

Language and Culture of the Jesuit “Early Modernity” in India during the Sixteenth Century

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What I call the Jesuit “early modernity” is more or less an adapted translation of a concept recently used in France by historians of science who work on Jesuit materials. They call it in French “*la première moderne*” or “the first modernity” in order to talk about the precocious scientific interests generated within the Jesuit networks of knowledge. The “early” modernity should be taken here as an extension of the French concept in order to encompass a variety of innovative social and cultural practice.

Without going into filigree explanation of this yet another imperfect historiographical abbreviation, the reason why this concept can be provisionally successful is that it permits historians to talk about phenomena that are not yet or not entirely “modern”, and are not simply the foundation stones or precursors of modernity. Jesuit “early” modernity may thus be conceptualised as a limited time and space in which the movement of ideas, people and resources accelerated and produced zones of effervescence, that is modernity. This does not mean that the effervescence was necessarily sustainable, and in fact it could disappear completely, or turn into something else that does not fall under classification of a “modern”.

Today historians use the term modernity with an annoyed jerk of their facial muscles, but still use it since periodisation is the *sine qua non* of history and historiography. The concept of “early” modernity here is used to define historical segments that do not necessarily fit into the narrative of the progress of modernity or into the historiographical teleology of modernity. In a word, I’m interested in histories that do not have an immediate follow up and that do not belong in obvious or direct ways to the genealogies of “future” events. The history of the Jesuit missions in India under Portuguese royal patronage is a fertile territory of discontinuous stories of desired, willed and unfinished European “modernities” even if we, from our limited standpoint, can never shed the illusion that the past prefigures and resembles the future.

I have chosen to refer to three texts, of which one is a part of larger treatise, written by three Jesuit missionaries in India in the second half of the sixteenth century and the early decades of the seventeenth. Each of the documents witnesses a Brownian movement of ideas that circulated in Indian Jesuit missions and beyond,

and that offered various strategies for making sense of this world and of acting upon it.

The first history is about the relationship of language and religion among the Jesuit missionaries in India. The second is about notions of indigenous Christianity among their convert communities by which they reworked (“modernized”) their own institutions and culture. The third history is about the first efforts at ethnographic study and the first, though historically unsuccessful, effort to reify and systematise Indian religious practices under the title of Brahmanism (*bramanismo*).

Language and Conversion

When in 1548, Henrique Henriques (or Anrique Anriquez), a Jesuit missionary on the Fishery Coast in South India, described his first efforts at writing a grammar of the local vernacular, which he called Malabar (i.e. Tamil), he was quite proud of himself.¹ The reason why he was forced to learn the language quickly, he explained in a letter to Ignatius of Loyola, was that his interpreter suddenly left to tend to some other business and left him on his own in the mission. In his determination to learn the language that even his predecessor Francis Xavier judged extremely difficult, Henriques studied it day and night and finally managed to work out the conjugations and tenses (preterit, future, subjunctive, infinitive, etc.) of the verbs and cases for the nouns. Hence, his *Arte* (grammar) was to be used in the same way as a Latin grammar. Within five months he had learnt enough to preach in the church and soon, he hoped, he would have no use of interpreters.

At the same time in Goa, Portuguese administrators and religious specialists showed very little enthusiasm for learning vernacular languages. To speed the pace of conversion, the local converts and catechists were made to translate the basic prayers into Konkani and teach them to the neophytes. In the Santa Fé seminary for native boys in Goa, the seminarians gathered from all over Asia and Africa were encouraged to cultivate their native tongues as a vehicle for proselytising, which they would use when they were sent back home after finishing their education. The ideal, however, was not to Christianise the pagan tongues—this was just a temporary measure—but to replace them with Portuguese and, for solemn occasions, with Latin.

A view from metropolitan Lisbon, even by a learned apologist of the Portuguese empire such as João de Barros, who was farsighted enough to be sceptical about imperialism in general, saw the future of the Portuguese territorial conquests in terms of the spread of the Portuguese language. In his *Gramatica da Lingua Portuguesa com os Mandamentos da Santa Madre Igreja*, one of the first of the kind published in Lisbon in 1539-40, Barros predicted that “the Portuguese arms and memorial stones [*padrões*], planted in Africa and in Asia, and on thousands of islands beyond the three parts of the world, are material, and time may spoil them, but it will not spoil the doctrine, customs and language that the Portuguese will have left in those parts”.²

Therefore, when the Jesuit missionaries arrived in India in the early 1540s sent by the Portuguese royal house and under the protection of the royal *Padroado*, their overall impression was that the missionary lingua franca was Portuguese. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit in India wrote in one his letters that the missionaries were to

learn Portuguese—if they had not done so before—on the ships during the long journey from Europe in order to be effective in Asia.³ It did not take long, however, before Xavier changed his mind. After having travelled to places ever more distant from Goa—from Kochi to the Fishery Coast, to São Tomé de Meliapor on the Coromandel Coast to Melaka, and the Moluccas in Southeast Asia and to Japan—he became aware of a veritable Babel of languages. Not knowing these languages was an obstacle to his conversion efforts. Christianity was primarily a religion of the word and choosing the right language to carry its meaning became imperative.

As he travelled and opened new mission territories, Xavier himself invented new creolised Christian languages. One of his contemporaries described his catechetical method as going through “town with a bell, bringing with him all the children and blacks [*todos os mininos e negros e negras*] whom he could [gather] into our church and...would teach them the doctrine, speaking half black and half Portuguese”.⁴ In Goa the mixture of “black” and “Portuguese” referred to a particular mix of basic Portuguese syntax garnished with Konkani vocabulary. Elsewhere, it was a mixture of Portuguese and another vernacular. The mixture of linguistic registers produced multiple and changing versions of *crioulos*, Creole Asian dialects based on Portuguese, some of which have survived into the twenty-first century. When the Dutch wrested control of most of Southeast Asia from the Portuguese, Creole and Portuguese remained in use among indigenous converts to Protestantism despite official Dutch concerns and protests.⁵

Linguistic creolisation is in many ways an ideal colonial situation in which the language of the masters is never completely the language of the slaves or subjects. The problem was that it did not work on all occasions and in all places. In fact, it worked mostly in the Portuguese enclaves scattered along the Asian littoral where the administrative and military presence of the *Estado da Índia* was strong enough to dictate the choice of language. In the mission among the Parava pearl-fishers on the Fishery Coast in South India from which, in 1567, Henrique Henriques addressed the letter translated below, using Portuguese was instantly recognised as inefficient and impossible. With no more than ten Jesuit missionaries to minister to the population of at least 20,000 to 30,000 Tamil-speaking converts and a handful of Portuguese merchants and soldiers, the choice of the language was obvious.

From the 1560s onwards, a new stimulus to learn Asian languages came also from the Jesuit Curia in Rome, which took seriously the decrees of the Council of Trent concerning instruction in vernacular languages. Two generals of the Society of Jesus in succession, Francis Borgia (1565-72) and Everard Mercurian (1573-80), actively encouraged Jesuit linguistic efforts. They ordered that dictionaries and grammars of Asian languages be sent to Rome for the instruction of the future missionaries. At the same time, the basic Christian literature such as the catechism, the life of saints and confession manuals were to be translated for the benefit of Asian Christians.

