

REMAINS OF DARK DAYS

The Architectural Heritage of
Oratorian Missionary Churches in Sri Lanka

Sagara Jayasinghe

Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos
Hélder Carita

EBOOK

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PREFACE

THE ORATORIAN IN CEYLON

The project “Oratorians in Ceylon: Survey of the Oratorian churches of Portuguese influence in Sri Lanka”, promoted by the ARTIS - Institute of Art History / School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, stands out for its understanding of cultural heritage as a complex, dynamic and multifarious reality, especially meaningful for the comprehension of intercultural relations, their diverging and complementary aspects and the evolution of human societies.

The subject of such a relevant project, sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, cannot be grasped without mentioning the figure of Fr. Joseph Vaz (1651–1711) and his decisive influence, in the late 17th century and early 18th century, on the Catholic activities developed in Ceylon after the loss of the main Portuguese territories to the Dutch, in 1658. The occupation of the island of Ceylon did not erase the Portuguese influence felt for more than a century, and the figure of the Brahman Joseph Vaz has its origin in the Congregation of the Oratory of Goa.

The impact of a congregation open to life and creativity such as the one founded by St. Philip Neri is palpable. As for Fr. Joseph Vaz, his reputation was greatly enhanced by the chronicle “Chronology of the Congregation of the Oratory of Goa”, by Sebastião

do Rego, member of the Congregation of the Oratory, published in 1746. The Goan Oratorians, fluent in Portuguese and the native languages, travelled across the regions of Bardez and Salcette, but their main operating area was Ceylon, at the time already under Dutch domination.

Fr. Joseph Vaz was the main responsible for the renewal of missionary activities in the island of Ceylon. He was regarded by his companions as an example of selflessness, zeal and perseverance in the dissemination of the Gospel in the East. Through the study of cultural heritage in its various facets, it is possible to retrace the evolution of artistic practices and community life – which is of the utmost interest for the comprehension of the dialogue between cultures and the vitality of cultural heritage and its different manifestations. Understanding this heritage, with its similarities and differences, amounts to understanding ourselves and others, in view of a culture of peace and respect for the universal dimension of human dignity. The richness of the present publication can act as an encouragement and a demonstration of the preservation of these principles.

GUILHERME D'OLIVEIRA MARTINS



This book was published as part of the research project “Oratorians in Ceylon: Survey of Oratorian Churches with Portuguese Influence in Sri Lanka”, funded by the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** through the grant number FCG-224590. The research team is composed by Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos (University of Lisbon), Sagara Jayasinghe (University of Moratuwa), Hélder Carita (New University of Lisbon), Pedro Guedes (University of Queensland), José Manuel Fernandes (University of Lisbon), Vishvesh Kandolkar (Goa University), Vítor Serrão (University of Lisbon), Zoltán Biedermann (University College London) and José Meco (National Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon).



