



Figure 1. Pulpit (with breasts of *nāgas* removed), Church of Saint Anne (Santana), Talaulim, Tiswadi, Goa.
Photo: Author.

The pulpit trap

Possession and personhood in colonial Goa

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From the mid-seventeenth century, when many churches both large and small were completed in Goa, the Portuguese colonial capital of Asia, a horde of splendidly crossbred creatures appeared on their gilded wooden pulpits.¹ Carved as human from the waist up with bent fish (or snake?) tails of blue or dark green, or with golden foliage at the bottom, they appear in four types: females with bulging breasts, males with beards and sometimes wings, androgynous figures, and figures with grotesque or beastlike faces (figs. 1–4).² Their appearance on the ornate, eye-catching pulpits, located in the middle of the side walls of the churches, especially after the Council of Trent, is fitting. The pulpit was, after all, a landscape where the divine Word and the demonic or pagan world staged a cosmic competition. Unlike an altarpiece, which Arthur Danto lucidly defined as “a trap for saints,” a baroque pulpit had an even larger mandate.³ As a renovated post-Tridentine bulwark of

the Word, it was a snare not only for saints, but also for whatever powers remained outside of Christian holy places and sacred objects. What Catholic theology and orthodoxy excluded had an opportunity to reappear, in a slightly modified form, in the spatial, temporal, and cultural framework of colonial and Catholic Goa.

In early modern Catholic Goa, often called the “Rome of the Orient,” what needed to be brushed away from memory and from the present was the fact that Goa was itself just a small dot on a large infidel and heathen canvas. In an effort to purify and organize the space of Catholicism in Asia within the Portuguese colonial project—a project that both supported and hampered what the missionaries considered a spiritual conquest—various religious orders devised and applied the method of accommodation to local cultural practices.⁴ At the forefront of this effort were the Jesuits. Historiography of the Jesuit missions in Asia has recently become a flourishing subfield of the “global” study of cultural encounters precisely because the concept of accommodation evokes the noncoercive (cultural and intellectual) side of Catholic spiritual expansion and opens up a space for the expression of non-European historical actors.⁵ Recent scholarship—from analyses of

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1. Recent works on Goan church architecture include A. Nunes Pereira, *A Arquitetura Religiosa Cristã de Velha Goa: Segunda Metade do Século XVI–Primeiras Décadas do Século XVII* (Lisbon, 2005); J. Pereira, *Churches of Goa* (New Delhi, 2002); P. Dias, *Arte Indo-Portuguesa: Capítulos da História* (Coimbra, 2004); P. Varela Gomes, *Whitewash, Red Stone: A History of Church Architecture in Goa* (New Delhi, 2011); C. Osswald, *Written in Stone: Jesuit Buildings in Goa and Their Artistic and Architectural Features* (Goa, 2013).

2. So far there is only one full-length monograph devoted to Goan pulpits: H. Moreira de Frias, *Goa: A Arte dos Púlpitos* (Lisbon, 2006). For pulpit typology see P. Dias, *História da Arte Portuguesa no Mundo (1415–1822): O Espaço do Índico* (Lisbon, 1998), pp. 296–301. For the most recent work, see Esteban García Brosseau’s unpublished doctoral thesis, “Nagas, Naginis y Grutescos: La iconografía fantástica de los púlpitos indoportugueses de Goa, Daman y Diu en los siglos XVII y XVIII” (Ph.D. diss., UNAM, Mexico City, 2012). Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to acquire a copy of this study in time to use it in this article.

3. A. Danto, review of *Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, by David Freedberg, *Art Bulletin* 72, no. 2 (1990): 341–342.

4. P. Aranha, “Gerarchie razziali e adattamento culturale: La ‘ipotesi Valignano,’” in *Alessandro Valignano S.I., Uomo del Rinascimento: ponte tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. A. Tamburello, A. J. Üçerler S.J., and M. Di Russo (Rome, 2008), pp. 76–98; I. G. Županov, “Accommodation,” in *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, ed. R. Azria and D. Hervieu-Léger (Paris, 2010), pp. 1–4.

5. The chronology, the geography, and the extent of Portuguese violence wrought against Muslim and Hindu religious edifices and objects in Goa continue to be hotly debated. If between 1510 and 1530 most of the non-Christian temples and mosques had been demolished in the “Old Conquests” (Tiswadi, Bardez, Salcete), this process was never completed in the “New Conquests” (Bicholim, Sattari, Ponda, and others) acquired in the eighteenth century. See Â. Barreto Xavier, “Disquiet on the Island: Conversion, Conflicts and Conformity in Sixteenth-century Goa,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 44, no. 3 (2007): 270. The accusations of the tabula rasa violence have become contaminated with nationalist (and Hindutva) zeal, and are currently being nuanced by historians and anthropologists. See A. Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Bloomington, 2014). Without diminishing the use of force and violence by the Portuguese in the



Figure 2. Pulpit, Church of St. Peter (São Pedro), Panelim, Tiswadi, Goa. Photo: Author.

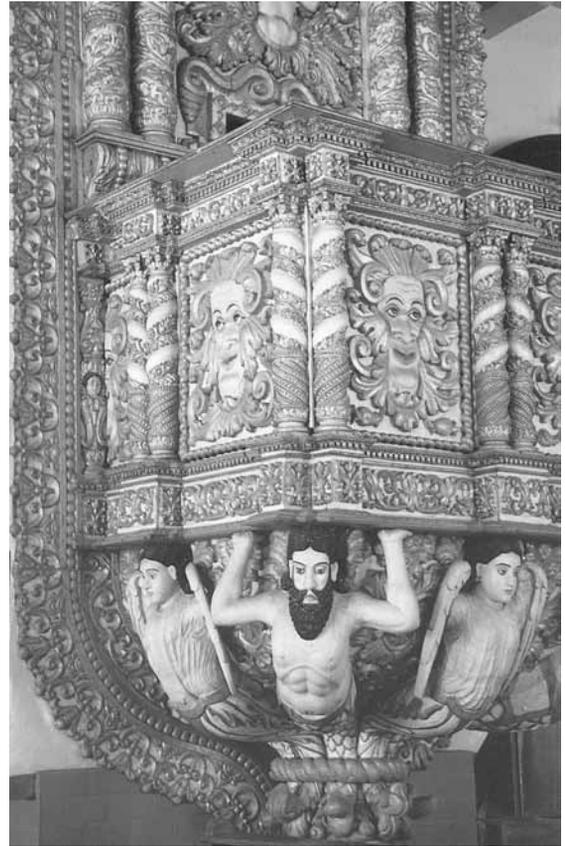


Figure 3. Pulpit (originally built for the Franciscan monastery in Daugim), Church of St. Jerome, Bardez, Goa. Photo: Author.

archival documents to ethnographic and anthropological studies—has focused primarily on texts, taking on topics including strategies of conversion in different contexts; degrees of syncretism, hybridity, or *métissage*; and instances of resistance and failure.⁶ It is crucial in the analysis of these cultural processes, set in motion

colonial period, Henn underscores the processes of “replacement” that occurred almost from the moment of the demolition. See also J. K. Fernandes, “Churches, Temples and Mosques! Oh My!” *Herald—The Voice of Goa*, 13 June 2014; http://www.heraldgoa.in/details.php?n_id=74567.

6. See R. J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995); H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994); and S. Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* (Paris, 1999). For an earlier, equally entangled and fascinating history of contacts in South Asia from the conquest of Sindh by Arab armies (eighth century) to the founding of the Delhi Sultanate (thirteenth century), in which identities were crafted through a nexus of relations and active transactions and engagements, see F. B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton, 2009).

by overseas missions, to cast a second glance, beyond philological investigation, on the practices of translation (linguistic and transcultural, and the resulting instances of misrepresentation, falsification, etc.). Not only do the translated texts capture the voices (fragmentary as they may be) of non-Europeans and subalterns, as has recently been stated many times over; they may also be queried for modalities of self-constructed subjectivity, both individual and collective.

