

PILGRIMAGES TO THE TOMB OF GOENCHO SAIB
OR ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

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DEFINITIONS OF PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is an universal and widespread practice across cultures and time. Pilgrimage locations are sites of the numinous, where out-of-ordinary events happened or are said to have happened. They are special places with special objects, demarcated by the inspiring presence of the sacred. The tomb of Francis Xavier is just such a site and, as is common with all such locations, its special meanings have been constructed and reconstructed by all of those who visit there, pilgrims and tourists alike.

The pursuit of redemption, divine aid, thanksgiving or penance, or the demonstration of devotion have all been purposes associated with pilgrimage. Etymologically, the word «pilgrimage» derives from the Latin *peregrinus* meaning «going abroad» (*peregre*) and through the field (*per* and *ager*). Most definitions of pilgrimage include the elements of «a journey to a shrine or sacred place» and «a long journey or search or exalted purpose or moral significance». However, ultimately, pilgrimage is about being transformed by a personal inner experience and returning home possessed of a new self. Pilgrimage is thus above all about a spiritual journey to mentally «composed»

¹ The authors are thankful to John Wilks for his suggestions and his linguistic corrections.

places as suggested by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Accordingly, we will deal with the tomb of Francis Xavier in Goa as a pilgrimage site and the ways in which it has been constructed and reconstructed in history by both groups and individuals going purposely to render *in loco* homage to St. Francis Xavier (known in Goa as Goencho Saib or Goencho Pai [The Lord of Goa or the Father of Goa] but also by the vast majority of devotees who merely make the journey in spirit. Thus the concept of pilgrimage as an internal spiritual journey is more useful for the purpose of this discussion.

REASONS UNDERLYING THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE TOMB OF GOENCHO SAIB (INCORRUPTION OF THE BODY, THAUMATURGIC POWERS, RELICS, A SAINT FOR ALL RELIGIONS)

Goa still is the most sacred of Catholic sites in Asia by reason of its being the repository of the sacred remains of Francis Xavier, «the Apostle of the Orient». Although Goencho Saib did not die in Goa but on the Island of Sanchuan (Macao), his body was returned there in 1554, after which «miracles» were said to have taken place, resulting in large numbers of pilgrims visiting the relics. These were initially kept in the no longer extant Church of the Jesuit College of S. Paulo Velho and since 1624 in the Bom Jesus.

Several reasons determined the choice of Goa as the burial-site of the saint. Firstly, Goa was the headquarters of the *Padroado Português do Oriente*, where Francis Xavier began his mission in the East. Moreover, the dispatch of Francis Xavier and his first companions to Goa marked the beginning of Jesuit missionary vocation overseas. Though there is in fact no historical evidence of its authenticity, a rumour that circulated in Goa in the aftermath of death of Xavier, suggested that he himself had expressed a desire to be interred in Goa².

A principal draw for pilgrims to the tomb of Goencho Saib was from the beginning undoubtedly the thaumaturgic power that devotees and ecclesiastic authorities alike attributed to it. The establishment of the saints' relics in Goa was for the faithful a final testament of a sanctity already widely associated with the missionary in his own lifetime. Official reports affirm that soon after the arrival of the relics in Goa, such rituals as venerating the tomb, touching of the body or

² Solimeo, 1995, p. 3.

relics were answered by miracles —in particular healing, but also conversions expressed in baptisms.

Fernão Mendes Pinto himself is said to have undergone a «genuine conversion» at the sight of Xavier's corpse being received in Goa. He then entered the Society of Jesus after donating the fortune he acquired as a successful merchant in Japan to the Order's missionary efforts³. At the end of the 19th century, Isabel Burton, wife of the celebrated explorer Richard Burton (also known as Captain Burton), visited Goa. One main reason behind was to petition the saint for the conversion of her husband⁴.