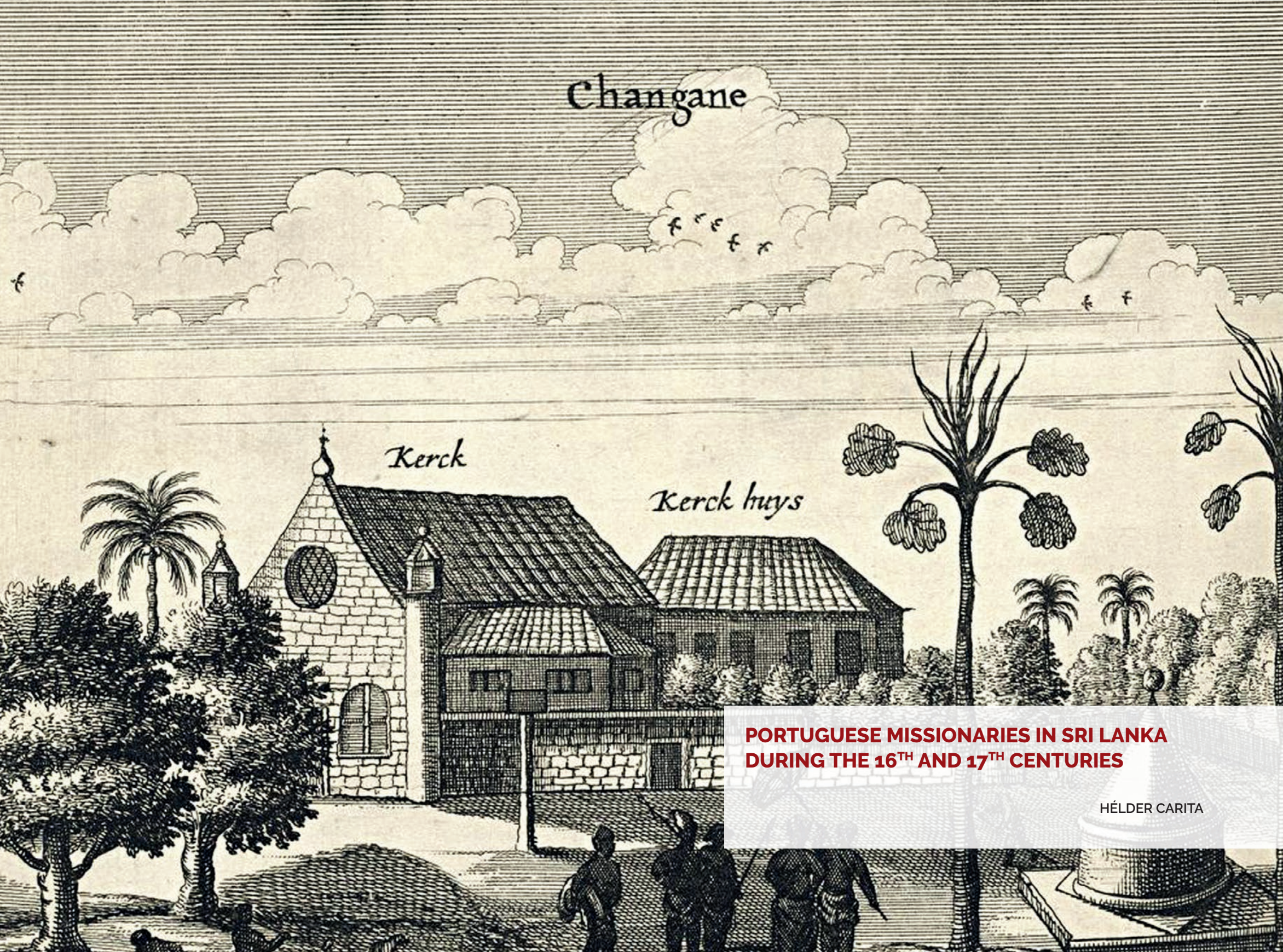
Changane

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**PORTUGUESE MISSIONARIES IN SRI LANKA
DURING THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES**

HÉLDER CARITA





Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries¹, the island of Sri Lanka (known as Ceilão by the Portuguese and Ceylon by the British) was witness to the conversion to Catholicism of a large group of communities located mainly along the seacoast, where the Portuguese established their commercial networks. This vast conversion determined the construction of a network of churches that spread from the seacoast to the interior of the island of Mannar and the Kingdom of Jaffna, in the northwest of Sri Lanka. The earliest efforts to proselytise the island's inhabitants began in 1543, when the Franciscans settled in the Kingdom of Kotte, after King Bhuvanekabahu (who reigned between 1521 and 1551) sent an embassy to Lisbon². During the 1540s, the missionaries also settled in the Kingdom of Kandy, where they were offered some land in the capital by the local ruler, to build a church dedicated to Our Lady of Conception³.

Initially, the construction of churches was slow-paced, as confirmed in a letter from Fr. João Noé to King John III of Portugal. This letter mentions the construction of only five Catholic churches on the island prior to 1552: "(...) these are the places where our friars

¹ The first part of the historical background is based on a previous text: CARITA, Hélder. "Portuguese-influenced religious architecture in Ceylon: Creation, types and continuity". In: FLORES, Jorge (ed.). *Re-Exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007, pp. 261-278.

² For a more detailed account of the early stages of Portuguese missionary work in Ceylon, see: LOPES, Fernando Félix. "A evangelização de Ceilão desde 1552 a 1602". In: *Studia*, 1967, nos. 20-22, pp. 7-73; BOURDON, León. *Les débuts de l'évangélisation de Ceylan vers le milieu du XVI^e siècle: D'après des documents récemment publiés*. Lisbon: Institut Français au Portugal, 1936.

³ TRINDADE, Paulo da. *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1962, vol. 3, p. 64. The church was destroyed at the end of the 16th century, during the invasion of Kandy by the Kingdom of Sitawaka.



Image 01 – Island of Sri Lanka, depicted by an anonymous Portuguese cartographer, probably based on a drawing of c.1635 by Pedro Barreto de Resende (source: *Lyvro de plantaforma das fortalezas da India*, codex from the Library of the Fortress of São Julião da Barra, published as a facsimile).

live: a monastery in Colombo where the Guardian stays; a church at Negombo; another at Berberym [Beruwala]; another at Galle, which is the chief sea port; and another at Lyção [Weligama]. At each of these there is a friar to baptize and teach those who join the faith (...)”⁴.

Around 1535–37, the Portuguese missionary movement underwent a new development: the Parava leaders (*pattankattis*) agreed to the conversion of all their people to Catholicism, in return for Por-

⁴ NOÉ, João. [Letter from Cochin, 28 January 1552]. In: REGO, António da Silva. *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente – Índia*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1993, vol. 5, p. 100. English translation: PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka – The Portuguese Period, 1505–1565*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1989, vol. 1, p. 311.

tuguese protection. The members of this large community were distributed along the south coast of India and the northwestern coast of the island of Sri Lanka, working as pearl fishermen – a key activity for the region’s economy⁵. Joined by St. Francis Xavier himself, the Jesuits began a dynamic religious campaign throughout the Pearl Fishery Coast, building a large group of churches not only on the Indian coast, but also in the Gulf of Mannar. Yet Sankili I – the Hindu king of Jaffna, also known as Segarasasekaram – opposed this campaign and massacred in 1544 the new Catholic converts of the island of Mannar, along with Fr. António Sardinha, the first Jesuit martyr in the region. This can help explain why the viceroy Constantino de Bragança invaded the Kingdom of Jaffna in 1560 and why Cankili was subsequently deposed. As a consequence, the island of Mannar came definitively under the sway of the *Estado da Índia*. A fortress was built on the island and became the residence of the captain of the Fishery Coast. The construction of the Jesuit college in Mannar started in 1565 and the Jesuits’ annual letters also mention the construction of four churches inland: three Karava churches and one Parava church, respectively in Erukkilampiddi, Thoddavali, Karisal and Patim.

Following the victories of Jaffna and the demise of the Kingdom of Sitawaka, in 1593, the Portuguese adopted an offensive strategy, intent on conquering the Kingdom of Kandy and, by extension, gaining complete control of Sri Lanka⁶. This new political, territorial and colonial strategy went hand in hand with a renewed missionary effort.

⁵ REGO, António da Silva. *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente – Índia*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1993, vol. 5, pp. 178–179. See also: MCPHERSON, Kenneth. “Paravas and Portuguese: A study of Portuguese strategy and its impact on an Indian seafaring community”. In: *Mare Liberum*, 1997, no. 13, pp.69–82; SCHURHAMMER, Georg. *Orientalia*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1963, p. 215; SUBRAHMANYAM, Sanjay. “Noble harvest from the Sea: Managing Pearl Fishery of Mannar, 1500–1925”. In: STEIN, Burton; SUBRAHMANYAM, Sanjay (ed.). *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1996, pp. 134–172.