A question remains, however, as to the visual translation employed in the mission, which necessarily went hand in hand with the textual. Can we read “accommodation” in pictorial and visual objects, much as we read it in texts translated from Latin, Italian, and Portuguese to Tamil, Konkani, or Farsi, and vice versa? In his pioneering work on art in the Jesuit missions in Asia and Latin America, Gauvin Bailey has shown that the migration, circulation, and reception of Catholic sacred images depended largely on the political configuration and cultural dynamics of the host cultures and mission



Figure 4. Pulpit, Church of Our Lady of Help (Nossa Senhora de Ajuda), Ribandar, Tiswadi, Goa. Photo: Author.

territories.⁷ In recent case studies, art historians have focused on the transcultural and mission biographies of specific objects and iconographic types, including the *Salus populi Romani* and other types of paintings of the Virgin Mary, the child Jesus, and saints such as Francis Xavier and Ignatius of Loyola.⁸ Some of these migrating images encountered along the way a plethora of unexpected doppelgängers, rooted in host cultures and different visual regimes.⁹

7. G. A. Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* (Toronto, 1999).

8. See P. M. D'Elia, "La prima diffusione nel mondo dell'immagine di Maria 'Salus Populi Romani,'" *Fede e Arte* (October 1954): 1–11; and J. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1985). On the Byzantine icon believed to have been painted by St. Luke, and the history of its reproduction and reception in Europe, see H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1994), pp. 47–77; and S. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (Cambridge, 1996).

9. One such encounter has recently been explored by Hui-Hung Chen in her detailed analysis of the relationship between the Chinese Buddhist deity Guanyin and the Virgin Mary. H.-H. Chen, "Rethinking the Image and Cult of the Holy Mother in Late Ming Jesuit Missions," paper presented at the workshop *Christianity Translated* (Ruhr-Universität Bochum, June 11, 2013). For the epistemic consequences

The sculpted figures on the Goan baroque pulpits are products of an intercultural encounter between two different yet morphologically and thematically related mythical creatures: one deeply embedded in the European imagination at least since classical antiquity, the other long thriving in the devotional practices of the Indian subcontinent. Specifically, the *sereia*, or mermaid, brought to Goa from Portugal, underwent translation into a local idiom—that of the *nāga*, a snake-like spirit living in rivers, underground, and in trees, and always associated with fertility.¹⁰ It is my

coming from the encounter of different, culture-based visual regimes, see *Seeing Across Cultures in the Early Modern World*, ed. D. Leibsohn and J. Favrot Peterson (Farnham, 2012), esp. Y. Kobayashi-Sato and M. M. Mochizuki, "Perspective and Its Discontents or St. Lucy's Eyes" (pp. 23–48), on the place of Western perspective in early modern Japanese visuality.

10. Esteban García Brosseau traced European models for the pulpit mermaids/*nāgas* in "Dioniso en la Iglesia: un púlpito indoportugués a la luz de la historia del arte novohispano," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 32, no. 96 (2010): 37–53. See also E. G. Brosseau, "Hybrides et chimères: l'art 'indo-chrétien' et le nationalisme latino-américain au regard du baroque indo-portugais," *Senzacornice* 5 (Dec. 2012–Feb. 2013). An old but informative work on serpent or *nāga* mythology in India is J. P. Vogel, *Indian Serpent-lore; or, The*

claim that we witness in this case, perhaps even more clearly than in textual examples of translation, the way in which accommodation materialized in practice in the mission field, and how it was bound to remain an ambiguous project. The Jesuit missionaries experienced the consequences of this ambiguity at the end of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries, when the Malabar and Chinese rites controversies poisoned their every move. What the zealous missionary translators failed to foresee was that every translation can flip into a “reverse translation,” which may and often does affect the very process of conversion (and translation). A reproduction of an object or an image is a kind of translation, but in the missionary context, translation is only a first step and does not suffice. Texts and objects have to be both translated (pulled apart) and converted (reassembled). The status and quality of the resulting reemodiment retain a degree of uncertainty. A question often asked by religious specialists and cultural historians concerning missionary translations is, then, how can we be sure that the conversion is “true” or “sincere”?¹¹

Drawing inspiration from the field of visual studies—especially the growing literature on the power relations between images and spectators, such as W. J. T. Mitchell’s *What Do Pictures Want?*—my intention is to deflect this question and ask how these objects meant different things

Nāgas in *Hindu Legend and Art* (London, 1926). On serpent symbolism in antiquity see J. H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (New Haven, 2010). P. P. Shirodkar discussed the widespread, multiform, and continuous worship of the *nāga* in Goa and its environs in “Naga Worship in Goa,” a paper presented at the I.C.C.S. Workshop on Goan Folklore: Theories, Perspectives and Methodologies, Goa University, Department of History, April 16–17, 1993. See also R. Gomes Pereira, *Goa: Hindu Temples and Deities* (Panaji, Goa, 1978). For *nāga* sculptures in medieval Goan temples see G. von Mitterwallner, “The Hindu Past: Sculpture and Architecture,” in *Goa: Cultural Patterns*, ed. S. Doshi (Bombay, 1983), pp. 21–40.

11. The question of sincerity in speech was also a humanist obsession, expressed famously by Garcia de Orta, the author of the first medico-botanical book published in Goa in 1563, in somewhat ambiguous (verging on oxymoronic) terms as: “the truth is painted naked.” G. de Orta, *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, vol. 1 (Lisbon, 1987), p. 79. See J. Pimentel and I. Soler, “Entre ciência e filologia: taxonomia dos erros nos Colóquios ortianos,” paper presented at the international conference *O Mundo num Livro: Abordagens Interdisciplinares aos Colóquios dos simples e drogas da Índia de Garcia de Orta’ Goa, 1563*; Lisbon, April 10–11, 2013. Troubled as it was, this representational economy was still very different and in many ways more flexible than the Puritan and later Protestant assumptions about the externality of language and its uneasy relationship with true spirituality. See W. Keane, “Sincerity, ‘Modernity,’ and the Protestants,” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (2002): 65–92.

to different audiences precisely because they organized a “complex field of visual reciprocity” between the image/object and the beholder.¹² My claim is that they were capable of helping the actors create, through a process I call reverse translation, a particular type of colonial and missionary relationality in Portuguese India that would ultimately be responsible for building structures of Goan, and to a certain extent Indian, Christian identity.¹³ The evocative charge of W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of “double-consciousness” is also useful here, not only to denude the asymmetrical relations of power inherent in the colonial and missionary situation, but also as a way to disclose the visible signs of resistance and negotiation at various levels.¹⁴

Textual reverse translation

The working of reverse translation in practice can be glimpsed in the way the receptor language turns against or resists the source language by submerging the translated notion within its own semantic field. This is especially visible in Catholic catechisms and pastoral literature in non-European vernaculars from the sixteenth century onward, produced in tandem by the Jesuits and their local secretaries and translators. Detractors accused Jesuit missionaries of translating “God” and other religious terms somewhat hurriedly and recklessly as they strove to accommodate a given culture’s preexisting vocabulary.¹⁵ In Brazil the Jesuit José de Anchieta decided that the Tupi word *Tupã*, meaning “thunderbolt” and understood as a manifestation of the divine, could also be used as a word for the Christian God. The word *karai-bebe*, which referred to a flying shaman, could likewise cover the notion of an “angel.”¹⁶ The Jesuits

12. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, 2005), p. 47. See also D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989).

13. The concept of “reverse translation” serves to emphasize the continuous and dynamic tug of war between the source and the receptor languages, the outcome of which remains unstable, but fertile ground for possible recuperations and innovations. It is also meant to draw attention to an ongoing dialectic between absorption and resistance rather than framing translation as syncretic amalgamation or hybrid constructions.

14. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” chap. 1 in *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903], ed. F. J. Griffin (New York, 2003), p. 9.

15. S. Kim, *Strange Names of God: The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci’s Shangti in Late Ming China, 1583–1644* (New York, 2004). For India, see B. Tiliander, *Christian and Hindu Terminology: A Study in Their Mutual Relations with Special Reference to the Tamil Area* (Uppsala, 1974).