The thaumaturgic powers of the tomb of Goencho Saib were also said to be manifest during various shipwrecks and such military campaigns as the famous victory over the Marathas in 1683. More precisely, the improbable victory of the Portuguese troops against the Marathas was attributed to the intercession of Francis Xavier; the Governor D. Francisco de Távora apparently placed his staff at the side of the saint praying for his aid in defending Goa. This incident gave rise to the custom that each departing viceroy or governor of Goa had to deposit his ruling baton in the saint's tomb before the new viceroy or governor could receive it. From the end of the 18th century (the need to preserve the body dictated opening of the tomb on rare occasions only) until Manuel António Vassalo e Silva became the last Portuguese governor in 1958, the baton was not placed in the tomb but in the hands of an image of St. Francis Xavier on the altar honouring the same saint.

The beatification process (Francis Xavier was declared blessed in 1619) speaks of the beauty of his body, his soft and perpetual odor; the incorruption of his flesh, despite having been treated with lime to accelerate the process when the body was interred for the first time in Sanchuan, and his bleeding in several occasions. Indeed, the resistance of the body and of some relics (for instance, in 1620, the Jesuit Provincial of Goa joyfully reported to headquarters in Rome that the garments kept in a silver shrine presently at the Museum of Christian art in Old Goa were still so fresh and complete that they were used in ceremonies in honour of the saint), and its resistance to decay observed over the first two centuries after his death, together with its

³ Gupta, 2004, p. 110.

⁴ Burton, 1879, p. 87.

miracle-working power, satisfied two of the conditions of proof most relevant to the early modern conception of sainthood⁵.

In the early years, skin and vestments pieces of Francis Xavier would be bestowed as gifts upon important political and ecclesiastic dignitaries. In 1949 the right forearm with which the saint used to perform conversions and since 1619 kept in Rome was taken on a worldwide pilgrimage commemorating the 400th anniversary of the saint's arrival in Japan. Indeed, the official division, distribution and display of bodily relics clearly served to create and sustain the cult of his body. The logic was metonymic: paying reverence to parts of a sacred body or/and objects that may have been in contact with it, was held to be equivalent to paying reverence to the whole figure. Of course, ideally the devotee was encouraged to pay reverence to a body *in loco*. However, since in the case of Early Modern Goa direct devotion was impracticable for almost all non-local believers, we argue that a spiritual journey could often substitute for a physical pilgrimage.

Even when it was actually possible to touch the body directly, the concept of a personal relic was fundamental in the establishment of the ritual of pilgrimage. From 1554 when Isabel de Carom bit off the right big toe, many people, both rich and poor, European and non-European, struggled to obtain a relic connected to Francis Xavier. This could be some body part or contact relic (some object used by Francis Xavier or just touched by the corpse), a letter written or signed by him or fragments of previous tombs⁶.

In particular, the habit developed amongst devotees of touching the tomb and, if possible, the body with objects that turned thereby into especially sacred contact relics connected to Francis Xavier. In 1755, during the opening of the coffin, Father Francisco Rodrigues touched the body of the saint with many rosaries, scapularies and his sword⁷. In 1859–1860, the most popular relics that were distributed among pilgrims to the public exhibition of St. Francis Xavier body were engravings representing the saint living and in death and ceremonies of the saint in silk, cotton or linen. Thousands of such artifacts

⁵ Osswald, 2008, p. 224.

⁶ For instance, in 1744, on occasion of the request of a new coffin, many small crosses were made of the sacred wood of the old coffin and distributed among the devotees (Fernandes, 2004, p. 40).

⁷ Fernandes, 2004, p. 40.