⁶ On this issue, see: ABYASINGHE, Tikiri. *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594–1612*. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1966; SILVA, Chandra Richard de. *The Portuguese in Ceylon, 1617–1638*. Colombo: H. W. Cave, 1972.

In 1594, Fr. Antonio Schipano wrote from Colombo to Claudio Acquaviva, the Jesuit Superior General, about the need for the Society of Jesus to become involved in evangelical work on the island⁷.

In January 1597, in response to growing expectations regarding the evangelization of Sri Lanka, the Bishop of Cochin requested King Philip I of Portugal (Philip II of Spain) to authorize the entry of more religious orders in the island, in order to assist in the “pacification” of the kingdoms of Kotte and Sitawaka. Seeing their religious monopoly in Sri Lanka under threat, the Franciscans tried their best to prevent this, but in 1602 the viceroy allowed priests from the Society of Jesus to settle in the island, granting them the territory of the Seven Korales, in the Kingdom of Kotte.



Image 02 – Church of St. Paul (Jesuit) and Church of St. Francis (Franciscan) in Colombo. Details from a map drawn by an anonymous Dutch cartographer, c.1655 (source: Kaart van de Baai, Stad en Vestingwerken van Columbo, map from the Nationaal Archief, published in SILVA, Rajpal Kumar de; BEUMER, Willemina. *Illustrations and views of Dutch Ceylon, 1602-1796*)

The strong support given to the Jesuits by Jerónimo de Azevedo (1594-1612), the Captain-General of Ceylon, was a major contribution

⁷ SCHIPANO, Antonio. [Letter from 9 December 1594]. In: PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka – The Portuguese Period, 1505-1565*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1989, vol. 2, pp. 139-142.

to their expansion⁸. It is thus no wonder that the same Jerónimo de Azevedo acquired in 1604, in the city of Colombo, a land in which to build a Jesuit college; or that he gave the Jesuits, in the following year, a vast number of villages previously controlled by Buddhist priests⁹. Continuing the process of expansion initiated by other religious orders, the Dominicans reached Sri Lanka in 1605, followed in 1606 by the Augustinians. The former were granted the lands of Sabaragamuwa and the Two Korales area, while the latter settled in the Four Korales area.

The Franciscans also intensified their activities during this period. In 1602, the text *Apologia* mentions 18 Franciscan churches, almost twice as much as the ones mentioned in 1599. In 1610, Fr. Francisco Negrão, the Franciscan General Commissioner in Ceylon, sent a report to Rome on mass baptisms, mentioning 31 churches where such acts had taken place¹⁰. A document dated from 1628 and signed by Constantino de Sá de Noronha, Portuguese Captain-General of Ceylon, refers to the existence of no less than 55 Franciscan churches in the Kingdom of Kotte. This detailed document suggests that Catholic communities, although still emerging along the Sri Lankan coastline, were also starting to expand to inland areas, following the course of the main rivers¹¹.

In Jaffna the missionary work expanded at a stunning rate, coinciding with the annexation of the kingdom by the Portuguese crown

⁸ His brother Inácio de Azevedo, who died as a martyr, was himself a member of the Society of Jesus. ⁹ [Letter from 26 October 1605]. In: PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka – The Portuguese Period, 1505-1565*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1989, vol. 2, pp. 245-246.

¹⁰ PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka – The Portuguese Period, 1505-1565*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1989, vol. 2, pp. 290-296. Paulo da Trindade also mentions the same baptisms, explicitly referring to the churches of Madampe, Mahature (Matara), Weligama (Beligão), Mipe, Galle, Alutgama (Alicão), Beruvala (Birbiri), Magonna (Macune), Kalutara (Caleture), Panadura (Paniture), Halpe (Salpe), Kelaniya (Calane), and Navagamua (Nagão).

¹¹ This document was published (with slight differences) by: TRINDADE, Paulo da. *Conquista espiritual do Oriente*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1962, pp. 133-146; QUEIROZ, Fernão de. *The temporal and spiritual conquest of Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992, vol. 2, pp. 714-719.

in 1619. A series of large-scale baptisms took place between 1624 and 1626, whereby a large part of the royal family, members of the court and senior dignitaries and their respective families converted to Catholicism. This situation culminated in the heir to the throne of Jaffna renouncing his rights in favour of the King of Portugal, in 1633. Paulo da Trindade does not hesitate to claim that, from then on, “(...) almost all the kingdom is Christian (...)”¹². Given this broad context of openness to Christianity, the Franciscans were forced to share the missionary work with the Jesuits. However, they kept for themselves the most accessible establishments on the coastline, while the Jesuits “(...) remained inland, one league from the sea (...)”¹³.



Image 03 – A church in Colombo. Drawing by Esaias Boursse, c.1662 (source: sketchbook from the Rijksmuseum, published in WAGENAAR, Lodewijk. *Cinnamon & Elephants: Sri Lanka and the Netherlands from 1600*)

¹² Paulo da Trindade wrote his book around 1634 and had access to direct information about the events. On this issue, see: TRINDADE, Paulo da. *Conquista espiritual do Oriente*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1962, vol. 3, p. 242.

¹³ QUEIROZ, Fernão de. *The temporal and spiritual conquest of Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992, vol. 2, p. 695.