In 1567, Henrique Henriques was the most accomplished “proto-Orientalist”, an expert in many Indian languages. He wrote the first European grammar of the Tamil language, *Arte Malauar*, which circulated widely in the mission and was later borrowed and improved upon by generations of various Catholic missionaries in the Tamil country, long after the name of its author fell into obscurity.⁶ He had already prepared a dictionary and translated into Tamil a collection of the basic prayers and

tenets of the Christian doctrine. From 1552, on various occasions Henriques boasted of his ability to “extract from any language” the basic declensions and conjugations with the help of one or two good interpreters.⁷ In the course of time he would try his hand at Malayalam (*Maleame*), which he compared to Tamil by way of comparison between Portuguese and Spanish, and at Telugu (*Badaga*).⁸ In the letter produced here, he reports on his progress on the grammar of Konkani (*Canarim*), a language spoken on the islands of Goa.⁹ He was also persuaded that he could do the same for Japanese, Ethiopian, Chinese or any other language on the face of the earth.¹⁰

What he was lacking, Henriques complained, was time to work on his grammars and his translations. With the arrival of Alessandro Valignano in 1575, Henriques’s linguistic energies were redirected towards translations and publications of Christian literature in Tamil. To facilitate this, movable Tamil types were cast by a Jesuit lay brother and over the next twenty years, Henriques produced four printed books: a small catechism, *Doctrina Christam* or *tampirān vaṇakkam* printed in Kollam in 1578; *Doctrina Christam* or *kiricittiyāni vaṇakkam*, printed in Kochi in 1579; a *Confessionairo* printed in Kochi in 1580; and the *Flos Sanctorum*, printed in 1586 in Goa. A detailed history surrounding the material production of these masterpieces of printing needs further research for the sources have led historians in various directions.¹¹

Although these books were printed in Henriques’s name, he was not able to get rid of local interpreters as he had hoped. For at least one of the *Doctrinas*, we do know that he was helped by a certain native priest Manuel de São Pedro. On the other hand, the printing of the second *Doctrina* (*kiricittiyāni vaṇakkam*) in Kochi had been entirely in the hands of Pero Luís Bramane, the only Indian Jesuit admitted into the Society of Jesus in the sixteenth century.¹² (See also “Christian self-fashioning in India” below.)

During the final decades of the century, a new breed of Indian interpreters with increasing sophistication in the matters of Christian doctrine appeared and replaced former *topazes* or *línguas*, some of whom were non-Christian. The new type of interpreters-cum-catechists came out of missionary schools in Kochi, Goa and even Lisbon and Coimbra.¹³ Henriques’s printed texts were, therefore, no simple translations from Latin or Portuguese into Tamil; they contained the already tested, negotiated and appropriated “eloquence” of the Parava Christian community. Just as the stone churches replaced earlier mud and palm leaf structures, printed books replaced paper manuscripts and palm leaf strips (*olai*).¹⁴

Tampirān vaṇakkam and even more so *kiricittiyāni vaṇakkam* remain, nevertheless, tied to the Portuguese and Latin “originals”; but, at the same time, the end result of the translation is the creation of spaces in-between, imperceptible and secret at first, in which newly planted words ripen and assume meanings of their own. According to Loyola’s spiritual vocabulary, the convert—in this case the Tamil language—begins a “new” life of its own in translation. This is precisely the moment in which, paradoxically, the Jesuits won the battle and lost the war. Although in his 1567 letter, Henriques portrays the Paravas as poor and in need of Portuguese subsidy, it was the Paravas themselves who contributed money directly for the upkeep of the Jesuit mission. They paid the salaries of the church employees, bought new “ornaments” for the altars and finally financed themselves the printing of at least

some of Henriques's books.¹⁵ An interesting (and symptomatic) circle of spiritual and secular (that is financial) involvement between the missionaries and their converts is disclosed in the preface to the *kiricittiyāni vaṇakkam*: "You have desired to have several books which will teach you and your descendants the path to heaven and therefore you have contributed large sums of money towards the press. Therefore we are giving you this book as a gift".¹⁶ The *Confessionairo* and the *Flos Sanctorum* were offered, therefore, to the audience of devoted Parava Christians who fervently demanded fortifying pious literature, and probably also paid the printing costs. Resounding with the convert's desires for "explanation", "consolation", "method", these texts contain "standard" doctrinal Tamil vocabulary established and fixed earlier. And while untranslatable words from Portuguese and Latin and proper names appear between diamond-shaped marks, the rich worlds of cultural adaptation open up on the pages of these two exceptional books, which are the two longest printed texts in a non-European language (and script) to have come out of the sixteenth-century European printing presses in Asia.

The Tamil *Confessionairo* and *Flos Sanctorum* are both witnesses and instruments of the "second" conversion that occurs when the "translated" utterance is made to act on and discipline the mind and the body of the converts. Christian Tamil in print is, therefore, made to "do what it says".¹⁷ In the *Confessionairo* it digs in and probes forcefully into the convert's mind in order to test and purify his or her inner will or intention. A whole new theatre of affects opens and is revealed in Henriques's text. A vigilant confessor had to teach the confessant how to expurgate his or her soul from sin in a series of ritual speech acts and by soliciting strong emotions. Besides the psychological dislocations that it operates, the *Confessionairo* also functions as a regulatory document, containing "laws" and defining penal, legal and moral jurisdiction within the Parava caste organisation. In this respect it complements perfectly the *Flos sanctorum* in which ethical, theological, and community principles pose as accomplished narrative events, over-inflated exempla of correct behaviour, righteous thinking and spiritual edification. Through these figures, plots and legends universally known in the Christian West, Henriques, and through him his Parava informants, told stories about their local world whether Christian or not.

Henriques's enthusiasm for deciphering and standardising Asian languages in the late 1560s clearly shows that the Portuguese empire had already lost the "linguistic" battle against the populations it purportedly controlled. The Jesuit missionaries and their accommodationist methods of conversion, which insisted on using vernacular languages for the transmission and translation of Christian doctrine, contributed in important ways to the eclipse of the Portuguese language. When Henriques wrote his letter in 1567, João de Barros's dream of seeing Indians speaking Portuguese in their temples was already just the chimera of a metropolitan arm-chair philosopher. However Barros was right in a certain sense. Until at least the end of the eighteenth century, in Christian literature in Asia, Latin and Portuguese words continued to function as vestiges of "the sacred" utterances—to be learnt by heart and invoked for ritual or liturgical occasions—or as the memorial stones (*padrões*) of an imaginary linguistic possession.

Document 1. Anrrique Anrriquez [to the General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, Francisco Borgia], 31 December 1567

Source: Original manuscript is in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Goa 8, III, fols. 667r-68v. Published in Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 7:437-43.

+ Jesus

Most Reverend Father

From the general letter which is written from here, Your Paternity will be informed about the fruit that has been made both on the Fishery Coast and on the island of Mannar.¹⁸ Through the goodness of Our Lord it progresses with a lot of consolation for the Fathers, especially by way of confessions, and with the help of certain native Christians who are like our coadjutors and to whom God has given grace to influence people to live well, and by way of spiritual exercises [given] to male and female devotees.

At present, we are ten on the [Fishery] Coast and on [the island of] Mannar, that is seven Fathers, two deacons and one Malabar Brother. The Brother Francisco Durão who knows the [Tamil] language went to Goa to deal with some matters of the Christians. I wrote also to the provincial to see if this father could learn some Latin in order to be ordained. One of the deacons is very advanced in [the Tamil] language which he has studied for the past eight months. The other [deacon] is not so advanced because both his abilities and health are weak. The one who is advanced could have been already ordained and doing confessions, if he did not have other duties than learning the language...

Although we feel that there is a lot of fruit harvested, when we see how few we are, mostly confessors who know the language, and how many places [there are to visit] and the resources at hand, only a little is done, which could be more if we had the necessary workers.

The provincial shows willingness to supply this Coast [with missionaries] and, among the others that he has now sent, he decided also to send Father Pero Vaz, a man of letters and virtues, who has been recalled from Bassein to come here. However, although he is willing, there are so many places that require [missionaries] that he cannot and will not be able to send all those needed for the Coast. May it please God that there will be [enough] in ten or twenty years...

I wrote last year before the promulgation [of the canons] of the Council [of Trent] that because there are many places and very few ministers, we had permission from the prelates so that not only brothers but also the native Christians, who are like hermits, that is, who teach prayers, could perform marriage rites. This permission is given only to those whom we trust and are obliged to inquire about any objections beforehand. Also, they are obliged to find witnesses who can guarantee that there are no impediments. They inform us later about what has happened. Then, we send them a message to receive them [to wed them] in the house. When there was a father, they let him know so that he can receive [wed] them at the door of the church. After the promulgation of the Council [of Trent], not only all this has become impossible, but also the brothers are not allowed to perform marriage rites. Now they have written from Goa that it will be decided at the provincial council whether the brothers can perform marriage rites...