(obviously related to the shrinking of the actual body) all of them documented with appropriate title deserve a special mention in this regard. In the exhibition of 1890, during which the head and feet were uncovered and each pilgrim was able to kiss the feet, many devotees brought with them personal objects with which priests would touch the body as if transforming them into relics. In the exhibition lists of «objects touched» were articles from France and England sent by devotees not able to make the journey themselves. In addition to the traditional rosaries, jewels, and bits of cloth, there were prints made using modern techniques such as woodcutting and chromolithography and photos (the first photo of the body in his tomb was taken during the public exhibition of December 1879–January 1880). The prints reproduced the object of veneration — images of the saint in life as well as of the uncorrupted body or of the tomb. After direct touching of the body was made impossible after 1952, mementoes and symbols of private devotion to the saint took the form of post cards and «true replicas of the tomb» fashioned in coloured plastic blessed by the Patriarch: thus began the religious souvenir properly so-called⁸.

In 1984, during the liturgical convention that took place between the 5th and the 9th December, masses were celebrated according to various rites: Roman, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara (Roman rites adapted to India) were celebrated in Old Goa⁹. Archbishop Patriarch Raul Nicolau Gonsalves defined the exhibition of 1994 as an ecumenical happening since «even Non-Christmas in large numbers are eager to have a darshan (vision of the vision of and perception by the deity) of the Saint by coming closer to the relics of his body and to come to him with confidence». He then blessed all sisters and brothers —no matter what faith or community they belonged to— but who shared a true devotion to Goencho Saib¹⁰. Both the celebration of masses in different liturgical rites that took place in 1984 and the celebration of 1994 obviously are but two examples of the ecumenical value attributed to the Goencho Saib within and beyond Goa.

⁸ Vicente, 2006, pp. 145–146.

⁹ Fernandes, 1994, p. 67.

¹⁰ Zupanov, 2005, p. 85.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS FOR PILGRIMAGES

The celebration of commemorative events is of course fundamental in raising the profile of sacred shrines as centres of pilgrim interest. In the case of Francis Xavier, the reception of the body in 1554, the ceremonies of beatification (1619) and canonization (1624) as well as the various public openings of the shrine did much to augment the standing of Goa as a pre-eminent centre of devotion and pilgrimage.

According to the hagiography of the saint, many of the miracles occur as a result of similar devotional practices. These include touching the body (the ritual included the kissing of the saint's feet, «sanctified» by the many miles they covered during his twelve years in the Orient), venerating objects that had been in contact with the body, embracing his tomb and requesting intercession at the tomb. The feast-day pilgrimage on the 3d December includes a visit to the still extant chapel in the grounds of the church of *S. Paulo Velho*. This small chapel attracts great popular devotion. Pilgrims would go there in order to pray to St. Francis Xavier, since —according to an oral tradition— it was the custom of the saint to pray and meditate in this hermitage. Moreover, according to another widespread tradition, the apostle had planted a *jacca* fruit tree and had drunk water from a fountain near the same chapel. After paying due reverence to the tomb, therefore, pilgrims would pray in the chapel above. Following a belief amongst many faithful that both the tree and the fountain had medical properties, some would take slices/pieces from the tree whereas others would drink water from the fountain or bottle it to take home¹¹. In the 1950s, the ritual was extended to include the visit to the church on the Holy Mountain, where Xavier had prayed during his stays in Goa¹².

Initially, the public exhibition of the uncorrupted body was an almost annual occurrence taking place around the feast —day on the 3rd December. Moreover, the advent of illustrious personalities (archbishops, governors, missionaries) was frequently made the occasion of opening up the shrine. In 1775, the tomb was closed by royal command because of the bad state of the body. The agenda of these public openings was not necessarily determined by events in the life of St. Francis Xavier. That was the case of the exhibition of 1910

¹¹ Souza, 2004, p. 28.