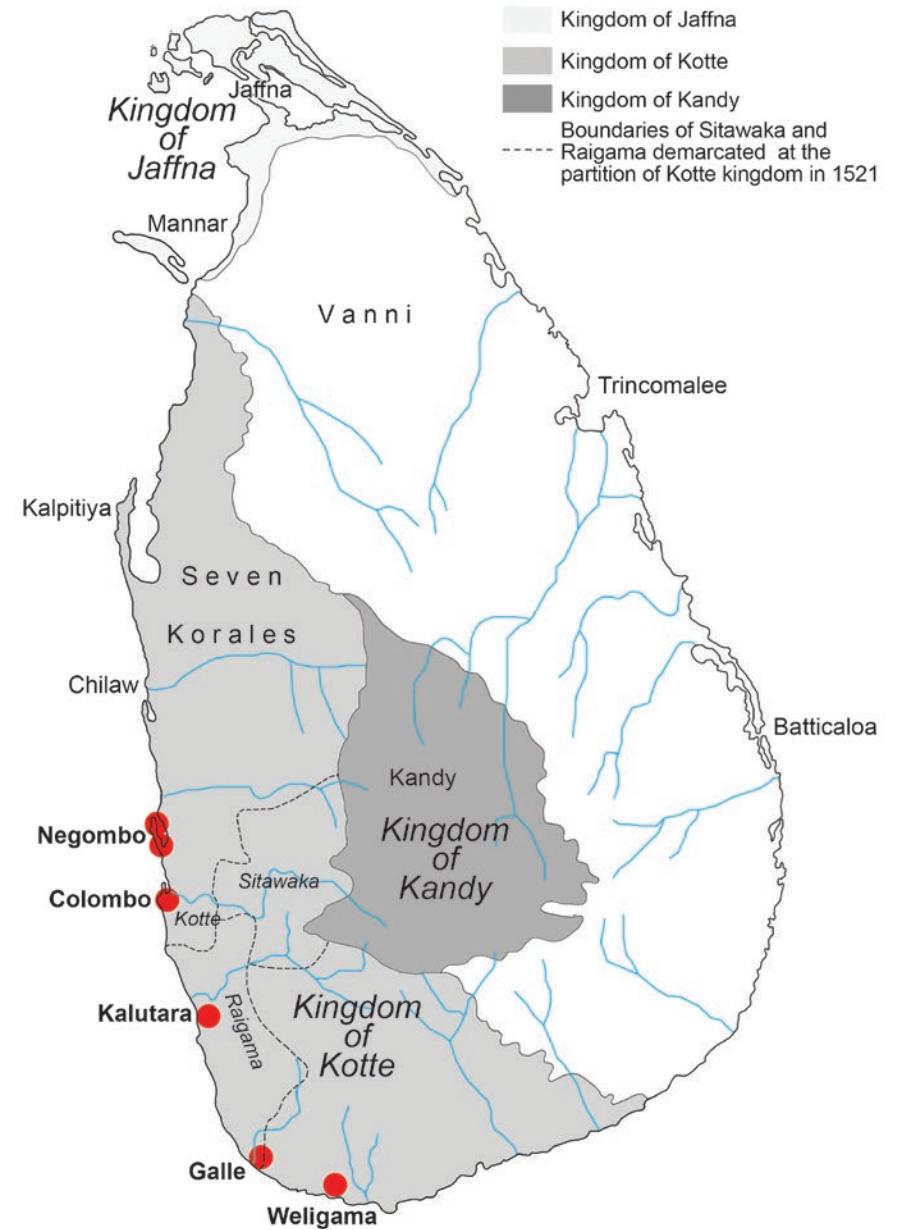


Image 04 – Map of Sri Lanka, showing the Franciscan churches built until 1552 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)