16. F. Alves, P. Edson, and J. Milton. “Inculturation and Acculturation in the Translation of Religious Texts: The Translations of

were not naïve, however: They knew perfectly well that their translation practices were potentially controversial and that the converts may not immediately grasp the difference between the ancient divinities and the newly imposed system. However, by grafting the new meanings over the native words—“new wine in old skins,” in St. Augustine’s illustrative metaphor—the missionaries were buying time as they waited for truth and grace to perfect their own textual pastiche. And at times they themselves disagreed or changed their minds.

In India, Henrique Henriques (1525–1600), a Jesuit missionary on the Fishery Coast on the Gulf of Mannar, translated “God” as *tampirāṇ* in his Tamil catechetical works, printed shortly after the Council of Trent. Ten years after Henriques’s death, Roberto Nobili (1577–1656), who started a new Madurai Mission in the heart of the Tamil country, decided that the word for “God” had to be taken from Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Brahmins, and that the Christian vocabulary of the early catechetical translations in Tamil did not work all that well among his high-caste neophytes away from the coastal European settlements.¹⁷ The controversy among the Jesuit missionaries that ensued from this linguistic (or rather semiotic) disagreement branched into larger issues of cultural translation and fed into the Malabar rites quarrels in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹⁸ The point of contention was not only the choice of translated words, but also whether certain notions should be translated at all. For example, Henrique Henriques left *igreja* (church), *graça*, *confissão*, *missa*, and other sacraments and sacramentals simply transcribed, since he and many other missionaries believed that these words could not be translated into pagan tongues. In the Japanese mission, the word *Deusu* was adopted for “God,” following earlier efforts to find a local concept from Buddhist and Shinto tradition.¹⁹

Likewise, some native words were perceived as too powerful in their original usage, and therefore

potentially dangerous if used in a Christian context. Such was Nobili’s *carvecuran* (the Sovereign Lord of All) and Mateo Ricci’s *tianzhu* (the Lord of Heaven).²⁰ These are what I call “reversibles” because they were able, as some missionaries suspected, to reverse the conversion to Christianity or, more often, deflect it toward more vernacular forms—still Christian in name but infused with local religious practices and materials. Paradoxically, it was with the second generation of converts, as Christianity insinuated itself into the web of local religious traditions and practices, that elements of Goa’s religious legacy were quite literally reembodyed in Christian forms and objects, such as the creatures on the pulpit.

A translated object: From mermaid to nāga

A pulpit contains three parts (figs. 5–6). At the top is the upper baldachin, which functions as a sounding board; in combination the canopy and back panels represent heaven, serving as a support for images of Christ, the Virgin, or the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. The central part of the pulpit is the basket, which is designed to accommodate the body of the preacher, who temporarily incarnates the Word of God. It is usually covered by wooden panels with images in bas-relief of selected saints and apostles. The base of the pulpit, in cyma reversa shape, is where the creatures of the netherworld—those that Christianity purportedly conquered—were allowed to pierce through the wood and foliage.²¹ The tradition of placing monsters in the interior of churches and on their facades, and subsequently on the bases of pulpits, has a long history in the European context that still needs to be analyzed, especially from the point of view of the complicated history of early European-Asian encounters (fig. 7).²²

With the establishment of the Portuguese empire in India and the rest of Asia, and the conquest and foundation of their most important foothold in Goa (1510), the mermaid was imported into the imperial imaginary of both colonial agents and colonial subjects.

Jesuit Priest José de Anchieta into Tupi in 16th Century Brazil,” *Target* 17, no. 2 (2005): 275–296.

17. See I. G. Županov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-century India* (New Delhi, 1999).

18. See P. Aranha, “Sacramenti o *samskārah*? L’illusione dell’accommodatio nella controversia dei riti malabarici,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 31, no. 2 (2010): 621–646.

19. G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 1973). The early term used by Francis Xavier was *dainichi*, which the Jesuits proscribed when they discovered its Buddhist denotation.

20. About Nobili’s choice of *carvecuran* or *sarveshvara* and its Vedantin context, see also R. F. Young, “Seeking India’s Christ-Bearing Word,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, no. 3 (2002): 22.

21. J. Pereira, *Baroque Goa: The Architecture of Portuguese India* (New Delhi, 1995), p. 91.

22. R. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York, 2004), p. 7; A. Weir and J. Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* [1986] (Hoboken, 2013), esp. chap. 5.



Figure 5. Pulpit, Church of St. John the Baptist, Carambolim, Tiswadi, Goa. Photo: Author.



Figure 6. Pulpit, Basilica of Bom Jesus, Old Goa. Photo: Author.

In the tenth canto of the *Lusiads* by Luís Vaz de Camões (*Os Lusíadas*, 1572), the *serenas* on the island of love are the reward for the heroes who discover India. The Archbishop of Goa, Gaspar de Leão Pereira (d. 1576), transformed the story of Ulysses and the mermaids into a psychomachia, a battle for Portuguese and Christian colonial (and colonized) souls in danger of perdition.²³ The mermaids in his *Desengano de perdidos*, “written for the newly converted and weak in faith,” and printed in Goa in 1573, were human passions attacking and threatening to sink the galley of the Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean. But these monstrous creatures, these tempters of the flesh, were tamed and immobilized when carved in wood and affixed beneath the feet of the preacher. For the Portuguese audience—the viceroy, the

fidalgos, and other lay and ecclesiastical officials—they might have served as a useful reminder of the dangers of the passions or senses that lead to the sins of the “trinity” of flesh, world, and the devil (*carne, mundo, diabo*).²⁴

Although there are practically no metadata attesting to the dates, the patrons, or the producers of the Goan pulpits, their style and state of preservation indicate that the “mermaid” sculptures went out of fashion in the early eighteenth century.²⁵ Those few art historians who noticed them at all identified these creatures not as mermaids but as local *nāgas* or *nāginis* (*nāgini* being the feminine equivalent of *nāga*), and the only quality they attributed to them was decorative.²⁶ The decorative

23. L. V. de Camões, *The Lusiads*, trans. L. White (Oxford, 2002); G. de Leão Pereira, *Desengano do perdidos*, ed. E. Asensio (Coimbra, 1958).

24. I. G. Županov, “‘The Wheel of Torments’: Mobility and Redemption in Portuguese Colonial India (Sixteenth Century),” in S. Greenblatt et al., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 24–74.

25. Dias (see note 2); Brosseau, “Dioniso en la iglesia” (see note 10), p. 47.

26. Moreira de Frias (see note 2), p. 63.

thesis would seem to be confirmed by the fact that they appear on secular as well as sacred furniture. “Oriental” chairs, desks, and admirahs often repose on ornately sculpted legs, shaped as *nāgas/nāginis*, lions, birds, or other types of hybrid or stylized monsters. In fact, the visual difference between mermaids and *nāgas* as they appear on pulpits is not very great; it may even be imperceptible. And yet, the scholars who have studied Goan Catholic monuments and their blending or translation of European and Indian forms seem to have no doubt about the creatures’ Indian identity.