I also wrote last year about the tithes that these Christians of the Fishery Coast are asked to pay. They are not yet capable of paying them because they are weak, poor and tyrannised by the kings in whose territories they live and because they are insufficiently taken care of. That is, they do not have enough ministers to take care of their souls.

The king is here the Master of the Order of Christ and he receives tithes by the decision of the Pope. The people are greatly scandalised when they see the captain collecting (the tithes) for the king. The people of India are not yet capable of [paying] tithes.

What can be done is that the Christians who are here sustain the fathers who take care of them. Even the gentiles are scandalised when they see that they [the Portuguese] demand and take tithes from the Christians. A Brother Francisco Durão went to Goa with two honourable men from the coast to discuss the tithes, among other things. When the Christians saw the pressure rising, they sent a message that they would provide all that was necessary to the fathers who take care of them, regardless of the success or failure of the pearl fishing season.

It is certain that this would put them in trouble, that is, in the event of a bad pearl fishing season, because of the poverty that follows such a bad season. They also wrote that in the event of a good pearl fishing season, they would give a gift to the bishop.

May it please God that all this be successfully dealt with. It seems to me that if the king were properly informed, such a thing would not be demanded. Neither did he expressly demand the tithes. This is done here because they [the Portuguese] want to have money by all means in order to sustain the [garrison on the] island of Mannar.

The majority of the Christians of India need to be given [to] rather than give. Since the Christians of Japan are considered better than those in India, the fathers [in Japan] sustain themselves without asking for anything and I heard that they received from the prelate the permission to trade in order to complement that what is given by the king.

Without a doubt there would be many, seeing that once they become Christians they would be obliged to give one-tenth [the *dízima* tax] to the king, who would lose their willingness, if they have it at all, to come to baptism. Your Paternity should recommend this matter to God, and if it seems [important] to you to write to Portugal about it, please, do.

For some years I feel in me a talent for composing grammars of any language if I have one or two good interpreters and a scribe of the same language. Two years ago, when I spoke with the provincial about that in Kochi, he said that I should try that. I told him that it should be good to do one [grammar] of the *Canarim* [Konkani language] because there are people in Goa who would like to examine it.¹⁹ After that, occupied as I was, and since I do not live in a place where there are any *Canarins*, I was not able to proceed so quickly. I did some work on and off, and around four months ago I brought from Mannar [Island] one or two *Canarins* who speak Portuguese. With them I worked during my free time without allowing others to help me with my duties, as I did before. With the help of God I learnt many things so that if I were in a place where it is spoken, in a month or two, more or less, I would be able to hear confession. I have also written a major part of the *Arte* [Grammar], although it is not finished, because I lack one or two *Canarim* scribes to perfect it. A deacon who is learning the Tamil language saw some of the things I have written and affirmed that it is better than the one [the grammar] that was written in Goa, and there they also collected some rules for the *Arte*. This brother was one of those who were learning [Konkani] at that time.

[The *Arte*] was composed by one or two *Canarins* who knew Latin.²⁰ I hope that this *Arte* will be improved to the level of the Tamil one, on which we also worked for many years. Few words are similar in both languages, but the [structure of the] sentences is very similar. *Canarim* is, nevertheless, more difficult. I hope to send this

Arte to Goa soon in order to have it examined, and to see whether I can do the same for other languages. The truth is that at this point I am not able to improve it as I would have done if I had had more time and a few *Canarim* scribes.

As for my state of health, for some months I am better than before. Pray to Lord to give us grace to fulfil perfectly His most Holy Will.

From this town of Punicayle [Punnaikayal] on the last day of December of Our Lord's Nativity of the year 1568.

+ Anrrique Anrriquez +

Christian Self-Fashioning in India

The writer of the following letter, written on 6 January 1580, in the Jesuit residence in Kollam, a town in what is today the Indian state of Kerala, is Pero Luís Bramane, the only Indian to be admitted to the Society of Jesus until its suppression in 1773. His exceptional Jesuit biography can be pieced together from information scattered through the correspondence of other Jesuits who worked closely with him in the southern Indian missions and from his five extant letters. Born a Brahman in a village near the city of Kollam, he converted to Christianity in 1546 when he was about fifteen years old.²¹ From that time until 1561 the Jesuits employed him as a *língua* or interpreter of Malayalam, his native tongue, and Tamil, another South Indian language. He was, of course, proficient in Portuguese and when he wrote his first letter in 1559 to the General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, Diogo Lainez, expressing his desire to join the Society. His language and rhetorical skills were clearly as good, if not better, than that of an average Jesuit correspondent.²² In 1561, he was admitted to the Society of Jesus as a novice and continued to study at St. Paul's College in Goa. However, from early on, due to his superior linguistic skills, his education in Jesuit institutions was often interrupted by urgent missions, either to serve as interpreter for important Jesuit figures such as António Gomes or to help out the fathers during the "confession season" (Lent) in the mission on the Fishery Coast. Thus, it took him the unusual length of ten years to finish his studies and to be ordained priest in 1575.

Eight years before his ordination, he was already an experienced missionary and a cherished member of the famous Jesuit mission among the Parava pearl-fishing community on the Fishery Coast, established by Francis Xavier in the early 1540s. Among the tasks he regularly performed there, he was singled out as an excellent preacher. Thus, one of his co-religionists in the field described his Passion Sermon in Tamil with admiration which caused, in his words, "a big sentiment" among the people who shed a profusion of tears and were incited to discipline themselves (that is to mortify the flesh by flogging) until blood dripped from their bodies during the procession.²³ The people cried so much, continued Diogo do Soveral, that Pero Luís had to stop the sermon and wait for the silence in order to continue. The power of his preaching in Tamil transcended linguistic barriers because even the Portuguese who were present on this occasion were "moved" by the sight of the fervent Christian devotion of these new Christian communities.

From other Jesuit sources and his own annual report letter from the mission on the Fishery Coast we can get a clear picture of his incredibly busy schedule, which involved travelling long distances along the coast in order to help the Jesuit fathers

with the ministry of confession, which at that time became overwhelming.²⁴ The confessional movement among the new converts has been recorded almost everywhere in successful Jesuit missions in India, of which the mission among the Christian Paravas was the most prominent. The reasons for the success of this Christian practice can be found to a great degree in cultural hybridisation, which connected confession with the pre-Christian practice of ritual possession, an important psychological conduit in South Indian culture. Contemporary anthropologists still ponder over this overarching religious manifestation, often defined as a pre-modern manner of dealing with psychological and communal disorders. South Indian "relational" divinities and devotional traditions (*bhakti*) are replete with the energy of possession, which flows between the humans and the gods. What this energy helps to bring out and articulate is a word—a word of complaint, distress, accusation and threat. A possessed person, conceptualised as a receptacle of a divine/demonic power, is generally considered as speaking the raw truth about the problematic relations beyond direct human perception. It serves, obviously, as a word of resistance for those who are disenfranchised by the community, such as women, outsiders, and others. Possession is also a profession in which shamans and mediums offer solutions and advice to those who need them.

With confession and other forms of "spiritual practice", the Jesuits provided an alternative solution to the same cultural problems.²⁵ Hence, the tears and fervent mortification combined with an incentive to the neophytes to speak about their most intimate desires, fears and angers replaced the possession, which the Jesuits branded as another demonic illusion. It comes as no surprise that the native informants, the *linguas* such as Pero Luís Bramane, were instrumental in guiding the Jesuit search for appropriate cultural idioms in which Christianity could be accepted by the new converts. He might, thus, have appeared as a native "collaborator" of the *Padroado*, that is, of the ecclesiastical and secular Portuguese imperial impulses and intentions. This particular reading of his role would work fine within an analytical framework—quite fashionable in the field of social sciences in the closing decades of the twentieth century—that takes for granted that the conversion in Asia during the sixteenth century was a purely coercive and hegemonic process. As Pero Luís Bramane's life and work shows, that is an excessively one-sided view.