¹² Gomes, 1952, p. 282.

that commemorated the anniversary of the second and definitive conquest of Goa by the Portuguese army under the command of Vasco da Gama. The exhibition of 1974 was initiated by the Archbishop of Goa in order to enable the renewal of the local church.¹³ This exhibition marked the beginning of a custom of holding public exhibitions of the body every ten years. The next will thus take place in 2014. Most curious was the exhibition of 1782, always said to have been held to end the rumour that the Jesuits had removed the body of Xavier when the order was suppressed by the Marquês de Pombal. On a more pedestrian level, I argue that the reinforcement of religious policy by secular power obeyed the logic of the Portuguese Patronage of the Orient as it assumed responsibility for the missionary endeavour overseas. Moreover, at the end of the 19th century, in a period when Portuguese Goa was clearly in decline, the holding of public exhibitions of the body of St. Francis Xavier alongside industrial exhibitions was intended to establish a link between the past glories of Goa and its intended future renaissance.

PILGRIMS

Various distinguished Jesuits rank among the more well-known pilgrims to the Xavier tomb. Some of these were themselves missionaries to the Orient. The present silver shrine dating from 1636–1637 was actually a gift of Marcello Mastrilli, a Neapolitan Jesuit and future martyr of Japan. When Mastrilli journeyed to Goa in order to give thanks for a cure he attributed to the intercession of St. Francis Xavier, he considered that the existing tomb was unworthy of the treasure it contained. He therefore decided to sponsor a new tomb¹⁴. Georg Schurhammer, the greatest hagiographer of Francis Xavier, decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the study of the saint after being miraculously healed from a nervous disorder at the tomb during the public exhibition of 1910.

Moreover, ecclesiastics with leading roles in local hierarchy and political authorities also shared a special devotion to the «Goan saint». In 1654, Francesco Spínola was consecrated bishop of Goa and appointed Apostolic Vicar of the East. The coffin was opened secretly in the middle of the night, so that he could contemplate and kiss the

¹³ Rego, 2006, p. 554.

¹⁴ Osswald, 2008, p. 227.

body in private. In 1678, the coffin was opened on the order of Governor António Pais de Sande. Upon their arrival In February 1744, both the new viceroy D. Pedro Miguel de Almeyda e Portugal and the new Archbishop D. Fr. Lourenço de S. Maria kissed the body and placed their heads under the feet of the saint at the request of the King of Portugal. This important event further induced the Provincial of Goa to order a new coffin and that a new biretta (square cap worn by priests) be put on the head of the saint. The coffin was again opened in March 1751, so that the departing governor of India D. Luiz Caetano de Almeida as well the new viceroy Marquis of Távora and his wife Marques D. Leonor and Archbishop D. Antonio Taveira de Neiva Brum de Silveira had the opportunity to kiss the body of the saint.

Understandably, Catholic prelates in India and in the Orient play an important role during such special occasions. In 1952, during the celebration of the fifth centenary of Xavier's death, the body was carried by the Bishop of Karachi, the Archbishop of Delhi, the Archbishop of Bombay and the Bishop of Mysore¹⁵. In 2011, the solemn mass on Xaviers's feastday was celebrated by the Nuncius Apostolicus in India and co-celebrated by such important dignitaries in the Orient as the Archbishop of Singapore.

Portuguese and Spanish kings and queens ranked among the devotees of Francis Xavier and of his tomb, thereby contributing greatly to the enrichment of the shrine. So, for example, the tomb was opened in 1774 to permit the dressing of body in rich vestments sent by Queen Maria Sofia of Portugal, in compliance with the expressed will of her deceased predecessor D. Maria Francisca Isabel de Sabóia. Previous to this, the Conde de Linhares had taken the bloodied towel that had been used during the removal of the saint's right arm in 1614 in order to present it to Philipp IV.

The tomb of St. Francis Xavier seems also to have been the object of special devotion in Italy. One one occasion, a silver image was placed on St. Francis Xavier altar. It bore the following inscription:

Sanctissimo Indiarum Apostolo
Francisco de Sopranis Patritia Genuensis
Urbani Duratii olim uxor

¹⁵ Fernandes, 2004, pp. 37-41 and p. 61.

Nunc Maria Francisca Xavieria
 In celeberrimo Incarnationis Monasterio
 Christi Sponsa
 Peregrino Caelesti
 Peregrini amoris votum et monumentum
 P. P. Anno Dni 1670¹⁶.