Recently, Paolo Varela Gomes came to this same conclusion in his reading of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century church architecture. He attributes the churches’ construction (not just influence) to a group of native Goan high-caste converts who asserted their own power and importance in colonial society.²⁷ These local elites can be compared to the Creoles of Latin America. They inhabited a middle ground between the colonizers and the colonized, and aspired (and often conspired) to the highest status in the colony.²⁸ Varela Gomes mostly agrees with the theologian and art historian José Pereira, who identified five important churches as examples of an “Indian Baroque” in which “the idiom derived from Europe is controlled by an Indian aesthetic.”²⁹ Two of these buildings—the Church of St. Anne (Santana) in Talaulim (fig. 1) and Our Lady of Piety (Nossa Senhora da Piedade) on the island of Divar (fig. 8)—have pulpits studded with spectacular *nāgas*.³⁰ Both were built (or rebuilt) and furnished through the efforts of the local Brahman converts and Catholic priests. The church of Santana was founded in 1577 on the Jesuit “recreational estate” in Talaulim used by the students of Saint Paul’s College in Goa, but its current form is the work of the Brahman parish priest Francisco do Rego (1638–1689),



Figure 7. Split-tail mermaid, twelfth century. Vézelay, Musée de l’oeuvre Viollet-le-Duc. Photo: Aliocha Maldavsky.

who rebuilt it inside and out between 1682 and 1689.³¹ Our Lady of Piety was conceived as an improvement upon the Talaulim church by another Catholic Brahman priest, António João de Frias (1664–1726).³²

27. Varela Gomes (see note 1). See also Â. Barreto Xavier, “Dissolver a diferença: Mestiçagem e conversão no império português,” in *Itinerários: A investigação nos 25 anos do ICS*, ed. M. Villaverde Cabral, K. Wall, S. Aboim, and F. Carreira da Silva (Lisbon, 2008), pp. 709–727.

28. J. Cañizares-Esguerra, “Iberian Science in the Renaissance: Ignored How Much Longer?” *Perspectives on Science* 12, no. 1 (2004): 86–124; J. Cañizares-Esguerra, “Chivalric Epistemology and Patriotic Narratives: Iberian Colonial Science,” in *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000*, ed. J. Cañizares-Esguerra and E. Seeman (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2007).

29. Pereira, *Churches of Goa* (see note 1), p. 72.

30. *Nāgas* are also found at the Jesuit basilica of Bom Jesus in the center of the old city (fig. 6), and in local Indian parishes including St. Peter in Panelim (fig. 2), Our Lady of Help in Ribandar (fig. 4), and St. John the Baptist in Carambolim (fig. 5).

31. After a visit to Portugal, Francisco do Rego returned to Goa around 1675. He was first assigned to administer the parish of St. Blaise. In 1682, he moved to Santana, though according to Varela Gomes (see note 1, p. 11), the church only became an autonomous parish in 1695. According to Diogo Barbosa Machado, Rego was an accomplished poet in Portuguese and Latin, and wrote a treatise (now lost), *Tratado Apologético contra varias calumnias impostas pela malevolência contra a sua Nação Bracmana (Apologetic treatise against various calumnies imposed by malevolence against the Brahmin nation)*. D. Barbosa Machado, *Bibliotheca lusitana: Historica, critica, e cronologica*, vol. 2 (Lisbon, 1747), p. 237.

32. António João de Frias wrote the historical and genealogical treatise *Aureola dos Indios (Aureole of the Indians)*, published in Lisbon in 1702. He was born in the village of Talaulim, received a Master of Arts degree, and became a parish priest at Santo André in Old Goa. See D. Barbosa Machado, *Bibliotheca lusitana: Historica, critica, e cronologica*, vol. 4 (Lisbon, 1759), p. 40. He flaunted his title of



Figure 8. Pulpit, Our Lady of Piety (Nossa Senhora da Piedade), Divar, Goa. Photo: Author.

Besides building churches and negotiating Indianized architectural style, these highly articulate elite Goan Christians were also at this very moment negotiating their own Christian identity and their role in the Portuguese colonial world. In these efforts the Brahmans also fought off other claimants to high status and knowledge, such as the Charodos, self-proclaimed members of the Kshatriya (kingly) caste.³³ We can trace this internal Indian Catholic quarrel in the archives, and through the genealogical and historical narratives that members of these elite groups wrote to justify their respective claims to the highest positions in the Indian hierarchy.³⁴ These arguments,

apostolic protonotary, in addition to being a notary of the Bull of the Holy Crusade, a judge for the qualification of the Military Orders, and a chaplain of the Portuguese king. "Alvará régio de 13 de Março de 1688 concedendo a mercê de capelão fidalgo a António João Frias," Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon), RGM/B/4/1260.

33. On the normative fourfold *varna* system, see the classic account by L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 66–67.

34. See Â. Barreto Xavier and I. G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries)* (New

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. chap. 7: "Orientalists from Within: Indian Genealogists, Philologists, and Historians."
 35. Â. Barreto Xavier, *A invenção de Goa: Poder imperial e conversões culturais nos séculos XVI e XVII* (Lisbon, 2008).

36. On Goan church councils see J. H. da Cunha Rivara, *Arquivo Portuguez-Oriental, fascículo 4 que contem os concilios de Goa e o synodo de Diamper* [1862] (New Delhi, 1992).
 37. M. Esteves Reis, "Retable art in India: its importance, the empathic apathy and the future. Cultural aspects concerning conservation," in *Heritage 2010: Heritage and Sustainable Development*, ed. R. Amoêda, S. Lira, and C. Pinheiro (Barcelos, 2010), pp. 1129–1140.

38. They seem to be analogous to the "green man" faces that show up all over Europe (personal communication with Cristelle Baskins); see also B. S. Centerwall, "The Name of the Green Man," *Folklore* 108 [1997]: 25–33. For an interesting discussion of *kīrtimukhas* on Indo-Ghurid mosques, see Flood (see note 6), pp. 160–184.

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. chap. 7: "Orientalists from Within: Indian Genealogists, Philologists, and Historians."

35. Â. Barreto Xavier, *A invenção de Goa: Poder imperial e conversões culturais nos séculos XVI e XVII* (Lisbon, 2008).

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37. M. Esteves Reis, "Retable art in India: its importance, the empathic apathy and the future. Cultural aspects concerning conservation," in *Heritage 2010: Heritage and Sustainable Development*, ed. R. Amoêda, S. Lira, and C. Pinheiro (Barcelos, 2010), pp. 1129–1140.

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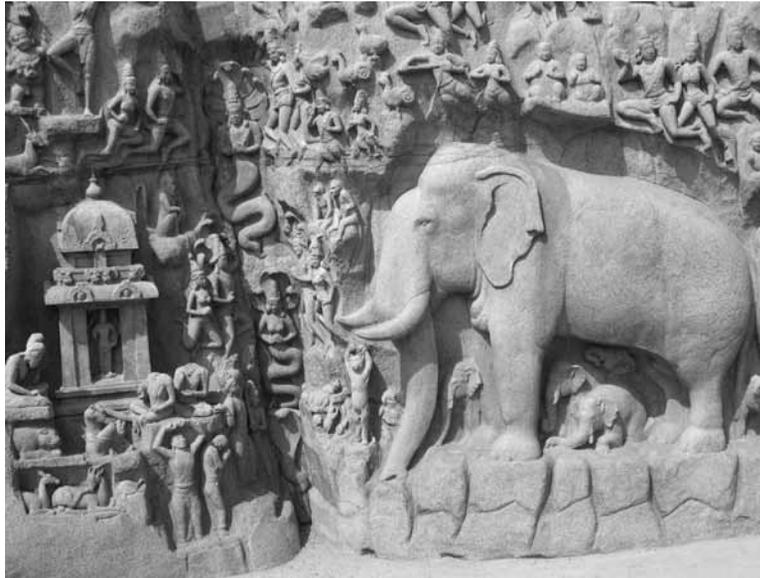


Figure 9. Descent of the Ganges, seventh century. Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu. Bas-relief featuring *nāgas*. Photo: Author.



Figure 10. Dancing Shiva with *nāga* devotees, Museum of Cham Sculpture, Da Nang, Vietnam. Photo: Author.

of local serpentine spirits. They may have a variety of vernacular names, but they are present in all Indian religious formations, from tribal animism to Buddhism, Jainism, and popular and Sanskritic Hinduism.³⁹ They

39. According to Fakhr al-Din Nizami's narrative poem (*mathnavi*) *Kadam Rao Padam Rao* (ca. 1430), members of the Kadamba dynasty—

are sculpted and painted in various materials all over the Indian subcontinent and especially in Southeast Asia (figs. 9–10). In art historical studies they are laconically

rulers of medieval Goa and Karnataka who were displaced by Muslim kings and by the rising state of Vijayanagara in the fourteenth century—worshiped *nāga*. See S. Digby, "Before Timur Came: Provincialization

mentioned as *nāga/nāgini*, although technically these are only serpentine beings, while those morphing into trees are known as *yaksha/yakshi*, and those with wings could be likened to *gandharvas*. It is obvious that the European mermaids were translated into morphologically similar beings from another cultural register. This is what one may call a visual accommodation, analogous to the Jesuit method of conversion—or, to borrow Alexandra Russo's term, an example of "aesthetic condensation."⁴⁰

Although art historians have found these objects interesting because they are products of cultural encounter, I want to look at them as objects that are also products of religious encounter.⁴¹ What do *nāgas* mean, or what do they do, on these pulpits? How do they participate in the sermon, which was one of the core apostolic ministries for missionaries and one of the key liturgical practices after the Council of Trent?⁴² How are they positioned vis-à-vis the preacher and the audience?