First of all, he was not simply a "collaborator", a category that points to treacherous and spy-like qualities of character. He was, on the contrary, a fervent Christian convert and as true a believer in the Kingdom of Heaven brought closer to Indian gentiles by the Portuguese as any other European Jesuit. His "interstitial" place within the administrative and ecclesiastical machine employed by the *Estado da Índia* and complicated by the presence of the transnational religious order such as Society of Jesus, made him more cognitively alert than his European co-religionists.²⁶ He perceived, understood and reacted to ambiguities and inconsistencies inherent in religious and cultural imperialism willed by the Portuguese in India. It would be wrong to characterise him as an Indian "nationalist" Jesuit, a contradiction in terms, since an ideal Jesuit was to forsake his country, nation and his family for the "greater glory of God" and espouse a transnational (Christian) identity. He was, however, the first to notice how capriciously implemented this ideal was in India. When he was still a young boy in the seminary for native students in Goa, one of the rectors decided to expel all the "natives" on the pretext that they were fit nei-

ther for European learning nor for priesthood.²⁷ Later on, the colour of his skin was also used for or against his demand to be admitted to the Society of Jesus. One of his patrons, a future Jesuit martyr Gonçalo de Sylveira wrote favourably about him, claiming that he was dark “because of the climate, but not black”.²⁸ To be ordained, he had to be, according to informal opinion and after 1585 by official decree, at least thirty years of age and a Christian for at least fifteen years.²⁹ This went against the decree of the Council of Trent allowing ordination at twenty-five. Indian converts were obviously seen as fragile Christians.

He was also quick to take advantage of and feed into a number of European ideas about Indian “gentile” social and cultural institutions. Thus he emphasised his high-caste pedigree. In a letter to the General of the Order written in 1559, Pero Luís Bramane framed his own individual qualities and special fitness to become a Jesuit and a priest by indirectly claiming that it was his birthright. “I am a young man, son of a gentile Brahman (who are like a religious caste among us Christians)”.³⁰ This claim was surely effective and credible to both Jesuit and Portuguese ears in spite of another decree by the Council of Trent recommending that the poor and lowly be preferred as candidates for priesthood.³¹ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Goa and elsewhere, Brahmans and high castes were the only “natives” considered admissible to priesthood.

Even when priests, “natives” were assigned to subaltern positions within the Portuguese ecclesiastical system in India since Portuguese clergy would not tolerate being given orders either by a “native” or by a “converted Jewish or Muslim” priest. Some of them who went to Rome and impressed the pope and cardinals with their pious behaviour and superior theological knowledge came back to India as bishops sent by the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith (established in 1622 in Rome). In spite of the title, they were never allowed to exercise their duties in the *Padroado* territory and they encountered persecution and accusations of false representation more often than they received appropriate honours.

Pero Luís Bramane learnt quite early and quickly what the institutional limits were within which he could or could not act and thrive as a Jesuit missionary. Evaluations of his peers, either in catalogues written regularly by the superiors or in individual letters, show that he was generally appreciated for his linguistic and social skills. Not a single “scandal” ever attached to his name, and he was always obedient and an exemplary Jesuit. But as he grew older and surer of his position, Pero Luís became more critical of the boundaries imposed on him and his kind.

He shows the first signs of impatience in this letter, written in 1580 when he was at the peak of his Jesuit career. At this point he was assigned to the mission among the St. Thomas or Syrian Christians on the southwest coast of India in the vicinity of Kochi. It was a special mission administered by the Jesuits from around 1577 when a famous Italian Jesuit, Alessandro Valignano, travelled to the region and met with the Syrian Archbishop Mar Abraham. These ancient Christians, whose presence in India dated back to the early centuries of the Christian era, were, according to their own accounts and legends, the descendants of the converts made by St. Thomas the Apostle. The Portuguese considered them a difficult and disobedient community. There were doubts about the orthodoxy of their religious practices and their bishops, who traditionally came from Mesopotamia, were suspected of Nestorian heresy and considered a threat to the *Padroado* system. Pero Luís

Bramane was handpicked by Valignano to serve as a companion and an interpreter to other Jesuit fathers sent to the mission. His high status was decisive for Valignano's selection since the St. Thomas Christians claimed a status similar to that of the highest caste in the region, such as the Brahmans (religious specialists and landowners) and the Nayars (the warriors and the kings). Pero Luís Bramane had no trouble holding his own there and he remained in the mission until, caught between warring factions, he was attacked and almost died in 1584.³²

In this letter, written a few years before the attack on his life, we see an ordinary missionary life unfold before our eyes. He travelled a lot from one place to another since the Christians were scattered in small hamlets and at that time there were never more than two or three Jesuits residing in the mission. The missionaries' primary concern was to teach Roman Christian ritual and Catholic civility by word and by example. This was often contrasted with the customs of the native priests, the *kattanars*, who were accused of simony, immorality (some of them were married) and ignorance. The technical term used for such a conversion in process was "reduction", that is, reducing the St. Thomas Christians to the absolute obedience of the Roman church and the *Padroado* prelates. In both the short and the long run, it turned out to be quite impossible. Without direct Portuguese administrative grasp and sufficient funds, as Pero Luis Bramane shrewdly concluded in another letter, the chances of success were meagre: "Nobody confesses their error if not conquered in conscience or forced. Since we do not have force, it is necessarily the other, and for this we need money".³³ Here we can recognise the method of accommodation at its inception, although in India it would not be until the early seventeenth century that Roberto Nobili would chisel out its fully articulated form in the Madurai mission.

The problem of the scarce financial resources made Pero Luís Bramane play a well-crafted "reverse mirror gaze" game on his audience. He half exhorted, half chastised the "rich, rich Cardinals" in Rome for being stingy and uncharitable. To make this rhetorical ruse effective he inserted his own stunning self-portrait as "a black man with pierced ears and whose dead parents were in Hell".³⁴ In spite of the vestiges of paganism still inscribed on his body, we are meant to understand that it was he, and not they, who worked for Christ in India. In the postscript to the letter he developed yet another proposal to his European superiors in order to finally "convert" the St. Thomas Christians to Catholicism and wean them from their own bishops ordained in Syria or by Syrian prelates. The plan that he shared with other Jesuits was to admit some of the "*surianos*"—the term he applied also to local St. Thomas and not only to "foreign" Syrian bishops—to the Society of Jesus and then send them back as Catholic bishops. In this way their conversion would follow an exemplary formula of interior and true conversion postulated by Ignatius of Loyola and evoked by Pero Luís Bramane, "so that they can enter with their [will] and come out with our [will]".³⁵ This formula can be also interpreted as an invitation to indigenise Catholicism; and for Pero Luís Bramane it was evident that the first step in that process was "to open the door for those of India" to the Society of Jesus.³⁶

More than a decade later, in his last letter, written as an old man in 1589, he made one more impassioned and somewhat impatient plea for the admission of the "natives".³⁷ He complained directly to the Jesuit General, Everard Mercurian, about the fact that he was "the only Malabar son, alone in the Society" and that he longed for more companions. There was no reason, he claimed, not to admit the natives

of India into the Society of Jesus, as there were many “able people here and among St. Thomas Christians”. Concerning rumours about a dissolute life led by Malabar clerics, he said, “God is my witness how other nations [i.e. Portuguese] live”.

Whatever the case, his solitary voice was not heeded and he remained the only Indian admitted into the Society until its dissolution in 1773.

Document 2. Pero Luís Bramane to Everard Mercurian, General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, 6 January 1580

Source: Original autograph of the letter is in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Goa 13 I, fols. 1r-2v. Published in Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 11:789-94.

+ Jesus

[To] Our Very Revered Father in Christ
Pax Christi.

I recommend myself to the holy blessing of Your Paternity and from here I beg you to send me your blessing, saying: “May Our Lord give you the perseverance in our holy Company of Jesus”.