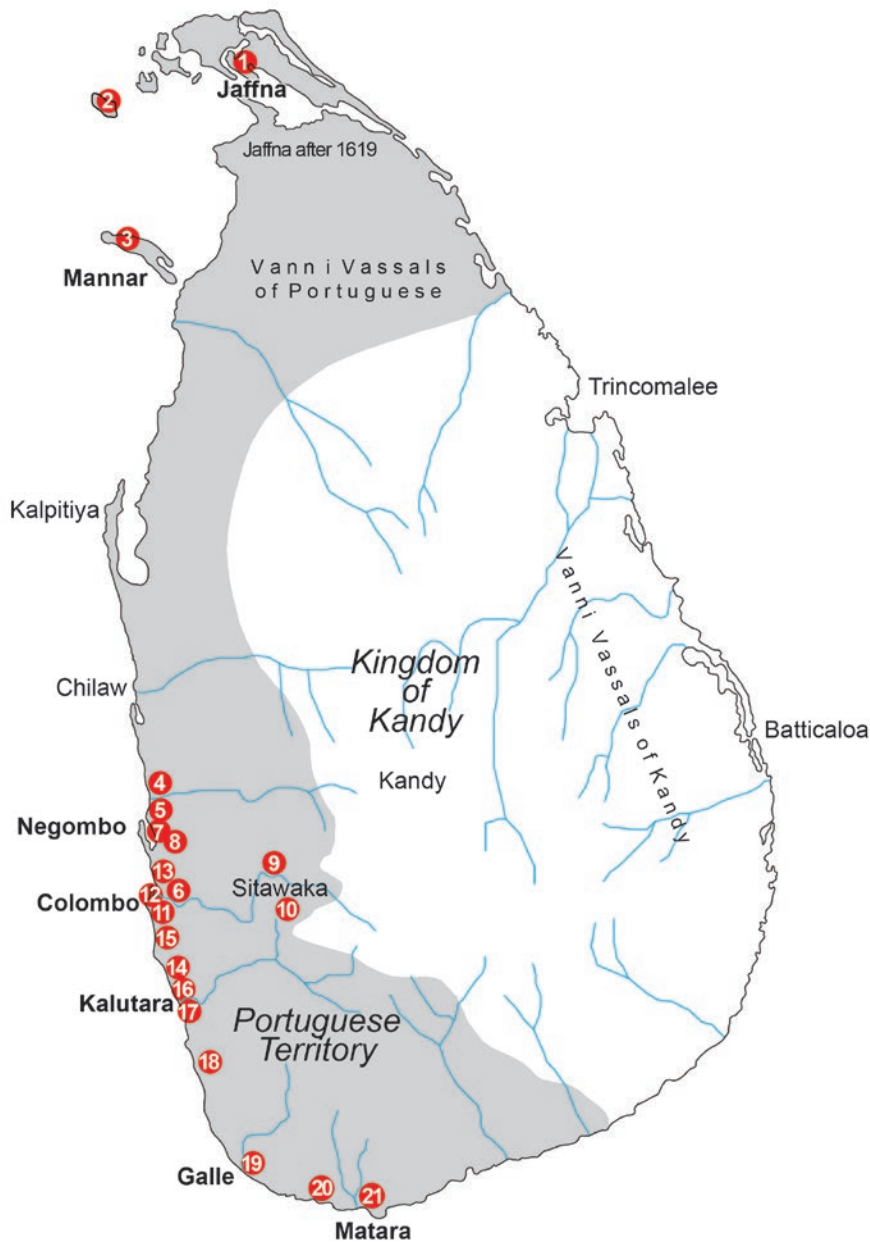
Franciscan Churches built until 1599

- 1 – Church of Our Lady of Portiuncula, in Kammala
- 2 – Church of St. Anthony, in Pallansena
- 3 – Church of St. Anne, in Kelaniya
- 4 – Church of St. Jerome, in Nagoda
- 5 – Catechumens' House of St. Thomas, in Negombo
- 6 – Church of St. Francis, in Negombo
- 7 – Church of the Mother of God, in Negombo
- 8 – Church of St. John, in Mutwal
- 9 – Church of Our Lady of Health, in Kalutara
- 10 – Church of St. Anthony, in Aluthgama
- 11 – Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Galle
- 12 – Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Matara

In his global assessment of the advances made by the missionaries, Paulo da Trindade provides a list of 25 Franciscan churches built in this period, not including those on the islands of Tanadiva and Mannar, nor those in Mantota, whose construction was described in a separate chapter. Fernão de Queiroz also drew up an additional list of 10 churches built by the Jesuits. However, a Jesuit document dated from 1644 mentions 12 residences in Jaffna, along with the respective dedications and the number of Christians affiliated to each one¹⁴.

Image 05 – Map of Sri Lanka, showing the Franciscan churches built until 1599 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)

¹⁴ “Breve Relação das christandades que tem os padres da Companhia de Jesus da província do Malabar na Índia Oriental, feita no anno de 1644”. In: *Goa*. Roma: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, vol. 56, ff. 526-535.



Franciscan churches built until 1602

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 – Church in Jaffna | in Colombo |
| 2 – Church in Delft Island | 12 – Church of St. John, in Mutwal |
| 3 – Church of the Mother of God, in Mannar | 13 – Church of St. James, in Wattala |
| 4 – Church of St. Anthony, in Kammala | 14 – Church of St. Mary Magdalene, in Panadura |
| 5 – Church of St. Andrew, in Pallansena | 15 – Church of St. Claire, in Mapane Mount |
| 6 – Church of St. Anne, in Kelaniya | 16 – Church of Our Lady of Hope, in Kalutara |
| 7 – Church of the Mother of God, in Negombo | 17 – Church of St. Saviour, in Kalutara |
| 8 – Church of the Holy Spirit, in Negombo | 18 – Church of St. Michael, in Halugama |
| 9 – Church of St. Jerome, in Nagoda | 19 – Church of Our Lady, in Galle |
| 10 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Sitawaka | 20 – Church of St. Anthony, in Weligama |
| 11 – Church of St. Thomas, | 21 – Church of St. Louis, in Matara |

Contrary to what happened in the Malabar Coast (India), the Franciscans maintained in Sri Lanka a clear supremacy over the Jesuits, both in terms of the number of churches and residences and in terms of their political influence in the local courts and royal families. It is important to note that the general baptisms involving the elite of the island's kingdoms were held in the Church of Our Lady of Miracles, where the General Commissioner of the Franciscans resided.

Image 06 – Map of Sri Lanka, showing the Franciscan churches built until 1602 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)