The *nāga* as a sign of possession

One possible reading of *nāga* sculptures on Goan pulpits is that they were intended as a visual sign of possession, one by which the missionaries and the Portuguese ecclesiastical hierarchy staked their claims to spiritual and territorial legitimacy. Early modern European expansion overseas was based on the premise that seeing was akin to possessing, or almost. Territories without any visible sign of belonging to a formal political "state" with an army and a king fell under the category of a "discovery," and Portuguese "rule" was established, first of all, through a series of rituals of possession.⁴³

of the Delhi Sultanate through the Fourteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 298–356. See also G. M. Moraes, *The Kadamba Kula: A History of Ancient and Mediaeval Karnataka* [1931] (Bombay, 1990). He claims that *nāga* worship was superseded by Shaivism.

40. The concept of "aesthetic condensation" is helpful in thinking about this site of encounter and the infinite number of readings that it opened up. See A. Russo, "A Tale of Two Bodies: On Aesthetic Condensation in the Mexican Colonial Graffiti of Actopan, 1629." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 49–50 (2006): 59–79.

41. Serge Gruzinski proposed European grotesque art as a middle ground on which the encounter between Mexican indigenous and Christian figuration occurred and was most successful, creative, and permeable. S. Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* (Paris, 1999).

42. J. W. O'Malley calls predication "the ministry of the Word" in *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

43. Patricia Seed has shown the different ways in which early modern European powers marked their territorial discoveries and staged their authority over them; P. Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge, 1995).

The question of rightful dominion was far from settled theologically and politically, since Portugal's claims to all the lands it "discovered" in the East were not accepted by many other aspiring colonial actors, such as the papacy, the British, the Dutch, and the French, who in the sixteenth century still lagged behind.⁴⁴

There were many ways by which "Golden Goa" (Goa Dourada)—which the historian Diogo do Couto called "a key to all India" (*a chave de toda a Índia*)—displayed its political sovereignty from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century, when it crumbled under its own ambition.⁴⁵ One was through the construction of monumental structures such as churches, crosses, and sumptuous buildings. Another was through the production, collection, and handling of objects both for local consumption or display and for export—from spices, textiles, and silverware to exotic animals, maps, and religious objects and relics.

The employment of objects and images that create bonds of ownership—no matter how fictive or ephemeral they turn out to be in the long run—is built into the foundation of an empire. When we look at albums and manuscripts filled with images of ships, maps, and portraits of viceroys,⁴⁶ we can clearly diagnose the direction of the "scopic drive" of the empire.⁴⁷ This insatiable desire, which circles around objects it is unable to fully possess, contributed to the pictorial explosion at the dawn of the age of mechanical reproduction. These and many similar documents of the Portuguese empire, commissioned by the king and by administrative and ecclesiastical elites, were usually produced to persuade, impress, or appease the metropolitan gaze, and to help the local administrators devise constructive strategies.

In addition to possessing the territory, the sea routes, the people, and their labor, the Portuguese empire was a *Christian* empire: Every soul counted, dead or alive, as long as it was saved from damnation and hell. The

44. Besides determining latitudes on the basis of astronomical calculation and planting *padrões* (memorial stones) along the interminable sandy beaches of the southern hemisphere, the Portuguese also fought for and conquered territories.

45. C. Madeira Santos, *Goa é a chave de toda a Índia: Perfil político da capital do Estado da Índia, 1505–1570* (Lisbon, 1999).

46. Examples of such albums/manuscripts include the *Livro de Lisuarte de Abreu*, the *Livro das Armadas*, the *Lendas da Índia* by Gaspar Correia (sixteenth century), and the *Livro das plantas de tôdas as fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental* by António Bocarro (seventeenth century).

47. I am borrowing here the Lacanian notion of "scopic drive" via Mitchell (see note 12), p. 72.

fantasy of a successful Portuguese *translatio imperii* in the tropics was thus shrouded in providential and religious overtones from the start, and with João III (r. 1521–1557) it was shored up by ecclesiastical and missionary administration.⁴⁸ The Jesuits in particular, and other missionary orders responsible for the conversion and pastoral care of the natives, as well as for the preservation of the Portuguese soldiers and *casados* (married men or settlers) in the Catholic fold, devised a whole battery of methods for disciplining the bodies and the souls of Portuguese subjects.

The Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony is relevant to this process of Christianization, as it was a way of producing consenting subjects of the Catholic Church and of the Portuguese colonial project.⁴⁹ The “colonization of the conscience” in Italy after the Council of Trent has been brilliantly studied by Adriano Prosperi and his students.⁵⁰ From Italy to India, the Jesuits established a new way of wiping clean individual consciences (or the “heart”) through confession and meditation rooted in the visualisation of objects suspended in a network of emotions, affects, and cognitive interlinings. The famous though ambiguous Ignatian formula, *entrar con el otro y salir consigo*, meant just that: the cleansing of the interior before filling it with images framed as a combination of mental and physical (sensorial) engagements.⁵¹ The selected episodes

taken from the Life of Christ were then to be situated, implanted, or “translated” into the image of a local, geographical place from one’s own memory. This is what Ignatius, throughout his *Spiritual Exercises*, calls “a composition, seeing the place.”⁵²

But as the Jesuits in India discovered when they mastered the vernacular languages (with some even delving into local literary culture in Sanskrit), this “place” could not easily be emptied of its earlier traces. As anthropologists and psychoanalysts have made clear, the understanding of the corporeal self is a cultural category that in India had been constructed collectively in close connection with the micro- and macro-environment. McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden have argued that the Occidental, Cartesian concept of the person as an “individual” does not correspond to the Indian ontological theories of the self, according to which persons are composed of transferable particles.⁵³ Unlike the bounded and unitary Judeo-Christian self, the Indian sense of the self is “dividual” and based on transactions of substances. According to this theory, there is something like an inner code that defines the self in its ideal purity, which is, however, practically impossible to maintain in reality. This is why rituals of purification are important social events in which “incompatible” substances are removed. If the microcosm of a person is thus an agglomeration of particles united by a code but susceptible to penetration by alien substances, it is only natural that macrocosms be perceived as consisting of these particles and substances as well. Valentine Daniel has persuasively shown the extent to which the Tamils perceived territory—their “native place” and literally the type of soil it contains—as compatible with their own bodily substances.⁵⁴ Anthropologists and students of classical literature in Sanskrit and Tamil have remarked that the same particle theory applied to divinities—“lower” and “higher,” Sanskrit and popular—whose agency is as volatile and unbounded as that of human beings.

48. A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven, 1995).

49. The recent historiography of the Indian subcontinent known as Subaltern Studies has as a whole had no interest in Catholic proselytism and conversion or in the Portuguese empire, although some of their analytical tools, such as Gramscian hegemony, could be applied to or tested on Goan history.

50. A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin, 1996). On the links between the Portuguese imperial project and Catholicism see G. Marocci, *A Consciência de um império: Portugal e o seu mundo (sécs. XV–XVII)* (Coimbra, 2012).

