jesuits in India.[64] The inculturation movement can thus even be seen as carrying the seeds of Indian "nationalism," even though the Hindu nationalist extreme right today increasingly brands Indian Christians of all denominations as foreign elements.[65] On the other hand, even from within the same theological family, there can hardly be consensus on which Indian religious and cultural tradition to adopt as a

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blueprint for inculturated Christianity: The Brahmanic, elite, Sanskritic culture preferred by Nobili? Giuseppe Beschi's Tamil literary culture? Dalit religious tradition? These are difficult choices and are certain to displease just about everybody.

Catholic theological ideas and theologians' intentions in the seventeenth century, as well as today, are often too lofty for and foreign to the common believers and churchgoers. On the ground level, in village India, the Christian religious landscape continues to take unusual and unorthodox shapes. From Jesuit letters describing their various mission fields in South India until 1773, we can get a glimpse of the process of turning the Virgin Mary into a manifestation of the goddess. Called, for example, Shakti (generic female power), Durga, Kali, and Mariyamman, the goddess is one of the most powerful divine beings in the South Indian sacred landscape.[66] Jesuit Marian devotional practices were, therefore, easily fused with the older system of propitiation of this vengeful, merciful, and thaumaturgic goddess, regarded as both inflicting illness and curing it. Teaching their converts to distinguish the Immaculate and affable Mary from the blood-drenched Durga was a mind-boggling task for the missionaries. Their intention was not to fuse the two, but neither could they separate them altogether since the adaptationist palimpsest strategy, as proposed by Nobili, targeted alternately either the signifier or the signified. Even if Nobili, Balthazar da Costa, and many other missionaries wrote numerous treatises in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit explaining in detail how and why the goddess had nothing to do with the Virgin Mary, they allowed, or rather they did not prevent their converts from interpreting for themselves, these difficult divine (or demonic) relationships (figs. 3a and 3b). That the Shakti grew over Mary, even gave her her name, is attested in contemporary anthropological research on Marian health sanctuaries in Tamil Nadu, which is visited daily by devotees and pilgrims of all major religions in India—Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim.[67]

Tropical Catholicism

Therefore, to chisel out an appropriate approach to the Christianization of India as a cultural and political agent of restructuring under the Portuguese royal padroado, the concepts of métissage and inculturation are both of only limited use. The first was developed to explain a dif-

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ferent historical configuration, and the second is no more than a modernized extension of accommodation and better suits the partisan and prescriptive pursuits of contemporary Catholic theologians. Nor is it helpful to focus on "subaltern" resistance or negotiation, as has been in vogue for more than a decade in Indian studies and refers primarily to British colonialism and the forms of domination related to it.[68] Without a full-fledged colonial power behind the program of Christianization, it is not possible to constitute a proper subaltern object of study or to identify counterhegemonic narratives. In addition, the indeterminacy of conversion and especially shifts in religious consciousness are not an issue in a situation in which statehood and nationhood have not yet been elevated to the pedestal of the sacred societal paradigms.[69]

With all these caveats and hesitations in mind, the metaphor of *troping* (*tropics, tropicality*) appears to be the most appropriate analytical and descriptive tool for the process of conversion to Christianity in India during the pre-British colonial period. Just as in the literary theory and rhetoric from which it originated, a trope generates a movement, a flight from something literal to something other than itself. Intended as carriers of uniformity and facts, tropes endlessly convert meanings and relations of things. The desired Christian identity in India, therefore, remains discontinuous and imperfect. Hence, each convert community displays particularities based on its preconversion social structure, its embeddedness in the regional sacred landscape, and its postconversion self-conscious reconstitution. For example, the Catholics in the Madurai Mission during the early seventeenth century were shocked and disgusted at the thought of being equated with Parava Catholics from the Fishery Coast or with the Portuguese in Goa. Conversion to Christianity obviously meant different things to different convert groups, but it never meant a universal religion. In addition, the change of heart and the change of customs, rites, and political allegiance were quite different propositions. Thus, learned Brahman converts might not see any contradiction in turning Christianity into their private faith, while for the outside world they would continue to follow strict rules of purity and pollution and even perform life-cycle ceremonies and participate in temple worship. Precociously, Nobili's solution to this problem was to name all the trappings of religious behavior that were not inner belief social, not religious at all.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Jesuits again tried to separate the religious and the social in order to convert Brahmans who