In 1698, the upper part of the tomb in *pietra dura* was donated by Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in token of his gratitude for the gift of the pillow that had supported the head of the saint¹⁷. But the success of the cult of the tomb also significantly depended on the affection paid by common people. The Jesuit chronicler João de Lucena wrote in the 17th century that the devotion of the common people was so great that they entered the water just to touch the ship; and the Jesuits had to open the coffin three times in the course of a morning before the people could be persuaded to leave the church of Saint Paul where the body was at first laid¹⁸.

Previously, Manuel Teixeira, the first biographer of St. Francis Xavier, wrote of multitudes of spectators on walls, at doors and windows watching the procession of the saint's body when it first arrived in Goa in 1554¹⁹. The pressure of the crowd was such that the coffin was almost forced to turn back and, according to Fernão Mendes Pinto, the sturdy grilles of the chapel broke because of the strain of the masses converging on the body²⁰. Valignano informs us that many of the people were anxious for him to give them relics²¹. Similarly, Provincial Melchior Nunes Barreto noticed on the same occasion an enthusiasm he had never seen before. People wept, beat their breasts, prayed God to pardon their sins, made desperate efforts to say their rosaries and to touch the body with personal belongings. It seemed they could never have enough of kissing his feet, and if he, Barreto, had not been present to prevent it, he firmly believed that everyone would have taken away a piece of the body as a relic²².

¹⁶ Melo, 1952, p. 253.

¹⁷ Osswald, 2008, p. 227.

¹⁸ Lucena, *História da Vida do Padre Francisco Xavier*, vol. 4, p. 203.

¹⁹ Teixeira, *Vida del Bienaventurado Padre Francisco Javier...*, p. 245.

²⁰ Mendes Pinto, 1995, vol. 2, p. 335.

²¹ Valignano, *Vita S. Francisci Xaverii*, pp. 197-199.

²² Gupta, 2004, p. 118.

The official reports on these public occasions thus speak of an immense mass of people invading the church, the cloisters and the hall; of people competing to see who could first pay reverence to the tomb. Conduct such as this was sometimes considered inappropriate or excessive by the authorities. Indeed, the crowds were often so large that the authorities were compelled to modify the program of celebrations. In fact, the duration of the public exhibitions was customarily extended up to one more week on all feast-days. Legislation was later introduced clearly intended to ensure that these occasions took place in an ordered manner. Accordingly, for instance, the program of 1952 required that all groups of pilgrims would meet in the Bom Jesus from 6 o'clock in the morning. Moreover pilgrims should dress in the uniform of their parish. Groups would follow an ordered program consisting in venerating the Sacred Sacrament, hearing an exhortation made by a priest, praying for the intentions of the Holy Father and the Patriarch of the Indies before kissing the sacred remains of Francis Xavier²³. Also in the 1950s, according to the *anuários* of the Bom Jesus, the pilgrimages were mainly made up of local people drawn from the various Goan parishes or occupational groups (e.g. fishermen). Moreover, local hierarchies encouraged the custom that recently married couples, Goans coming back from abroad or leaving Goa, children who had just received the First Communion, scholars concluding their studies were able to request a special blessing at the tomb of St. Francis Xavier.

The Goan emigrants form another important group of pilgrims. Thus, they deserved a special form of attention on the part of authorities. On the 13th May (the day of the Fatima visions) 1958, a special pilgrimage made up of Goan emigrants took place under the direction of the Patriarch of the Indies and the Portuguese Governor. A prayer that had been purposely composed for them plus an indulgence was distributed among them on the same occasion²⁴.

In Goa as everywhere else in Catholic world, the formation of brotherhoods is one important aspect of lay devotion. The Brotherhood of St. Francis Xavier was created in the 1958 and attached to the Bom Jesus. According to their statutes, they should practice and spread a sincere devotion to the saint apostle of the Orient. They

²³ Costa, 1954, pp. 74-75.