51. There are different variations of this cryptic phrase instructing missionaries and confessors how to convert and take care of souls: *entrar con el otro para salir con la suya; entrar con el otro para salir con nosotros; entrar con el otro y salir con uno mismo*, etc. In Jesuit tradition and in later translations and usages, the word “door” is often added. The original formula (*entrar con el otro y salir consigo*) is given in Ignatius’s instructions to the Jesuits Broët and Salmerón for the mission to Ireland (September 1541); *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu: Epistolae et Instructiones*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1903), pp. 179–181. In the French version, it is reworked as “l’ennemi entre par la porte de l’autre et sort par la sienne”; Ignace de Loyola, *Écrits* (Paris, 1991), p. 666. The reasons for and the morphology of these permutations are studied by Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Ines G. Županov in the unpublished research paper, “*Entrar con el otro y salir consigo*: Le motif de la ‘porte’ dans la littérature missionnaire jésuite aux XVIe et XVIIe

siècles,” presented at the seminar of the Groupe de recherches sur les missions religieuses ibériques modernes, EHESS, Paris, May 8, 1999.

52. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Society of Jesus*. Newly translated from the original Spanish “Autograph” (New York, 1948). See P.-A. Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola: le lieu de l’image* (Paris, 1992).

53. M. Marriott and R. Inden, “Toward an Ethnology of South Asian Caste Systems,” in *The New Wind: Changing Identities in South Asia*, ed. K. David (The Hague, 1977), pp. 227–238.

54. E. V. Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley, 1987).

Religious experience is, according to this ontological schema, a moment in which the human and the divine meet or cross each other's paths, "transact," and exchange "substances." In Tamil, *kaṭavul* (god) means "'crossing,' 'exceeding,' or 'surpassing.'"⁵⁵ The deity is therefore not transcendent, but immanent, capable of materializing in the world before the eyes of the devotee in different shapes of living beings.⁵⁶ The divine particles can enter the body of the human being and temporarily possess him or her. The divine is also associated with a special power, *śakti*, ambiguously coded as both a creative/divine and a destructive/maleficent force. Trance-possession, in which the human body becomes a vessel of the divine power and the divine word, has become a cottage industry in the anthropological literature of South Asia, but it was also an obsession of the Jesuit missionaries.⁵⁷ The enhanced permeability of the body to the ambiguous power of *śakti* was identified by the Jesuit missionaries as the direct result of idolatry, which was the realm of the demonic. Divinity and humanity intersected in ways that could not be easily translated into the Christian cultural framework, especially because the missionaries operated with a different concept of personhood.⁵⁸

Not unlike the pre-Christian world of Late Antiquity so brilliantly analyzed by Peter Brown, the Indian paganism encountered by missionaries in the sixteenth century

was "rustling with the presence of many divine beings."⁵⁹ The Jesuits considered the empire to be inhabited by demons perilous for pagans and Christians alike, and set out to combat them through exorcism and sacraments, especially the sacrament of confession.⁶⁰ However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the names of the major gods—Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma—and fragments of "sacred" texts were discovered and perused by the missionaries in local languages or with the help of catechist-interpreters. The different forms of the apotropaic goddess (called variously Kālī, Mariyamma, Shantadurga, Bhagavati, Santeri, etc.), often associated with epidemics of smallpox, were also well known.⁶¹ While images or idols representing these major divine beings were promptly smashed, or the non-Christians were forced to move them out of the Portuguese territory, spirits or demons of a lesser and perhaps more vernacular kind proved difficult to eradicate.⁶²

The *nāga*, and other Indian apotropaic creatures identified as spirits or lesser divinities, were allowed to be woven into church ornament precisely because, from the European ecclesiastical point of view, they were harnessed and ensnared by the Word and by church rituals. Church decoration had long contained images of those who were defeated by the Word. If devils and demons were staged in European churches, *nāgas*, *kīrtimukhas*, *makaras* (sea monsters), and possibly other creatures had their place in Indian churches, trampled under the feet of the preacher of the Holy Word. Images of local spirits and demons, defined as such by Portuguese ecclesiastical officials, were either suppressed or assigned a subaltern place in the new visual regime of the colonial Portuguese Christian order.⁶³

55. I. Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals* (New York, 2000), p. 8.

56. According to Friedhelm Hardy, the divine is "available within the confines of empirical reality." F. Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (New Delhi, 1983), p. 135.

57. From an ancient Dravidian religious substratum focused on ecstatic agricultural cults comes also the idea that this divine energy, *bhakti*, is in fact female. It has been argued that in the *bhakti*, devotional worship of a later period, the psychology of religious awareness was specifically female. K. Ram, "The Roman Catholic Church: Petty Raja of the Mukkuvars," in K. Ram, *Mukkuvar Women: Gender, Hegemony and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing Community* (London, 1991), pp. 29–44. For Jesuit missionary observations on ritual and spontaneous possession in South India, see I. G. Županov, "Conversion, Illness and Possession: Catholic Missionary Healing in Early Modern South Asia," in *Divins remèdes: Médecine et religion en Inde*, ed. I. G. Županov and C. Guenzi (Paris, 2008), pp. 263–300.

58. On the nature of a person in South India and possession rites, see R. Freeman, "Dynamics of the Person in the Worship and Sorcery of Malabar," in *La Possession en Asie du Sud; Parole, Corps, Territoire*, ed. J. Assayag and G. Tarabout (Paris, 1999), pp. 149–182. See also F. M. Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York, 2006). On the early modern conception of personhood (and subjectivity), see U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford, 2011).

59. P. Brown, "The Problem of Christianisation," in *1992 Lectures and Memoirs*, Proceedings of the British Academy 82 (New York, 1993), p. 90.

60. On Jesuit missionaries see also I. G. Županov, "I am a great sinner": Jesuit Missionary Dialogues in Southern India (Sixteenth Century)," in *Cultural Dialogue in South Asia and Beyond: Narratives, Images and Community (Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)*, ed. C. Lefèvre and I. G. Županov, *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, no. 2–3 (2012): 415–446.

61. *The Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais* (*Brit. Mus. Ms. Sloane 1820*) of Father Jacobo Fenicio, S.J., ed. J. Charpentier (Uppsala, 1933), p. 47.

62. See P. Axelrod and M. A. Fuerch, "The Flight of the Deities: Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996): 387–421.

63. See A. Henn, "Image Wars: Iconoclasm and Survival," presented at the workshop Christianity Translated (Bochum, Ruhr Universität, June 11, 2013). Henn tells how a miraculous image of St.

“Double-consciousness”: Subverting images

Alternatively, these images and objects can be read in a different way, as examples of reverse translation. This hermeneutic model reveals additional, even contradictory meanings. As churches became centers of sociability and sources of social normativity and authority—not unlike the temples they replaced—they also became invested with indigenous subterranean symbols of kinship, kingship, and identity. Certain converted elites, such as Brahmans and Charodos, had already settled into new Christian habits, and even managed to achieve high status within the new Christian hierarchy, by supporting parish institutions, building and endowing churches, and taking up official employment in the Portuguese colonial administration. By 1606, the “high-caste” elites managed to push through a decree at the Fifth Provincial Council by which, contrary to the Council of Trent, only the “noble” castes were allowed to be ordained.⁶⁴

In the seventeenth century, from Peru to Goa, the political assertion of local Catholic elites in the Iberian colonies (in some contexts called “Creoles”) also created a backlash of doubt regarding their sincerity, piety, and faith. Residues of “idolatry” were discovered everywhere.⁶⁵ The Inquisition records in Goa also show that while in the sixteenth century the targets of its “mercy” were new Christians (*cristãos-novos*) of Jewish origin, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they were “newly converted Christians” (*cristãos novamente convertidos*), or those who were converted from “gentility.”⁶⁶ Portuguese officials thus perceived

Anthony in the village of Siolim (Bardez) strangled a snake (or *nāga*) that kept damaging the church as it was being constructed. According to Henn, the visual representation of the strangled snake (long interpreted by locals as representing the Hindu god Vetāla, the dedicatee of a former temple on this site) helped this former deity survive into the eighteenth century in the memory of the Siolim (Christian and non-Christian) community. Henn argues that iconoclastic violence could actually facilitate the survival of the Hindu deities, in this case through the friars’ retelling of the story of the snake. Some of these deities returned to Goa after the reforms of the Marquis de Pombal. The St. Anthony sculpture in Siolim is also discussed in Henn (see note 5), pp. 54–56.