Franciscan churches built until 1628

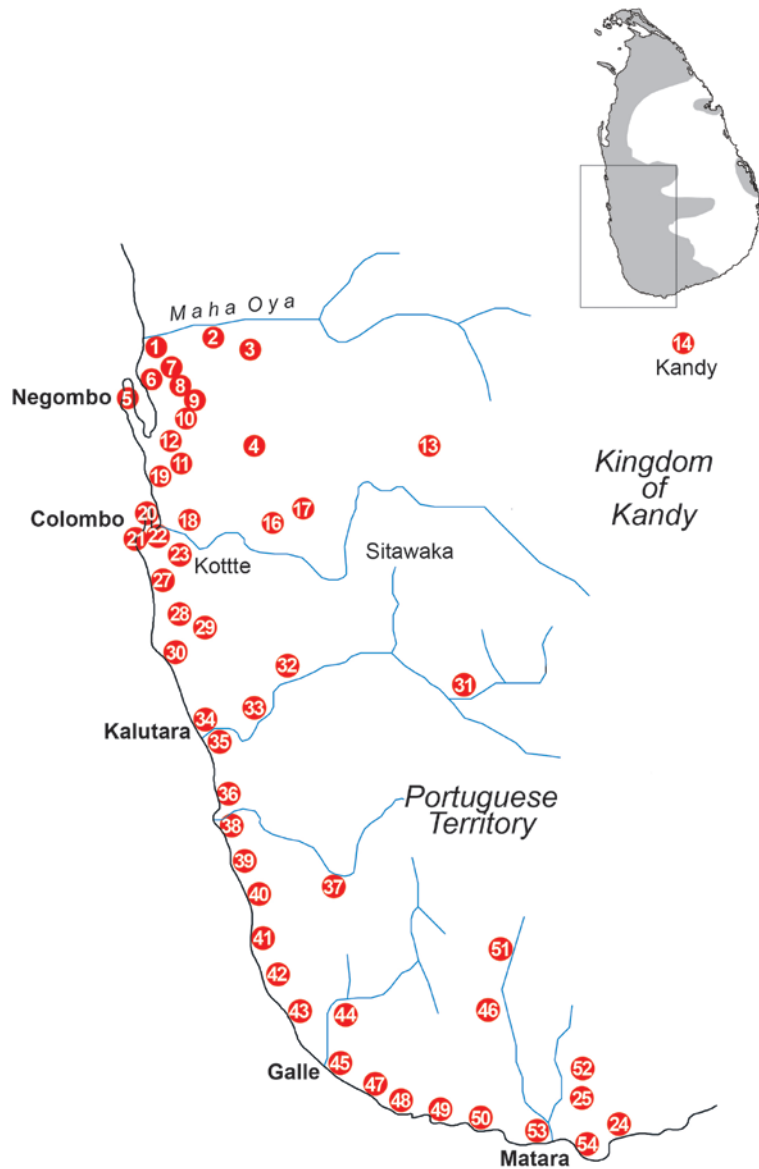
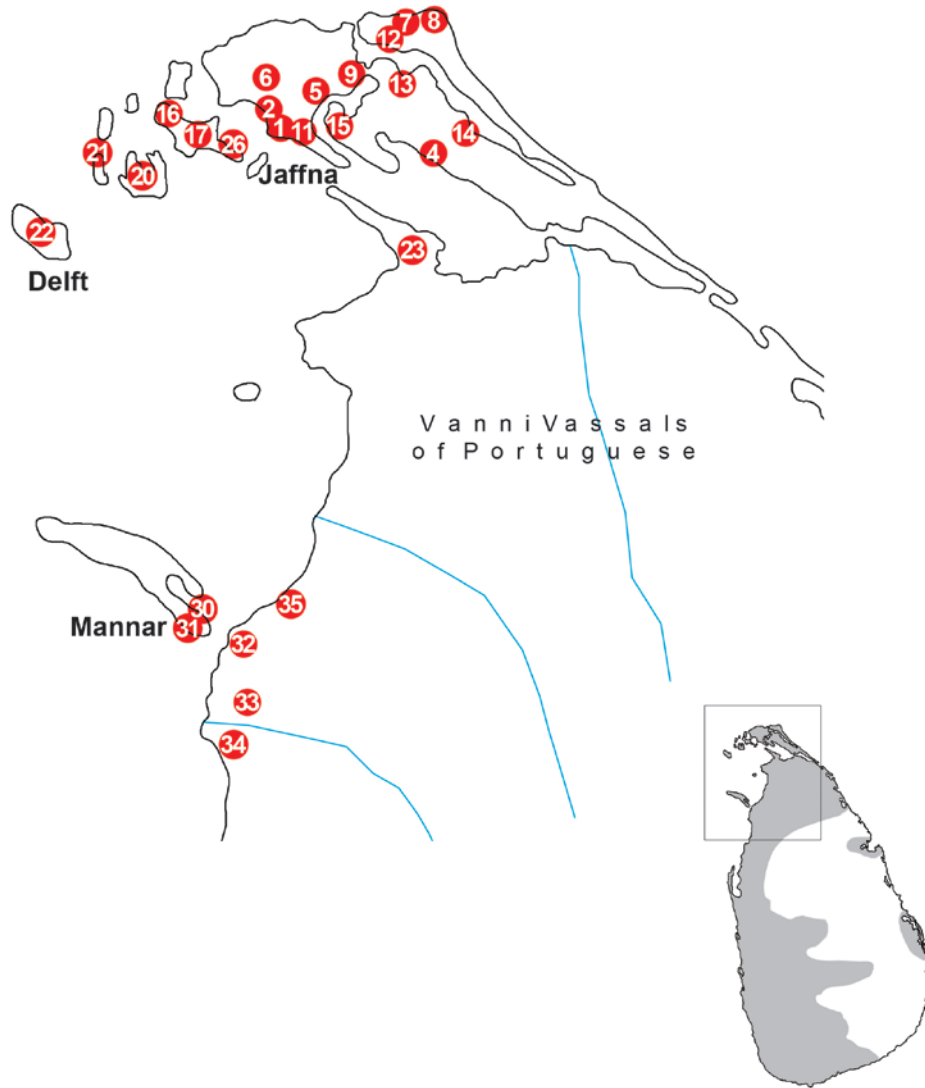


Image 07 – Map of the southwestern part of Sri Lanka, showing the Franciscan churches built until 1628 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)

- 1 – Church of St. Didacus, in Pallansena
- 2 – Church of St. Bonaventure, in Halpe
- 3 – Church of St. Benedict of Palermo, in Akaragama
- 4 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Gampaha
- 5 – Church of the Mother of God, in Negombo
- 6 – Church of the Holy Spirit, in Negombo
- 7 – Church of the Holy Trinity, in Hunupitiya
- 8 – Church of Our Lady of Remedies, in Bolawalana
- 9 – Church of St. Mary of Jesus, in Galloluwa
- 10 – Church in Welikada
- 11 – Church of the Wounds of St. Francis, in Welisara
- 12 – Church of St. Pascal, in Dandugama
- 13 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Menikkadavara
- 14 – Church of the Good Jesus, in Kandy
- 15 – Church of St. Jerome, in Nagoda
- 16 – Church of the Mother of God, in Mapitigama
- 17 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Dompe
- 18 – Church of St. Bartholomew, in Kelaniya
- 19 – Church of St. James, in Wattala
- 20 – Church of St. John the Baptist, in Mutwal
- 21 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Colombo
- 22 – Church of St. Thomas, in Colombo
- 23 – Church of Our Lady of Birth, in Kotte
- 24 – Church of St. Lucy, in Dickwella
- 25 – Church of St. Anthony, in Bambaranda
- 26 – Church of Our Lady of Veral
- 27 – Church of Our Lady of the Mount, in Lunawa
- 28 – Church of Our Lady of Vidigama, in Ramukkana
- 29 – Church of Good Jesus, in Gorakana
- 30 – Church of St. Mary Magdalene, in Panadura
- 31 – Church of the Saviour, in Sabaragamuwa
- 32 – Church of St. Luke, in Uduwara
- 33 – Church of St. John the Baptist, in Galpatha
- 34 – Church of Our Lady of Health, in Kalutara
- 35 – Church of the Wounds, in Kalutara
- 36 – Church of St. Peter, in Maggona
- 37 – Church of St. Peter of Alcantara, in Meteweli
- 38 – Church of St. Anthony, in Aluthgama
- 39 – Church of Our Lady of Good Voyage, in Kosgoda
- 40 – Church of the Three Kings, in Welitara
- 41 – Church of St. Claire, in Madampe
- 42 – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Hikkaduwa
- 43 – Church of St. Louis, in Ratgama
- 44 – Church of St. John the Baptiste, in Wakwella
- 45 – Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Galle
- 46 – Church of the Birth of Jesus, in Kodagoda
- 47 – Church of St. Joseph, in Koggala
- 48 – Church of Our Lady of Remedies, in Ahangama
- 49 – Church of St. Michael, in Weligama
- 50 – Church of Our Lady of Good Voyage, in Mirissa
- 51 – Church of St. Joachim, in Paraduwa
- 52 – Church of Our Lady of Pity, in Kottawatta
- 53 – Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Matara
- 54 – Church of Devundara / Dondra