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came to study in their colleges. In St. Joseph's College in Tiruchchirappalli, the idea was put forward to found a separate residential colony for the high castes who enthusiastically participated in this latter-day adaptationist experiment à la Nobili and who themselves declared:

> We wish to show by the practice of Christian virtues . . . side by side with an outward conformity to Brahman habits and custom, that Christianity does not mean drinking, wearing hats, boots and trousers, or surrender of caste dignity, but a vivifying influence which raises man to the highest perfection of his moral nature.[70]

That the converts' Christian experience should on no account be equated with a European experience is a Jesuit discovery to which Nobili dedicated some of the most brilliant pages in his Latin opus concerning theologico-anthropological aspects of accommodation. This is the major turn, or trope, that defined the Jesuits' type of Christianization in their "difficult" missions in India, China, and Japan.

The expressions and institutions of the native or vernacular Christianity that developed and continue to branch out from these early missionary centers in India can therefore be called *tropical Catholicism* for at least two reasons.[71]

One reason is to evoke the fact that, historically, the climate was considered part of the difficulty in converting the natives because of its humoral connection with idolatry. The ecological basis of Indian religious experience—which is also the basis of Indian medical experience—was therefore perceived as an essential problem in the eradication of idolatrous practices.[72] By the middle of the eighteenth century, the relation between the hot Torrid Zone and idolatry solidified into a self-evident truth. According to Montesquieu, warm climates debilitated the elasticity and the force of the fibers in the body, making Indians cowardly, passive, impressionable, sensual, lazy of mind, and given to idolatry.[73] In the early nineteenth century, Abbé Dubois, a French missionary and a famous ethnographer/informant for the British in matters of Indian customs and manners, extolled caste as the social adhesive linking otherwise barbarian Indian crowds.[74] It was only by acquiring knowledge in order to dominate both the natural environment and social relations that the later British scientific enthusiasts opened the way for controlling the effects of India's "hot" and "deranged" demography, society, and religion.[75]

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The second reason is because of the linguistic vernacularization (or tropicalization) of the Christian message, church rites, and social customs associated with conversion. By the reeds, branches, and lianas of the various Indian languages into which missionaries translated catechetical works, the plenitude and historical intricacies of immemorial beliefs and practices dating from before the conversion returned to weave together and reinterpret Christianity in unpredictable new ways. Thus, when Henrique Henriques rewrote the history of Christianity for his angelic community of Parava converts, starting with Christ's circumcision, he told them that "in the beginning there were no Muslims, only Jews and Tamils."[76] Tamils were, in this sense, generic gentiles (*gentíos*), but the way Henriques turned the history of Christianity into a Tamil (Indian) history might have appeared quite unsettling to his contemporaries in Europe.[77] Luckily, Portuguese ignorance of the Tamil idiom served as a protective shield for this linguistically ambitious Jesuit. As a New Christian (converted Jew), he was, of course, under suspicion of the Inquisition.

The use of language, including communicating through gestures, moreover, is what makes the conversion discernibly tropological because it is premised on the displacement of cultural patterns and the change of consciousness.[78] The endeavor to replace memories linked to a particular culture and language with one's own memories is a willed act and an ideal of each proselytizing mission, but conversion never works quite that way. Conversion can be defined rather as an intentionally false equation posturing as simple translation. For example, *Deus* (God) equals *tambiran, confesso* (I confess) equals *kompsarikkiren, pão* (bread) equals *appam*. If we analyze each word in these early missionary translation pairs, transferring Portuguese into Tamil words, we will discover layers of meanings that would make the transfer suspicious, even impossible. According to the *Tamil Lexicon, tambiran* means (1) God, (2) master, lord, king, (3) title of Travancore kings, (4) non-Brahman monk of Saiva mutt (monastery), and (5) overseer of monks.[79] Only by reducing words to a single, unified meaning can the translation/conversion actually be effective. This, of course, proved to be impossible. Thus Nobili replaced *tambiran* with *sarvesvaran,* claiming that the latter Sanskrit term was free of political and pagan subsignification.[80] From Henrique Henriques to later Jesuit grammarians and lexicographers of Tamil, like Balthazar da Costa and Antão de Proença in the seventeenth century and Giuseppe Beschi, Domingos Madeyra,