64. M. de Jesus dos Martires Lopes, *Goa setecentista: Tradição e modernidade (1750–1800)* (Lisbon, 1999), p. 101; Cunha Rivara (see note 36), p. 240.

65. For example, trees had to be felled if they were suspected of being dedicated to the devil; see *Documenta Indica*, ed. J. Wicki, vol. 17 (Rome, 1988), p. 411.

66. C. Boschi, “A religiosidade laica,” in *História da Expansão portuguesa*, ed. F. Bethencourt and K. Chaudhuri, vol. 2 (Lisbon, 1998), p. 446.

idolatry as secretly thriving under the superficial cover of Christianization.

Precisely around that time, from the mid-seventeenth century, *nāgas* appeared on pulpits ambiguously represented as mermaids. These serpentine spirits clearly played a very specific role in the Christian economy of visibility and subalternity: They carried the weight of the Christian body of a preacher who literally stood on top of them. *Nāgas* were also close relatives, genealogically and iconographically, of another serpent-like creature, the dragon. Dragons were most familiar as the victims of St. George and St. Michael, always portrayed in a humiliating manner, cast to the ground and pierced or about to be pierced by a lance. The Portuguese introduced paintings and sculptures of the dragon-slaying St. George to India, but Syrian Christians in Kerala may have already developed a particular devotion to this saint.⁶⁷ Corinne Dempsey has shown how the contemporary cult of St. George evolved in Kerala under the sway of three different waves of foreigners, first from Syria, then the Portuguese, and finally the English.⁶⁸ In the South Indian cultural world, the conquered or defeated divinity often becomes a devotee of the conqueror. This has been a traditional way of accommodating, assimilating, or “translating” otherness into the local, previously dominant cultural idiom (fig. 11).⁶⁹

In Goa, the pulpit *nāgas* can therefore be understood as a means of establishing ties of kinship between foreigners and autochthons. Besides kinship, they are also crucial in the construction of kingship. According to popular belief, which stemmed from the ancient myths recorded in the *Mahābhārata* and the Buddhist *Jātakas*, the *nāgas* controlled fertility and were thus linked with the authority of the king.⁷⁰ They served as guardians of

67. The story of St. George and the dragon in the history of religious and cultural encounters merits more copious research. See O. Pancaroğlu, “The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia,” *Gesta* 43, no. 2 (2004): 151–164. See also L. Jardine and J. Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (London, 2000), pp. 16–20.

68. C. G. Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India* (New York, 2000). Dempsey showed how another prominent Christian saint, St. Thomas the Apostle, had been awarded local “kinship” ties with the powerful being, the goddess Kālī or Bhadrakālī. The two were considered as brother and sister who engage at times in sibling rivalry.

69. *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. A. Hiltebeitel (Albany, 1989). See especially the articles by D. D. Hudson and J. Punzo Waghorne.

70. See M. S. Nagaraja Rao, “Sculptures from the Later Cālukyan Temple at Hāveri,” *Artibus Asiae* 31, no. 2/3 (1969): 167–178; J. Shaw,

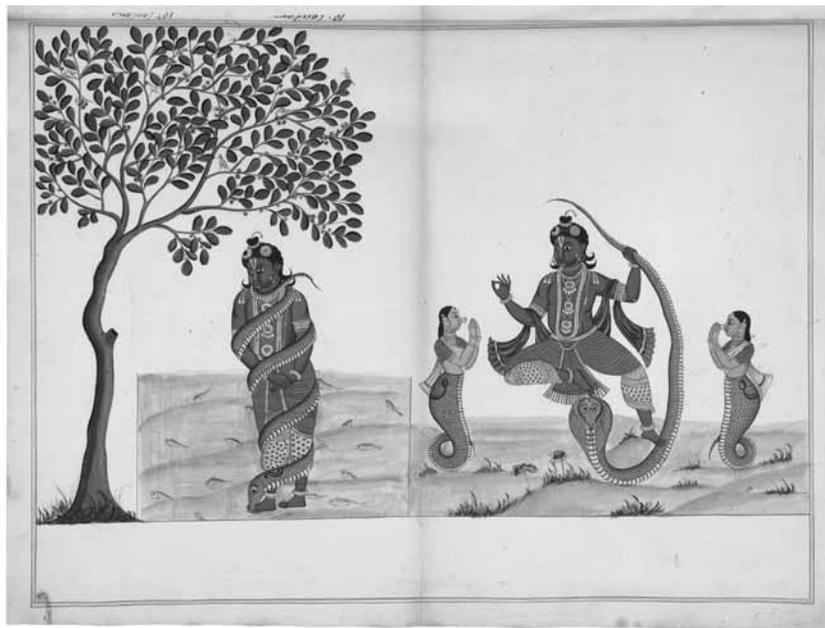


Figure 11. Krishna Kaliyadamana tramples the *nāga* Kaliya (who then became his devotee). Album of the *Bhagavata Purana*, ca. 1780–1785. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, OD-34 FOL–Cat. RH 303(76). Photo: BnF.

water (including streams and pools) and of land (such as trees and mounds). Although the king was at the center of the moral and cosmic order, it was the *nāga* who ensured the rain and the growth of grain in the kingdom. Moreover, the authority of the guardian *nāga* was such that an immoral and wicked king would lose the protection of the snake deity; his realm would then become impoverished and ultimately ruined.⁷¹ The *nāgas* and their female consorts or daughters, the *nāginis* or *nāgis*, appear in numerous dynastic myths throughout South and Southeast Asia.

Nāga or serpent worship was probably one of the most ancient religious expressions all over the globe precisely because it is so closely connected with the

primary elements, such as the soil and the water.⁷² It also nourished anthropological and psychological theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Aby Warburg described the Hopi snake dance as a relic of paganism in the age of electricity. He lamented the demise of the fear of snakes as evidence of alienation from “mythical and symbolic thinking,” which “strive to form spiritual bonds between humanity and the surrounding world.”⁷³ Shedding its symbolic skin in one place, the snake appeared even more prominently in another: Freudian psychoanalysis. Although Freud saw the snake as an exclusively phallic

⁷¹ “*Nāga* Sculptures in Sanchi’s Archaeological Landscape: Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Local Agricultural Cults in Central India, First Century BCE to Fifth Century CE,” *Artibus Asiae* 64, no. 1 (2004): 5–59; A. Verghese, “Deities, Cults and Kings at Vijayanagara,” *World Archaeology* 36, no. 3 (2004): 416–431; and R. S. Cohen, “*Nāga*, *Yakṣiṇī*, *Buddha*: Local Deities and Local Buddhism at Ajanta,” *History of Religions* 37, no. 4 (1998): 360–400.

⁷² In Kadam Rao Padam Rao, the minister Padam Rao acquired attributes of Vasuki (the king of the *nāgas*), the guardian of the realm; Digby (see note 39), p. 336.

⁷² A cross-cultural, transnational, and historical study of serpentine beings and their powers of healing and protection has yet to be made. For an exemplary European case, see K. Park, “Country Medicine in the City Marketplace: Snakehandlers as Itinerant Healers,” *Renaissance Studies* 15 (2001): 104–120.

⁷³ A. M. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), p. 54. The *nāga* may even fit well into Warburg’s *Nachleben* category, as a kind of serpentine *Ninfa*, from a “non-European/classical” inventory of *Pathosformeln*. See G. Didi-Huberman, “Dialektik des Monstrums: Aby Warburg and the Symptom Paradigm,” *Art History* 24, no. 5 (2001): 621–645; and A. Eyal, “Le ‘regard philologique’ de Warburg,” *Images Re-vues, hors-série* 4 (2013): 2–12.

symbol, anthropologists such as Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi revamped his theory, identifying “female phalluses” as well.⁷⁴

This is precisely what we are able to detect on the Goan pulpits. The *nāgas* come in variously gendered forms and they are intended, in Warburg’s sense, to connect the supernatural and human worlds. Sculpted in wood and painted by local woodcarvers who may or may not have been Christian, *nāgas* appear at first sight to be bound, tamed creatures, staring quietly from below the pulpit basket as they emerge out of invisibility, carrying on their backs nothing less than the Word of God. Their function as caryatids or atlantes was inspired both by European architectural forms used from antiquity onward (and especially revived in the sixteenth century), and by architecture in India, where similar beings can be seen protruding from the columns and walls of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples.