Last year I wrote to Your Paternity about the Christians of St. Thomas of the Cerra [or Serra, i.e. Mountain] because I stayed there in the company of Father Bernardino [Ferrario], who has now left for the Moluccas by the order of holy obedience. I stayed there ever since in the company of Father Jorge de Crasto until the end of September. After that I came to Cochin for the love of printing in Malabar [the Tamil language] until the end of October.³⁸

At that point, I received news that one of my sisters and her son wanted to become Christian. For that reason I went to the Travancore coast where I had already spoken to my nephew and went to look for his mother. The youngster is about twenty years old, of good disposition [*boa cousa*]. Our Lord converted him to whom he is now and paid for it with his blood. The youngster will be named after Your Paternity [i.e., Everard].

Last winter, in June, Father Bernardino and I made some visits to the Christians of the Cerra.³⁹ Our last [visit] was to a place, which is on the northern side, five or six leagues away. We got there, as usual, in time for Compline.⁴⁰ We recited the Vespers of Our Lady, the two of us in chorus with the Christians who were present, and the Magnificat. The father burned incense in front of the altar and I in front of the father, and one lay person chosen for this task burned incense in front of the men and women who stood separated from each other. When the Compline was finished I gave a short homily [*praticazinha*] in which I explained the procedure of the company whose sons we are, and that we came to this place with the permission of their prelate, the Archbishop Mar Abraham, the Catholic who had been to Rome at the time of Pope Pius V.

After that we invited them all for the following day's mass and sermon, which I did during the offertory in the Malabar language, which is my native tongue.⁴¹ They rejoiced in this and after that I baptised their children for free, because their [priests] charge money for this. They were very satisfied and surprised that we do not accept anything from them. They sent us chicken, figs and invited us to eat, and accompanied us from one place to another with pleasure.⁴² They gave us their churches to stay in them and their treasury to establish *fabricas* in them.⁴³ They brought their sons to us to teach them Latin. This happened in all the places.

Our Lord saw how satisfied we were and wanted to test how firm our faith was. He wanted especially to test me, who lacks it [faith]. I hope that God would give me more through the prayers of Your Paternity. What happened is that a big storm

passed over a large river [while we were] in a small boat, with big rain and wind. Even in this there was a great mercy of God in that it blew into the poop [of the boat]. We held on and the boatman steered from the poop and I from the prow, and finally, all drenched, we reached an island at night. To be sure, my Father, I was worried for the father's [Ferrario's] life because he does not know how to swim. This is a good thing to know for all of ours [brothers] out there [in Europe], especially for those that are to come here. I can swim and thought of holding on to the boat which was all flooded until we were washed ashore, but Our Lord released me from everything due to the merits of the Holy Fathers and Brothers of the Company [of Jesus], to whom is due all glory and honour.

One of the good things done by Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano was to use these Christians, according to the intention of Your Paternity. They feel well with us. They demand that we join them from all corners and they are happy with our manner of proceeding. Last year I wrote to Your Paternity that I had two [more] children to baptise, of whom this year when I did my visit according to my oath of holy obedience I baptised one who was six years old and the other who was three. Certainly, one should feel pity for those who died here without baptism.

These Christians of the Cerra, it seems to me, live on this fifty-league long territory and their settlements are about three or four [square] leagues in surface when big and half a league when small. If eight fathers of the Company who knew the language come here, in a short while these Christians would be brought under obedience. And for this a rent of a thousand *pardaos* would not be necessary.

If I could only be [transported or appear] among those rich, rich gentlemen cardinals and the gentleman Marco Antonio Colona and others of that ilk to tell them that they spend a lot there for things that are of no service to God, as it is this [service here] for the souls for which Christ suffered. That a black person with his ears pierced and whose dead parents are in hell should tell all this may explain a lot. On the other hand, it seems to me that even if Lazarus were to be resuscitated, little would be done. As soon as I would finish saying this in Rome, I would like to see myself in India. I trust Your Paternity will forgive me this imprudence of mine.

I also wrote to Your Paternity that I have a Christian brother and three nephews and now hope that one of my sisters would come with her son who is twenty years old. I asked that he be given a post of *lingoa* in Kollam and Kayankulam, that is, to be [an] interpreter. This is a good job for them and with this they left me because until then my relatives pestered me and I pestered the fathers. If Your Paternity could write to Portugal to the fathers to obtain from the king this job of interpreter in Kollam and Kayankulam for my brother and my nephew, each could be placed in one or the other according to the wishes of the Fathers and myself.

News about me: physically healthy, lacking all kinds of virtues. Recommend myself to Your Paternity's blessing.

From Kollam, today, 6 January 1580.

Your Paternity's unworthy son

Pero + Luís

When I had already finished writing this letter, I received a letter from Your Paternity, written on 19 October 1578, with which my poor soul was so greatly consoled that I cannot express myself. Now I have a reason to have hope that Our Lord will forgive my sins and will give me his grace since Your Paternity remembers to console me without knowing me [in person] and without my writing to you. May Our Lord reward Your Paternity for this mercy.

It is very good that His Sanctity [the Pope] wrote to the Archbishop of Angamale

that he should be present at the provincial synod, but he was so scandalised with what they did to him the last time. I believe, however, that he will go to it either in person or, if not, will send his procurator, which is good for now. The archdeacon is also a good man, and it would be good if he succeeds the archbishop in his office [prelacy]. Both are truly our friends.

I spoke here with some senior fathers and with the father visitor about how good it would be to admit some Syrian [Christians] into the Company and make them Catholic and then His Sanctity could ordain them bishops and send them here. Or, [it would be good] if some brothers of the Company learnt Syriac well, were ordained and sent here. All this should be done through the Patriarch of Babylon from where these bishops come. This would be a good way of reducing them [to obedience] quickly, because he has to enter with his [will] and come out with ours. May Your Paternity receive these liberties from an undisciplined subject with the spirit of paternal clemency. I recommended myself again and again to the Holy Blessing of Your Paternity.

Date above.

Your unworthy son

Pero + Luís

On Indian Heathenism

Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso (born 1541 in Lisbon, died 1621 in Tuticorin), a Jesuit missionary in India, wrote the following pages around 1616 from the Madurai mission in the heart of the Tamil country. These are merely words of introduction to one of the first and most comprehensive Portuguese proto-ethnographic treatises to describe in detail Brahmanical rites and customs. Although the Brahmans were only a tiny fraction of the population, by the beginning of the seventeenth century Europeans in India generally considered them the priests and the creators of Indian heathenism. The twentieth-century editor of this text, the Jesuit Joseph Wicki, added a misleadingly anachronistic title in his publication of this document, which had remained unnoticed for more than three centuries in the general archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome. By calling it a treatise “on Hinduism”, Wicki and many other scholars of his generation unwittingly projected back a concept that did not come into being before the eighteenth-century British Orientalist movement.

With or without a proper term, the Portuguese did have a sense that the majority of people who inhabited the territory from the Ganges River “inward” (*para dentro*), which in Portuguese geography meant the Indian subcontinent, and who were not Muslims, Christians or Jews, were Gentiles (*gentios*) who practiced some kind of distinct religion. What exactly the tenets of such a religion were was far from clear. From the middle of the sixteenth century, with the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries, the urgency to understand local religious practices is clearly expressed in their correspondence. The search for the Indian sacred books (by theft, confiscation or purchase) was followed by intense learning of the languages in which they were written, from Tamil, Malayalam, Konkani, Marathi, Telugu and other vernaculars to the most privileged language of the literati, the Sanskrit. Indian learned men, mostly Brahmans who were versed in Sanskrit literature, were coveted as interpreters and, most of all, as converts. “Brahmanisation” of the Portuguese and missionary perceptions of Indian religion was, therefore, unavoidable.