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and Paulo Francisco de Noronha in the eighteenth, the translation process did not come to a halt.[81]

To make things even more complicated, as soon as Sanskrit was "discovered" and defined as the language of the indigenous sciences, it rapidly acquired the status of the Indian "Latin" and for a long time held the promise of being a (possibly) perfect receptor language of Christian spirituality.[82] From the early eighteenth century, the French—spreading from Pondicherry, where different missionary orders (Jesuits, members of the *Société des missions-étrangères,* and Capuchins) cohabited uneasily and led quarrelsome lives—as well as the Dutch, German, and English all entered into the game of the conversion-translation-domination pattern that fed into the British colonial scientific turn.

Narrative Frontiers, Frontiers of Paganism

This book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Tropical Saints and Relics, I look into how the biographies and relics of the two major Christian saints, St. Francis Xavier and St. Thomas the Apostle, helped various Portuguese colonial actors frame and sanctify their own sacred and political jurisdiction and geography in India.

Francis Xavier's early premonitions, travel adventures, mission fields, canonization after death, and relics marked and outlined the scope of the Jesuit expansion from Africa to China. Xavier's vita, sanctified in texts, theater performances, and paintings, is the perfect and exemplary model of a missionary life. By stripping away the layers of hagiographic narratives, from official inquiries to Jesuit histories that multiplied following the process of canonization in Rome (1622), my aim in this first chapter is to signpost the major themes and sites of contention taken up by his successors. During his relatively short, hectic, and tempestuous ten years of travels through Asia, Francis Xavier seemed to have lived through, savored, and reflected on all the important missionary issues, from the desire for personal sanctity to the method of accommodation. Although his ultimate mission (to conquer China for Christ) ended in failure and death, his body continued to make history. Jealously kept in the Church of Bom Jesus in Goa, Xavier's relic finally grew its local, tropical roots and continues to impersonate both a Christian saint and an Indian divinity for his local Christian, Muslim, and Hindu devotees (fig. 4).

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The second chapter traces the history of the Portuguese discovery, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, of the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle on the Coromandel Coast. The "invented" and contentious history that this discovery produced is still a living tradition. A scramble for the holy bones and relics and the rivalry between various Portuguese actors, both religious and secular, brought some prosperity and little peace to the town of São Tomé de Meliapor (today a suburb of Chennai or Madras). Nowhere did the sacred and the political work together so seamlessly, at least in the beginning, than in this small enclave "at the holy feet of the apostle." While for the Portuguese and the Jesuits the apostle's bones and relics were a way to appropriate the dispersed local sacred sites of dubious origin and authenticity, rewire them with their own brand of Christianity, and then claim political cum religious authority over the whole of the territory, St. Francis Xavier's body was imported to Goa precisely to add the much needed sacred dimension to the Portuguese capital and to the Jesuit Indian headquarters. These two homegrown saints are two examples of the Portuguese colonial will to acquire a firm local grounding. Just how and where the fusion of the local tropical and global Christian substances was to occur depended on the preexisting geography of the sacred and on contingent historical events filliped into motion by various actors.

The next three chapters, which belong to part two, Tropical Virtues and Vices, unravel and document a variety of Jesuit missionary experiences in India. All the protagonists *in fabula* are pioneers and inhabit, in one way or another, the frontiers of the Christian world. Their judgments and writing, their decisions and, at times, misguided actions, defined the limits of the possible and desirable in geographical, cultural, and epistemological terms. Thus, in the third chapter, a Portuguese Jesuit with an aristocratic pedigree, António Gomes, who appeared to have led the same missionary Christian zealous life as Francis Xavier, ended his missionary term in India as a falling star, a flop. My aim in scrutinizing the history of his personal and missionary failure is to analyze the inner workings of the Jesuit institutional machine as it was periodically jump-started in the frontier missions. The combination of the excess of spiritual fervors and Portuguese aristocratic nationalism, epitomized in the life of António Gomes, is the background against which larger issues vital for the survival of the Society of Jesus were chiseled out. The use of personal charisma or will versus obedience or discipline, the principle of egalitarian *communitas*—feeling among the

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members versus hierarchical structuring—these are some of the dilemmas continuously facing Jesuit superiors and subalterns. The solutions were, of course, often disappointing, as António Gomes bitterly learned during his stay in India.