Staged institutional acts like preaching from pulpits created a kind of electric circulation of gazes among the preacher, the audience, and, in our case, the *nāga*. It was while looking at the *nāgas* that the Goan Christians—whose ancestors had destroyed their “idols” and burned their “pagan” books a generation or two earlier—were able to reconstitute bits and pieces of their former non-Christian selves. We have only scant evidence of the content of the individual sermons in parish churches (delivered in Portuguese as well as Konkani), but there is ample description of how they “moved” their audiences.⁷⁵ According to Jesuit accounts, people not only ended up in tears, kneeling on the floor or in the arms of their relatives, but they also began to “discipline” themselves by performing acts of penitence. The pulpit itself served as a place of concentrated potency from which the preacher’s words of exaltation or ecstasy, as well as the true Word of God, were heard.

For the newly converted Christians and for those who may not have understood the finer points of the sermon, but who stood directly facing the *nāga* figures as the preacher’s voice resounded forth from the pulpit, another kind of awareness must have sprung forth. This is the moment of “double-consciousness,” to borrow

W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept regarding racist stereotyping: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”⁷⁶ The unleashed hammer of the Inquisition in the seventeenth century brought home to the local Catholic elites the Portuguese contempt for and suspicion of their Christian identities. What they gained by looking into the eyes of those who did not really see them—except, in Du Bois’s words, through the “veil” of prejudice—was self-reflexivity and perhaps also the reactivation of older, pre-Christian markers of self.⁷⁷ Watching the *nāgas* hovering above their heads while listening to Konkani sermons by Catholic Brahman priests—who at just that point in the mid-seventeenth century started their own battle for recognition within the Portuguese colonial structure and within the Catholic universal order—may have been a foundational moment for the Goan Christian regime properly speaking. It was about replacing former religious authorities with the new, but with the Brahman again at the top of the hierarchy. If not completely realistic, these were the desires and intentions of the Catholic Brahman community—at least those who were the patrons, priests, and architects of the local churches, and thus directly responsible for the pulpit and church designs.

Nāgas may have been “translated” as mermaids on the pulpits, but translation, as Walter Benjamin lucidly remarked, is a process that allows the source text or object to “live on” even in its absence.⁷⁸ Indian *nāgas* were also connected to the important Indian cultural practice of possession, by which the divine communicated with the terrestrial world, proffering advice, threats, and especially explanations and truths necessary for healing. In this sense they recall the she-dragon Python at Delphi, who possessed oracular powers and represented chthonic forms of knowledge. The *nāga* is a preferred agent capable of “seizing” or “grasping” men and women, empowering them to speak out and reveal the origin of a calamity or a

74. G. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, “The Female Lingam: Interchangeable Symbols and Paradoxical Associations of Hindu Gods and Goddesses [and Comments and Reply],” *Current Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (1980): 45–68. The snake in India is ambiguously coded as both male and female. It can represent a mother and a father, “equated with a god or a goddess” (p. 47).

75. The traditional aims of preaching are: to instruct, to move, to please.

76. Du Bois (see note 14), p. 9. In describing the simultaneity in the practice of worshiping two or more deities from seemingly rival religious camps in contemporary Goa, Alexander Henn uses the term “double-occupancy.” A. Henn, “The Becoming of Goa: Space and Culture in the Emergence of a Multicultural Lifeworld,” *Lusotopie* (2000): 335.

77. The metaphor of the veil is a unifying thread in *The Souls of Black Folk*, but it does not have a fixed meaning. Du Bois (see note 14).

78. See Flood (see note 6), p. 182.

problem. This is why the professional healers who acted as oracles in rituals of trance-possession were the first targets of missionary wrath. They were often perceived either as demonic helpers or as charlatans and tricksters profiting from the credulity of distressed and ignorant people. A much bigger problem, continuously referred to in missionary letters from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, were cases of spontaneous states of possession that occurred among non-Christians and Christians alike.⁷⁹

Fear of demons and sorcery was a common and widespread phenomenon in the early modern world. Based on the principle of sacramentality, Catholic pastoral acts were intended to alleviate that fear and offer protection. All sacraments were considered to be remedies bringing spiritual regeneration to the soul. The preacher's words broadcast from the pulpits were one such remedy, as was the sacrament of confession and penance. The *nāgas* may have preserved some of their apotropaic qualities in the eyes of Goan churchgoers, even as they were pinned down on the pulpits, mute and placid. More importantly, while the *nāgas'* presence on the pulpits served as a visual metaphor for the relationship between the colonizer and colonized subject, the preachers and the empire at large simultaneously generated power and authenticity by "digging into" the local soil (in a literal/territorial and metaphorical/cultural sense), which allowed them to access the chthonic divine power epitomized by the *nāga*.

Who possessed whom? Perhaps there is no single answer to this question; the power of images may defy the power of the gaze. In the absence of documentary evidence of exactly who commanded, designed, executed, and paid for the *nāga* sculptures, I can only offer what seems to me a plausible interpretation. Besides decorative intention, which seems too simple an explanation, I detect two large if opposing desires—or drives in the Lacanian sense—invested in their visibility. One is the celebration of colonial power over all chthonic creatures, while the other is the ironic resistance to dispossession by the Goan indigenous Christian elites. In that sense the "double-consciousness" authorized both the survival of former selves and the assimilation to the Other. In this process, the reassembled identities engendered new social



Figure 12. Buddha in meditation on the *nāga* Mucilinda, first half of the twelfth century. Preah Khan, Cambodia. Musée Guimet, Paris, MG 18127. DR, avec l'aimable autorisation du musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet. Photo: Musée Guimet.

and cultural ambitions of the Goan Christian elites. It was in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that these ambitions spilled over in many different directions—economic, intellectual, and religious. The newly established religious order of Oratorians (*Congregação do Oratório de Santa Cruz dos Milagres*), for example, recruited exclusively from the Goan Brahman community, aiming to replace the "foreign" Catholic priests in their pastoral office in Goa and in the *Padroado* missions, and thus prove their inherent, chthonic "nobility" and superiority.⁸⁰

79. Županov (see note 57). See in particular my discussion on the connection, established and accommodated by Jesuit missionaries, between the local practices of demon possession and Catholic confession.

80. For Brahman Oratorians in Goa see I. G. Županov, "Goan Brahmans in the Land of Promise: Missionaries, Spies and Gentiles in

The *nāga* disappeared from Goan pulpits in the eighteenth century. There was no longer any use for them in the age of reason, a period when, as Aby Warburg wrote, devotion and reflection ceased to pour into each other. But their power of possession never ceased. The anthropologist Brigitte Sébastia, while working on Catholic thaumaturgic sanctuaries in Tamil Nadu, captured on video a woman possessed by a *nāga* during church services in Puliampatti.⁸¹ Throughout Indian history, and, perhaps most of world history, one thing was certain: You can convert a *nāga*, but you can never triumph over it (fig. 12).

Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sri Lanka," in *Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, ed. J. Flores (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 171–210; and Â. Barreto Xavier, "Purity of Blood and Caste: Identity Narratives among Early Modern Goan Elites," in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, ed. M. S. Hering Torres, M. E. Martínez, and D. Nirenberg (Zürich, 2012), pp. 125–149.

81. Brigitte and Christian Sébastia, *Puliampatti, sanctuaire thérapeutique*, 2001–2002 (documentary film); B. Sébastia, *Les rondes de saint Antoine: Culte, affliction et possession en Inde du Sud* (Montreuil, 2007).