Interest in Brahmanical life-cycle rituals and their "sciences", "laws" and "authentic" books reached its apogee by the end of the sixteenth century and a few relatively competent first-hand accounts were written in the first decades of the seventeenth century. One remarkable non-Jesuit account is by Frey Agostinho de Azevedo (1603). His text was a part of a report for the royal council of Philip III on Portuguese India. What is remarkable in his presentation is that Indian paganism is conceptualised as a system rather than a jumble of unconnected rites and customs. Diogo do Couto in his *Fifth Decada* (1612) faithfully plagiarised Azevedo's text.⁴⁴ A similar fate befell another expert Jesuit account of Indian cosmology, Jacome Fenicio's *Livro primeiro da Seita dos Indios Orientais, e principalmente dos Malauares* (1609). Parts of his treatise found their way into published works by Philippus Baldaeus and Manuel de Faria y Sousa.⁴⁵ While the Dutch chaplain Baldaeus is already notorious for intentionally borrowing both written and pictorial material for his book *Afgoderye der Oost-Indische heydenen* (Idolatry of the East-Indian Heathens) without acknowledging and even disparaging his sources, the situation with the Jesuit and Catholic compilations is less clear-cut. The accumulation of knowledge concerning Indian religious practices in view of conversion and for celebration of the heroic missionary deeds in Asia demanded cut-and-paste techniques from the literary experts in Europe. The fact that the missionary text arrived in various transcriptions without the signatures of the authors, since they were writing for the Greater Glory of God and not for their own, their appropriation by publishers was greatly facilitated. On the other hand, the documents produced by the experts in the field, men of action such as the Jesuits, were often perceived as too close to and too implicated in indigenous explanations and categories. A view from afar censured all that was not immediately acceptable or clear to the European audience.

Although some Jesuit manuscripts acquired a second life with the help of plagiarisers and borrowers, some manuscripts lay all but forgotten in the archives. One such text is Antonio Rubino's *Relatione d'alcune cose principali del regno di Bisnaga*, in which he described the idolatry practiced in the rump kingdom of Vijayanagara in Vellore (1608).⁴⁶ Similarly, the *Historia do Malavar* (1615) written by a Portuguese Jesuit Diogo Gonçalves appeared in print only in the twentieth century. He was a militant, "nationalist" Portuguese, more than willing to provide strategic information about, for example, the location of a rich temple in Kerala, and openly invited Portuguese army to attack and pillage it.⁴⁷

One of the features that distinguishes Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso from other Jesuit proto-ethnographers of the same period is that at the beginning of his career he had no special predilection for ethnographic writing or any kind of writing at all. He was one of those Jesuits recruited locally in India and he traded his unsuccessful military career in the army of the *Estado da Índia* for the missionary career among the "soldiers of Christ", as the Jesuits were often known. According to Jacinto Pereira, who wrote his necrology in 1621, Fernandes Trancoso joined the Society of Jesus in 1561 on the island of Mannar. His "conversion" occurred when he was lying wounded during the doomed expedition to Jaffnapatam by D. Constantino de Bragança's armada. The next step in his Jesuit career was his stay in the College of St. Paul in Goa in order to study Latin, cases of conscience, and other subjects necessary for ordination. By 1583 he was a procurator for the Fishery

Coast Mission (*Missão da Pescaria*) and a priest. Working among the Parava pearl-fishing community on the extreme south of the Indian peninsula was a hard but satisfying task he successfully performed. He learned Tamil well enough to preach, hear confessions and administer numerous parishes scattered along the sandy strip of land from Cape Comorin to the temple town of Rameswaram. It was around 1595 that he was posted to Madurai, which was at the time the capital of the Nayaka rulers and one of the major temple towns of South India. Nominally, his duties were to tend to the Catholic Parava merchants who moved inland, although he also sporadically played a role of Portuguese “ambassador” at the court. The friendship between the Nayakas and the Estado da Índia relied mostly on the importation of horses, which was in the hands of Portuguese merchants. What the Jesuits were not allowed to do in Madurai was proselytise and convert.

This situation radically changed with the arrival of a young Italian Jesuit, Roberto Nobili who, in Fernandes Trancoso’s opinion, turned the mission upside down. Nobili held, wrote Fernandes Trancoso in 1610, that “there are some or even big differences between us in religion”.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Italian denied that he was a “Portuguese”, donned the heathen dress of a *sannyasi*, ate vegetarian food cooked by Brahman cooks, conversed only with Brahmans and high castes, and dissociated himself completely from the Catholic Parava church and its priest. The separation of churches, which for the Portuguese missionary veteran amounted to schism, was what finally prompted him to denounce his young coreligionist to his superiors in Kochi and Goa. To his surprise he discovered that Nobili had powerful support in his Italian superiors, such as Alberto Laerzio, and that *accommodatio* was the hallmark of this particular missionary approach already in practice in China. After furious exchanges between the two missionary camps in Madurai, and which began to involve Nobili’s few high-caste converts and Fernandes Trancoso’s Paravas, the war of treatises and letters began. Nobili’s Latin texts, garnished with theological quotations and analogies, started to circulate and to be read and discussed among the Jesuit theologians in Kochi and Goa.

Fernandes Trancoso had to concoct urgently a response to Nobili’s rhetorical propaganda for his experimental, accommodationist mission.⁴⁹ (Incidentally, these texts ignited a long controversy culminating in the Malabar rites quarrel in the middle of the eighteenth century.) The points of disagreement between the two Jesuits were irreconcilable. While Nobili admiringly recognised in Brahmans the learned men of European antiquity and tried to imitate their life style, or as he would call it their “political customs”, in order to gradually wean them over to Christianity, for Fernandes Trancoso the Brahmans were learned in diabolical sacrifices and mantras. His detailed descriptions of the “ceremonies” and “mode of conduct” were geared to prove that the Brahman way of life was their religion and he, in fact, gave it a name: Brahmanism (*bramanismo*). By adding the suffix *-ism* to an Indian word, Fernandes Trancoso turned it into a concept that comes closer to the later notion of Hinduism as a unitary religion of all the Hindus. But his was a solitary move and since his text received almost no attention at the time, he had no immediate followers.

The reason why his text ended in the archives too soon are many. Some can clearly be detected in the translated paragraphs and others can be inferred from them. His text is badly written, as if he never looked back at what he wrote. It is full

of unnecessary repetitions, sentences that run into each other, undeveloped thoughts, ungrammatical forms and the most confusing orthography. He was obviously untrained as a writer, unlike, for example, his antagonist Roberto Nobili, whose superior rhetoric partly accounts for his success in the controversy. Fernandes Trancoso was aware at least of some of these problems but attributed it to the obscure and even dangerous material that he tried to transpose into Portuguese. "Sometimes there will be places that will appear obscure to understand [although] in Portuguese, but it seemed more convenient [like that] instead of changing words, not because they kill and the meaning gives life, but because one and other in these matters (*nesta materia*) kill."⁵⁰

Writing about Brahmanism was for Fernandes Trancoso equal to meddling in idolatrous and diabolical substances themselves. His text is a long inventory of transcribed Sanskrit and Tamil terms, which make sense only to specialists in Indian classical literature and philosophy. The excess of indigenous knowledge, defined as dangerous heathen knowledge at that, made his text an unreadable and unread document. Except for a few experienced and learned missionaries in India, there was nobody to appreciate his effort. Moreover, Roberto Nobili who also resided in Madurai and used the same informant, a Brahman convert named Bonifacio Xastri, did everything to discredit the text in his treatises *Responsio* (1610), *Informatio* (1613) and *Narratio* (1619), in which he defended the thesis that there was *no Hindu religion* and that Indian paganism was simply "civility". Armed with theological theories developed in Europe by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers, Nobili devised an ingenious strategy—based on theologically framed resemblance and analogies—of how just about everything in Indian paganism can be converted into Christianity.

Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso provides very few similitudes: for example, he agrees that the learned Brahmans resemble the Church Fathers and that emblems such as the tuft of hair and the thread can be likened to the Muslim "*toque* and tunic". But these are exceptions, because for him Indian (or Tamil, to be more precise) heathenism is simply unique. It is the absence of analogies that gives his text an unusually modern anthropological veneer. One after another, in thirty-nine chapters, he does what he promises in the introduction: he describes the entire life-cycle of an ideal Brahman man from the first day of conception until death. It is an ethnographic description of a prescribed, but not necessarily actual ritual performance, a fact he does not make clearly enough.