The desire for martyrdom is at the heart of the fourth chapter. It is a particularly complex Jesuit predicament since the Jesuits were encouraged both to strive for and, paradoxically, to avoid it. Hence, martyrdom became a tangled political issue among the Jesuits themselves. Antonio Criminali, the major character in this chapter, whom non-Christian soldiers decapitated near Vedalai on the Fishery Coast in South India in 1548, never acquired the crown of martyrdom. He is often ambiguously called a protomartyr because his act of self-sacrifice was considered as somewhat imprudent and rash. While in the course of the sixteenth century a full-blown aesthetic cult of the martyrs developed in Jesuit colleges in Rome and in Europe, in the field, on the frontier, the missionaries were advised to avoid violence at all cost. Conversion was finally a question of the tortured heart, not of the body.

The increasing Jesuit interest in the anthropology of paganism and the discovery of Hinduism from the early seventeenth century on are discussed in the fifth chapter. By looking into two treatises written by contemporary Jesuit writers Diogo Gonçalves and Jacome Fenicio, the world of South Indian idolatry and, in their opinion, deviant social customs breaks open in their informative frontier narratives. Each focused on different issues according to his own sensibility: Gonçalves on descriptions of kinship structure, geography, and basic religious beliefs; Fenicio on cosmologies, religious beliefs, and rituals. Long before the idle British amateur ethnologists, these two protoethnographic accounts mapped the territory later assigned to Hinduism.

Finally, the third and the last part of the book, Disciplining the Tropics, is about Jesuit (and Portuguese) conceptions of the pagan body and pagan language. Both needed to be disciplined, straight-jacketed, and fashioned into a proper Christian idiom. The disciplining project was not without problems since the Jesuits had to invent their own strategies as they went along and discovered new missionary fields. One was a medical mission that turned out to be problematic in spite of its great popularity among the Christians and the "pagans." The inherent contradiction involved in the Jesuit medical mission is explored in the sixth chapter in the examples of the biographies of two Jesuit physicians and by looking into how the Jesuits were compelled to redefined

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their medical tasks. Instead of simply curing individual ailing bodies, they endeavored to heal and reform the sick social body of the Estado da Índia. Instead of administering medical treatment, Jesuits wrote and enforced the rules and regulations for the hospitals. Their contemporaries considered spiritual, social, and corporeal hygiene recommended by the Jesuits to be a full success.

In the seventh chapter, it is the Holy Word that serves as the medicine of the soul. The first Jesuit translation of catechism and other Christian manuals and stories into Tamil is where the first true accommodation took place. The Jesuit linguistic mission had enormous success among the Parava pearl-fishing communities, but the problem of whether the Christian doctrine was translatable into Tamil, a "pagan" idiom, remained. How to convert a language continued to haunt Jesuit linguists in the Tamil country, from Henrique Henriques to Roberto Nobili and Giuseppe Beschi and others. This last chapter discusses how much twisting of the tongue is necessary or sufficient for conversion and whose tongue is twisted in the end.

It is obvious that the Jesuit missionaries imported an enormous amount of European cultural baggage and spiritual furniture to their Indian frontier, but it was the local bazaars that actually defined the price and the demand for these and similar goods. It may also be true that the tropical world of India produced humoral and geographical boundaries that demanded a great deal of bodily energy and skill to adapt. The Jesuits not only had the strength and the zeal for the job, they also left texts, descriptions, and written opinions—a rich tropics of discourses from which we can glimpse the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Indian missionary frontier. The seven chapters in this book are no more than frontier flagpoles claiming a narrow strip of land, but leaving a whole tropical forest for those who will come.