²⁴ The Chronicler of the Sanctuary, 1958, pp. 86-87.

should specifically help the cult and the solemnities of the sanctuary, the Basilica of the Bom Jesus. Their most solemn collective procedure should be the incorporation of the whole brotherhood with their uniforms and flag in the two annual processions to St. Francis Xavier taking respectively place on the 12th March (The Novena of the Grace) and on the 3rd December²⁵.

From the earliest years, foreign pilgrims (sometimes predominantly tourists) in Goa formed another important group of pilgrims. Della Valle speaks of the interest of European observers in the ceremonies of 1624. Writing of her visit to the tomb, Elizabeth Burton indirectly alludes to this in claiming not merely to be a traveller like all the others, with a mere touristic or museological interest. Rather, she is also a devotee, a catholic, in a trip that is for her also a pilgrimage. This curious remark clearly underlines the growing affinities between religious pilgrimage and secular tourism and dates from a period in which Goa was beginning to feel the side effects of an increase in tourism to British India. Goa's traditional role as a centre of pilgrimage and its 19th century development as a favoured tourist destination have since then become culturally intertwined and often inseparable.

The shrine of St. Francis Xavier is located in an area that is largely non-Christian in population. The question arises as to how this shrine to a Catholic saint could have drawn the widespread devotion of non-Christians. The answer seems to lie in the fact that, from the beginning, the official public ceremonies had attracted an interest that was religiously diverse. According to Fernão Mendes Pinto, «the native heathens and Moors reportedly stuck their fingers in their mouth to show how deeply amazed they were, as was their custom»²⁶. Sebastião Barradas, reporting the canonization of 1624, wrote that the idolaters and Moors also seem to have taken pleasure in observing the ceremonies from windows that did not open fully²⁷. In 1952, the presence of pilgrims from other Indian regions was noticeable and many were active collaborators in the festivities. For instance, on 10th December a student from a college in Tuticorin (Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu) opened the procession with a lavish

²⁵ Alvernaz, 1958, p. 89.

²⁶ Mendes Pinto, 1995, vol. II, p. 335.

²⁷ Gupta, 2004, p. 190.

baton. Other students and faithful from the bishopric sang the litanies in the Tamil language, whilst the director of the same educational institution gave his sermon in English during the mass. In the afternoon the sermon was given in Tamil by one of the missionaries from Cranganor. The vernacular rite produced a pleasant sensation among the public due to the novelty of the chant, according to the official publication of the event²⁸.

CONCLUSIONS

Goa remains the most sacred Catholic spot throughout the Orient. This is clearly due to the fact that the bodily remains of Goencho Saib were transported from Sanchuan, then to Malacca and finally to Goa in 1554. Of course, the specific motives underlying the pilgrimage, whether *strictum* or *latum sensum*, varied widely between 1554 and 2012. Whereas the apparently miraculous preservation of the saint's body, its thaumaturgic powers and the general desire for relics clearly ranked amongst the most compelling motives for many of the earlier pilgrims, today many who journey to visit the tomb do so in order to mark their own sense of an urgent contemporary need for inter-religious and inter-confessional tolerance and dialogue. In addition to the reception of the body in 1554, the ceremonies of his beatification (1619), canonization (1624) and the public openings of the shrine did much to augment the devotion to Goencho Saib. The spectrum of devotees to the cult of this saint is vast. It includes distinguished Jesuits, some of them missionaries to the Orient, kings, queens and members of the Portuguese and Spanish royal houses, ecclesiastics with leading roles and political authorities in Goa, and Goan immigrants. Special mention must be however made to non-Christians as observed by Fernão Mendes Pinto as early as 1554.

²⁸ Fernandes, 2004, p. 30.



Tomb of St. Francis Xavier in the Basilica of the Bom Jesus (Goa)

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