The prescriptions come, according to him, from the authentic books translated from Malabar, that is the Tamil language. These original books of laws are, at least from their adulterated transcription, none other than the four Vedas of which he did not have a first-hand knowledge since they were composed in Sanskrit. Despite his superficial understanding of the ancient Sanskrit literature, the material he collected is quite impressive. In his writing we can sense his effort at a "true" representation without the theological speculation so dear to his learned opponent Roberto Nobili. Truth for Fernandes Trancoso meant collecting transliterated words and phrases as if they were entymological pieces, beautiful but with an inherent lack of meaning.

Heathenism itself, according to missionary opinion, lacked meaning—since it was devoid of Christian meaning—and was fuelled either by diabolical forces

or by mechanical, senseless repetition. Some more sophisticated Jesuit writers, such as Diogo Gonçalves, diagnosed the absence of free will (*livre alvedrio*) in heathenish rites and customs. Unable to fashion their own agency, the heathens were bound to stick to and repeat their rituals. Fenicio had a similar solution. Heathenism was for him a product of carnal people who possess no spirit.⁵¹ Hence the metaphor of a diabolic device (*ingénio tão diabolico*) or a Brahmanical machine, a kind of *perpetuum mobile* that keeps people in “darkness”.⁵²

Even if the nature of Indian gentility was still hotly debated among the Jesuits themselves, especially the theological and ontological fine points, they all worked within the same hermeneutic paradigm. The goal was to distinguish the diabolical from the religious, the superstitious from the social. One of the biggest questions was whether caste was a religious/superstitious or social/civil phenomenon. If it was social, as Nobili claimed, it could be permitted to the Indian converts together with all the life-cycle ceremonies that accompanied it. If it was superstitious, as Fernandes Trancoso claimed, it had to be abolished altogether. In this sense, the Brahman ceremonies and mode of behaviour presented in his treatise belonged to a world that had to disappear with the advent of true Christianity. However, the future decided otherwise.

Document 3. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, circa 1616

Source: Original manuscript of the treatise in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Goa 59, fols. 1r-142. Published in Wicki, ed., *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hinduísmo*, 1-8.

For our Father General

Since on these pages I wanted to give to Your Paternity some information about the manner of conduct of the gentiles in these regions, especially the *bramenes* [Brahmans] in whose power are their laws, their manner of conduct, customs, rites and all the sciences and laws that exist and are included in it, it appeared to me necessary to say in general in a few words what and which they are.

I say therefore that their laws are divided into four [parts]. Their names are *Iruçu*, *Eihiru*, *Xama*, *Adaru*:⁵³ each of which is divided into two parts, one purely spiritual or substantial (*sustansial*) while the other is called *carmam* [Karman], and it seems to be the laws in which are contained all the things that pertain to their rites and their mode of conduct. The law which is called *nhana* [*jñāna*] is followed by the *saniaxes* [*sannyāsi* or renouncers]. Those who become *saniaxes* neither perform sacrifices, nor learn, teach or do *equiam* [*ekkiyam*], and they spend their life in contemplation of how to attain *Parabrama* in order to unite themselves with Him and become the same thing as Him and enjoy His presence. The second part that they call *carmam* is divided into three laws, that is: *Eihiru*, *Iruçu*, *Xama*. In *Eihiruwedam*, they teach the manner in performing sacrifices that are infinite because for everything they have a special one. Their ceremonies [are] both general and particular. The one they call *Iruçu*, comprises in itself all the *mandirōis* [mantras] to be recited at each of the sacrifices and ceremonies. In the third are contained all the tunes of the *mandirōis* that have to be recited in different tunes according to each ceremony. This is the law of the highest esteem among them. They say that it came into being with the Brahmins. With the *raixos* [rajas] came into being the *Ehiru* and with *comutins* [*komatis*] came into being *Iruçu*.⁵⁴ The fourth law is called *Adaru*, the other name of which is *nhanam*. What it contains is of the highest authority and although they only have a part of [this law], nobody contradicts it in anything. It is the source of [knowledge of] the manner of making the *corumin* [*kudumi*],⁵⁵ of

tying the thread, and the *mandirōis* to be said at that time, as well as of what is to be done at marriages and the procedures of the *saniaxes*. These are more like witchcraft for killing, for doing vile things and for ordering demons. Since some of these things they consider supernatural and others as necessary for salvation, they call it a *spiritual* or substantial law, which is *nhanam*. They also teach the names of the fires in which their sacrifices are to be made. There are three [fires]: the fire *patião*, the fire *daquixana*, and the third *agavaniam*. Each of them has a name according to the *mandiram* with which they make them. They serve for different sacrifices with different *mandirōis*. This much is to be said about the laws.

The sciences that they most respect are six and they call them *xastras* [Shastras]. One is called *Xintaman* [Cintāmani], which means "the pearl of the arguments" founded in sophistry. The second is called *Vedanda* [Vedānta], which is the same as "the end of wisdom". They prove in it that there is only one God which is in all creatures, both in rational and irrational [beings] and without senses; and that it is the soul from which all the souls proceed. In order to unite with it [the Soul], they have to be born many times until they become *saniaxi* because only then can they understand who is Parabrama. If the individual succeeds in uniting with Him or, as others say, with His glorious body, he would serve Him with it [Shastra]. The other four *xastras* are named after their authors. In all of them they deal with sacrifices, principally with *equiam*: with whom it can be made and how and with what *mandirōis*, who should perform it, etc. Their [Shastra] names are *Battan*, *Parabacaram*, *Purabamincan*, *Ginemsemsiam*, and these are the names of those who wrote them. These are the laws and *xastras*. You will see here, you will find here, in this compendium the following:

How many are the stages [of life] to be found in this machine of Brahmanism (*maquina do bramanismo*) and what is contained in each of them; all the sacrifices to be done, beginning when the woman is pregnant, when she gives birth, when they name the child, when it is taken out of the house [for the first time], when it is given solid food, the *mandirōis* are to be recited for each of these occasions, the ceremonies for cutting *corumbi* with its sacrifices, those for tying the thread and for marriages, obligations of the *bramaxaris*, of the married men, of *vanaprasanten* and of *saniaxis*, how to become a *saniaxi*, what are the ceremonies to be performed and how many types of *saniaxis* exist in all and who was their founder, what is the meaning of their staff which they call *tandu*, their ablutions and ceremonies connected with food, their *langenes*, that is the signs they put on their head, what the Brahmans believe and profess regarding the creator of the universe, what is the relation with the creator, the sacrifices and ceremonies when they install a *lingam* to be there forever, the manner in which they perform *puxei* [puja] for it, the tools of a Brahman for the *puxei* in the *pagode* [temple], how many types of *puxei* there are, the ceremony and the sacrifice of the *teivasam*, how to do the solemn *equiam*, some differences within the sects of the *pandaras*, and the signs they use in order to be recognised as to which sect they belong. There may always be something more [to say], but everything presented here is taken from the original books and their laws.

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[Here] begins the summary of the ceremonies and the manner of behaving of the Brahmans of these parts of India according to their laws and their doctrines.

Among the things that I occupied myself with for the past twenty years while I resided in Madurai according to my vow of holy obedience, one of them was to find out about the manner of behaving of this gentility (*jentelidade*), especially the Brahmans, because all the other people are considered as incapable of whatever

merit or any other thing by which to obtain glory. This is what Juden [Cutan], an important wise man, says in his stories: a king toured his kingdom and encountered a man who had performed penitence for many years by having his head on the ground and his feet in the air. The king approached him and asked why he had been doing that penitence. And he responded that it was for his salvation and for achieving glory (*ir a gloria*). The king asked him to tell him what his caste was. Since he responded that he was not a Brahman, immediately he had his head cut off, saying that only Brahmans are allowed to achieve glory and no other person. In this manner, the Brahmans keep with them the things of the law and preserve them with a lot of integrity.