Franciscan churches built until c.1634



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 – Church of Our Lady of Miracles, in Jaffna | Not Identified |
| 2 – Church of Our Lady of Salvation, in Nallur | 19 – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Marticota |
| 3 – Church of the Wounds of St. Francis, in Shivacharya | 20 – Church of Our Lady of the Good Voyage, in Punkudutivu Island |
| 4 – Church of St. Anthony, in Kachchai | 21 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Nainativu Island |
| 5 – Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Kopai | 22 – Church of the Immaculate Conception, in Delft island |
| 6 – Church of Our Lady of Birth, in Manippay | 23 – Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Pooneryn |
| 7 – Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Uruiur | 24 – Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Ilaur |
| 8 – Church of Our Lady of Good Voyage, in Point Pedro | 25 – Church of Modeliares |
| 9 – Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Puttur | 26 – Church of St. John, in Allaipidi |
| 10 – Church of the Mother of God, in Cateveli | 27 – Church of St. Joseph, in Manfadiva |
| 11 – Church of St. John the Baptiste, in Chundikkuli | 28 – Church of Our Lady, in Valana |
| 12 – Church of Udupeli | 29 – Church of Our Lady, in Charavane |
| 13 – Church of St. Benaventure, in Varanni | 30 – Church of the Mother of God, in Mannar |
| 14 – Church of St. Mary, in Eluthumadduval | 31 – Church of St. John the Baptiste, in Mannar |
| 15 – Church of Our Lady of Pity, in Navatkuli | 32 – Church of Our Lady of Health. In Mantota |
| 16 – Church of St. John the Baptist, in Kayts Island | 33 – Church of Our Lady of Salvation, in Nanattam |
| 17 – Church of Our Lady of Health, in Valanai | 34 – Church of Our Lady of the Good Voyage, in Arippu |
| 18 – Church of St. Joseph, in Mapeti – | 35 – Church of St. James, in Perinkalli |
| | 36 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Chitaveli |

Image 08 – Map of the northwestern part of Sri Lanka, showing the Franciscan churches built until c.1634 (source: Hélder Carita)

Jesuit churches built until c.1644



Image 09 – Map of the southwestern part of Sri Lanka, showing the Jesuit churches built until c.1644 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 – Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, in Kalpitiya | 12 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Walahena |
| 2 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Kalpitiya | 13 – Church of Assumption of Our Lady, in Madampe |
| 3 – Church of St. Francis Xavier, in Etale | 14 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Metiyagana |
| 4 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Maripo | 15 – Church of St. Francis Xavier, in Marawila |
| 5 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Navakkadu | 16 – Church of St. Ambrose, in Katuneriya |
| 6 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Narakkalli | 17 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Chetur |
| 7 – Church of St. Francis Xavier, in Puttalam | 18 – Church of the Three Kings, in Kammala |
| 8 – Church of St. Peter, in Chilaw | 19 – Church of Our Lady, in Thoppuwa |
| 9 – Church of Our Lady, in Anaivilundawa | 20 – Church of St. Michael, in Moratuwa |
| 10 – Church of St. John de Baptist, in Muneswaran | |
| 11 – Church of the Holy Cross, in Kokkulawa | |

The fact that neither building has external side galleries seems to indicate (as in the case of southern Indian churches) that churches with galleries only appeared at a later date. On the other hand, these churches are clearly influenced by Indo-Portuguese architecture, especially with regard to three main features: 1) the increase in scale; 2) the powerful symbolic weight; 3) the adaptation to local conditioning factors. Indeed, like most Portuguese-influenced architecture in Asia, the size of buildings in Sri Lanka increased in comparison to the models originally imported from Portugal. While this demonstrates the introduction of a visual discourse of power and supremacy, it also relates (in the case of religious architecture)