In order that Your Paternity can see what these absurdities and affronts are (*doerse dellas*), with divine favour I wrote them word for word in this notebook from their laws, their tales, and important wise men. And it is said in the fourth law that the life stages (*estado*) of the Brahmans are divided into four types of men, one is *bramaxari* [*brahmacharya* or unmarried student], or those who after receiving a thread learn the law; another is that of married men who are called *gragastar* [*grhastya*]; another is that of hermits whom they call *vanaprastam* [*vanaprastha* or the forest dweller] and yet another is that of *saniaxes* [*sannyasi*, or renouncer]. In these four life stages it is required that he be well born and that the [relevant] ceremonies are performed for him: when the woman is in the fourth and sixth month of pregnancy; when he is born; when they give him a name; when they give him solid food and when they perform the *curumbi* [*kutumi*] ceremony at the age of three. At the age of eight in the month of April they perform the ceremony of tying the thread.

He has to begin learning the law in August during the reign of the star which they call *Apittam* [*avittam*], and during the time that he learns the law he has to live from alms and has to do all the things that the *bramaxares* do. He will learn one or two or three laws, and when he will have learnt all there is to learn, with the permission of the *curu* [*guru*] he will get married with a high-born Brahman woman and he will perform *equiam* [*ekkiyam*], and then everyday he will perform *omam* [*homa*] and all the other ceremonies. And if he does not do it that way he will acquire many sins and harms and in the month of April he will have to perform a sacrifice, which they call *pasuvadantlio* [*pasubadha*]. If he does not do it, the fire will be offended.

The third stage among the Brahmans is *vanaprastan* and these are some people who live in the desert and they also call them *iruxis* [*rishis*], who are men taken to be of great perfection. Some of them write about the laws of the Brahmans just like the Fathers of the Church do among us, and their glosses have great authority. They are also heads of the lineages as we here [in Europe] call the patriarchs. These leave their hair, their beards and the nails on the hands grow and they perform penitence in the desert. I saw one in Madurai who had his beard tied, and in front of me unfastened it and it dragged on the ground [with the length] of four fingers, and he was not a short man. The nails of another one were so long that his thumbnail turned around his arm. For that reason, he did not open his hand. Another nail, that of his ring finger, had also almost encircled his arm. And I saw another whose hair hung to the ground, and if I remember well, he was not able to close his hands because of his huge nails. They may be dressed in white cloth or in *cavi* [ochre color] and they live in the desert and spend their time in penitence and they eat only once a day. The *saniaxes* are those who live in the desert as I said.

And since, with the help of God, the way in which one becomes a *saniax*, his way of life and all that he respects and is obliged to do in his diabolical religion, and how many types of *saniax* there exist, all clearly taken from ancient books and laws, are to be discussed, and translated with some help from Malabar into Portuguese, I will

not go into details here (*nem me [a]largo en tratar o que tenho dito*). And since with God's help, as I said before, I decided to write extensively on each thing separately, I am not going into details [here]. I will begin with the ceremony that is performed at four or six months after the conception of the child. They call it *simandão* [simanta].

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Notes

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All translations from Portuguese and Tamil are by the author.

- 1 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 1:285-86.
- 2 Barros, *Gramatica da Lingua Portuguesa*, 405.
- 3 Xavier, *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii*, 1:94.
- 4 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 3:336.
- 5 Subrahmanyam, "Slaves and Tyrants", 201-53; and Lopes, *A Expansão da língua portuguesa no Oriente*, 63.
- 6 The *Arte Malauar* remains in manuscript in the Reservados section, MS No. 3141, Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon.
- 7 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 2:305.
- 8 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 5:688.
- 9 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 7:442.
- 10 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 3:598.
- 11 As to who cut the "Malabar" typeset and where the books were printed, see James, *Tamil Lexicography*. See also Schurhammer, "The First Printing in Indic Characters"; Thani Nayagam, "The First Book Printed in Tamil"; Thani Nayagam, "Tamil Manuscripts in European", 219-28.
- 12 Schurhammer, "The First Printing in Indic Characters", 321.
- 13 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 4:27-28.
- 14 The first stone church was built on the island of Mannar in 1571. Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, 166.
- 15 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 5:14-21.
- 16 Henriques, *Doctrina Christam, or kiricittiyāni varakkam*, 6.
- 17 J.L. Austin's "performatives" belong to this category of linguistic acts; Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*.
- 18 The reference to spiritual "fruit" (i.e. conversion) is a standard topos in Jesuit letters.
- 19 *Canarim* (plural: *canarins*) is used here alternately as Konkani language and as a person whose mother tongue it is. Konkani is spoken primarily in and around Goa.
- 20 The Jesuit sources do not mention the name of the author of this first Konkani grammar. A Jesuit, Lourenço Peres, mentioned in a letter written in 1563 that a Goan man who "graduated" from the Jesuit college in Goa excelled in preaching in Konkani. He also taught Konkani and wrote a grammar. Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, 7:111. The first known grammar of Konkani, written by an English Jesuit, Thomas Stephens (1549-1619), had been published posthumously in the Jesuit college of Rachol in 1640.
- 21 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 3:485.
- 22 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 4:392-396.
- 23 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 7:178.
- 24 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 8:510.
- 25 Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals*.
- 26 "Interstitionality" is a concept borrowed from Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.
- 27 See my unpublished conference paper on António Gomes, "Ferveurs et tropiques: une carrière missionnaire en Inde, António Gomes (1548-1554)", Conférence internationale, Histoire culturelle et histoire sociale: les missions religieuses dans le monde ibérique, EHESS/Ecole française de Rome, Paris, 26 May 2000.
- 28 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 4:432.
- 29 Except for the Syrian Christians; Melo, *The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy in India*, 139.
- 30 Pedro Luis Bramane to Diogo Lainez, Goa, Nov. 1559, ARSI, Goa 10 11, fol. 418r.
- 31 Melo, *The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy*, 139.
- 32 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 13:784.
- 33 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 12:173.
- 34 Pero Luis to Marcurian, Kollam, 6 Jan. 1580,

- ARSI, Goa 13 I, fols. 1r -2v.
- 35 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 11:794.
- 36 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 15:219.
- 37 Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 15:219.
- 38 He supervised the printing of the Tamil translation of the *Doctrina Christam* written by Marco Jorge and translated by Henrique Henriques as *kiricittiyāni vaṅakkam*.
- 39 Winter here means the monsoon or rainy season.
- 40 *Compline* (*Completas* in Portuguese and *Completorium* in Latin) is the last of the seven canonical hours before retiring for the night.
- 41 Here the Malabar language stands for Malayalam, Pero Luís's native tongue. On other occasions, the Malabar language stands for Tamil.
- 42 What kind of fruit the fig is in this context is uncertain. It is possible that the author means bananas, which are usually offered and were called in Portuguese "Indian figs" (*figos da India*).
- 43 To establish a *fabrica* means here to take over the temporal administration of the church.
- 44 Rubiés, "The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism", 228; and Couto, *Da Asia*, dec. 5, pt. 2, pp. 1-48.
- 45 Charpentier, *The Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais*; Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also of the Isle of Ceylon*; Faria y Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*.
- 46 The integral text was published in Rubiés, "The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism", 228; Couto, *Da Asia*, dec. 5, pt. 2, pp. 1-48.
- 47 Wicki, ed., *Diogo Gonçalves S.I. Historia do Malavar*, 83.
- 48 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, Goa, 5 1, fr. 29r-31v.
- 49 S. Rajamanickam, a Jesuit biographer and apologist of Roberto Nobili, has come to the conclusion that this treatise was written not by Fernandes Trancoso but by an Indian convert in Madurai. It is obvious that this work is "heterological" and based on information provided by local informants, but the final touches in terms of the selection of the material and rhetorical equipment is most certainly the work of Fernandes Trancoso. See Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*.
- 50 Wicki, ed., *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hiduismo*, 219.
- 51 Fenicio, *The Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais*, 67.
- 52 Fenicio, *The Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais*, 1.
- 53 Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso mentions here the four Vedas: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda.
- 54 The division of the society into four varnas (colours) is evoked here. Brahmans, Ksatriyas (rajas), Vayshas (komatis are merchants). The fourth group (Shudras) is missing from his description.
- 55 Kudumi is a tuft of hair left on the shaved head of a Brahman.