Jesuit churches built until c.1644

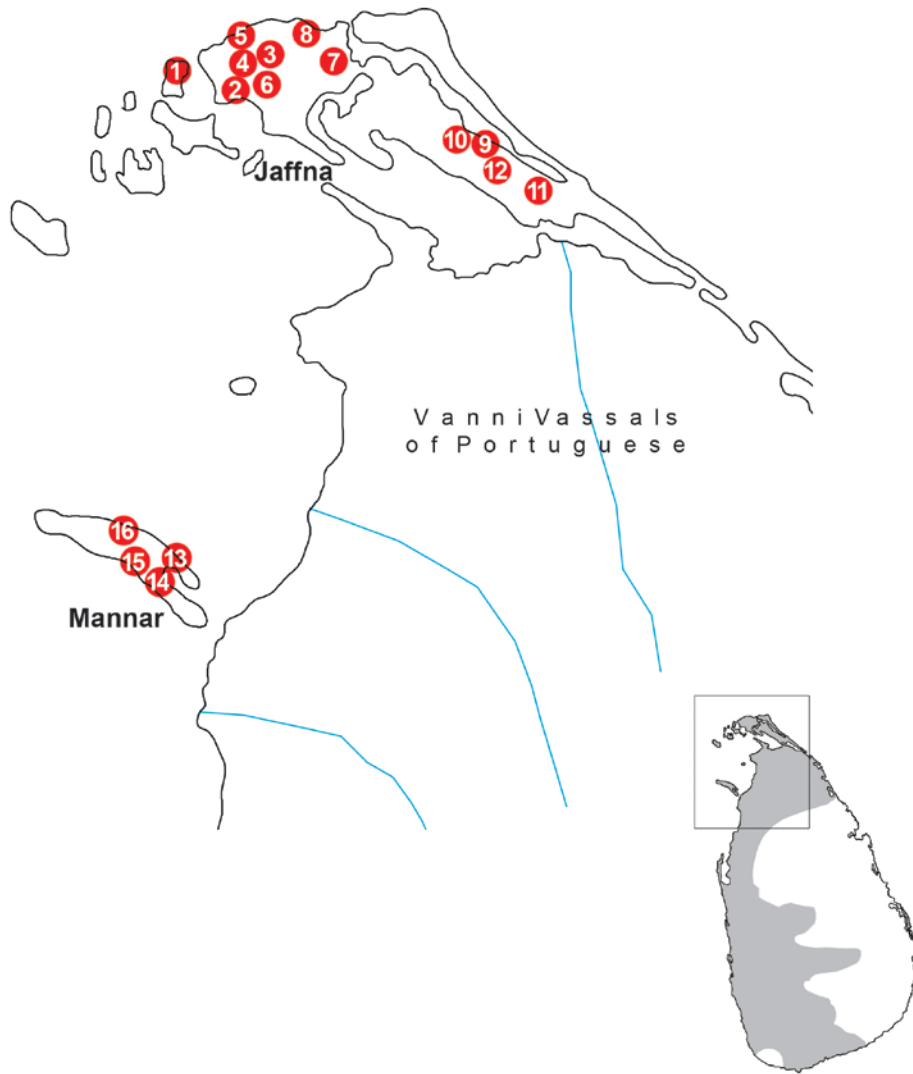


Image 10 – Map of the northwestern part of Sri Lanka, showing the Jesuit churches built until c.1644 (source: Hélder Carita and Sagara Jayasinghe)

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 – Church of Our Lady of Remedies, in Karativu/Kayts Island | 9 – Church of the Birth of Our Lady, in Tambakamam |
| 2 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Vaddukoddai | 10 – Church of All Saints, in Mukamali |
| 3 – Church of St. Paul, in Tellippali | 11 – Church of St. Michael, in Kottandarkulam |
| 4 – Church of the Holy Trinity, in Chankanai | 12 – Church of Jesus, in Pallai |
| 5 – Church of Our Lady of Remedies, in Pandattarippu | 13 – Church of Erukkilampididi |
| 6 – Church of St. Ignatius, in Mallakam | 14 – Church of St. Andrew, in Patim |
| 7 – Church of the Holy Spirit, in Achchuvvely | 15 – Church of St. Andrew, in Totavelly |
| 8 – Church of Our Lady of Angels, in Myliddy | 16 – Church of St. Thomas, in Karisal |

to an attempt to mirror Eastern aesthetic models. This was meant to satisfy the people’s expectations, as the entire community felt that architecture – especially that of a religious nature – had an important representational value.

The situation in Sri Lanka showed remarkable consistency, with an abundance of large churches. In 1572, one Jesuit observed that the Karavas of Mannar were building a church in “(...) stone and mortar, with a tiled roof (...)”; he noted that, given their poverty, “(...) they are of much greater merit for building a church at such great cost (...)”¹⁵. Fernão de Queiroz’s comments on Sri Lanka reveal the same surprise at the extreme scale of religious architecture: “(...) the majority of these Parish churches were as magnificent as the best in Goa (...)”¹⁶. Finally, Baldaeus describes the

¹⁵ LUÍS, Pero. [Letter from Tuticorin, 11 January 1572]. In: WICKI, Joseph (ed.). *Documenta Indica*. Roma: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1964, vol. 8, doc. 67, p. 517.

¹⁶ QUEIROZ, Fernão de. *The temporal and spiritual conquest of Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992, vol. 2, p. 720.



Image 11 – Depiction of a church in Changanai by Philippus Baldaeus, c.1660 (source: BALDAEUS, Philippus. *A Description of the East India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel*)



Image 12 – Ruins of the Portuguese Church of the Holy Trinity, in Changanai, 1903 (source: LEWIS, John Penry. *The Portuguese-Dutch churches of Jaffna*)

churches in Jaffna in similar terms, as shown by his observations about the church in Myladdi: “(...) the church is a large structure of stone, the house belonging to it, with a balcony on the top of it, absorbing a very fine prospect into the main sea so that it may well deserve the name of belvedere (...)”¹⁷. The tendency of Indo-Portuguese

¹⁷ BALDAEUS, Philippus. *A Description of the East India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also of the Isle of Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1996, p. 802.



Image 13 – Ruins of the Portuguese Church of Our Lady of Angels, in Myladdi, 1971 (source: LEWCOCK, Ronald; SANSONI, Barbara; SENANAYAKE, Laky. *The Architecture of an Island: The living heritage of Sri Lanka*)

architecture to increase the scale and favour markedly monumental buildings (especially religious ones) was progressively combined with a significant increase in the symbolic impact of the architectural elements. Albeit at a more subtle level, this new feature reveals an assimilation of Eastern aesthetic values, clearly visible in Sri Lanka, where doorways, staircases, pediments, windows, towers or turrets were endowed with exuberant decorations, of great visual impact.

When the Dutch arrived in the East, the Portuguese presence in the island was greatly compromised. Initially focused on controlling the maritime trade routes in southeastern and eastern Asia,

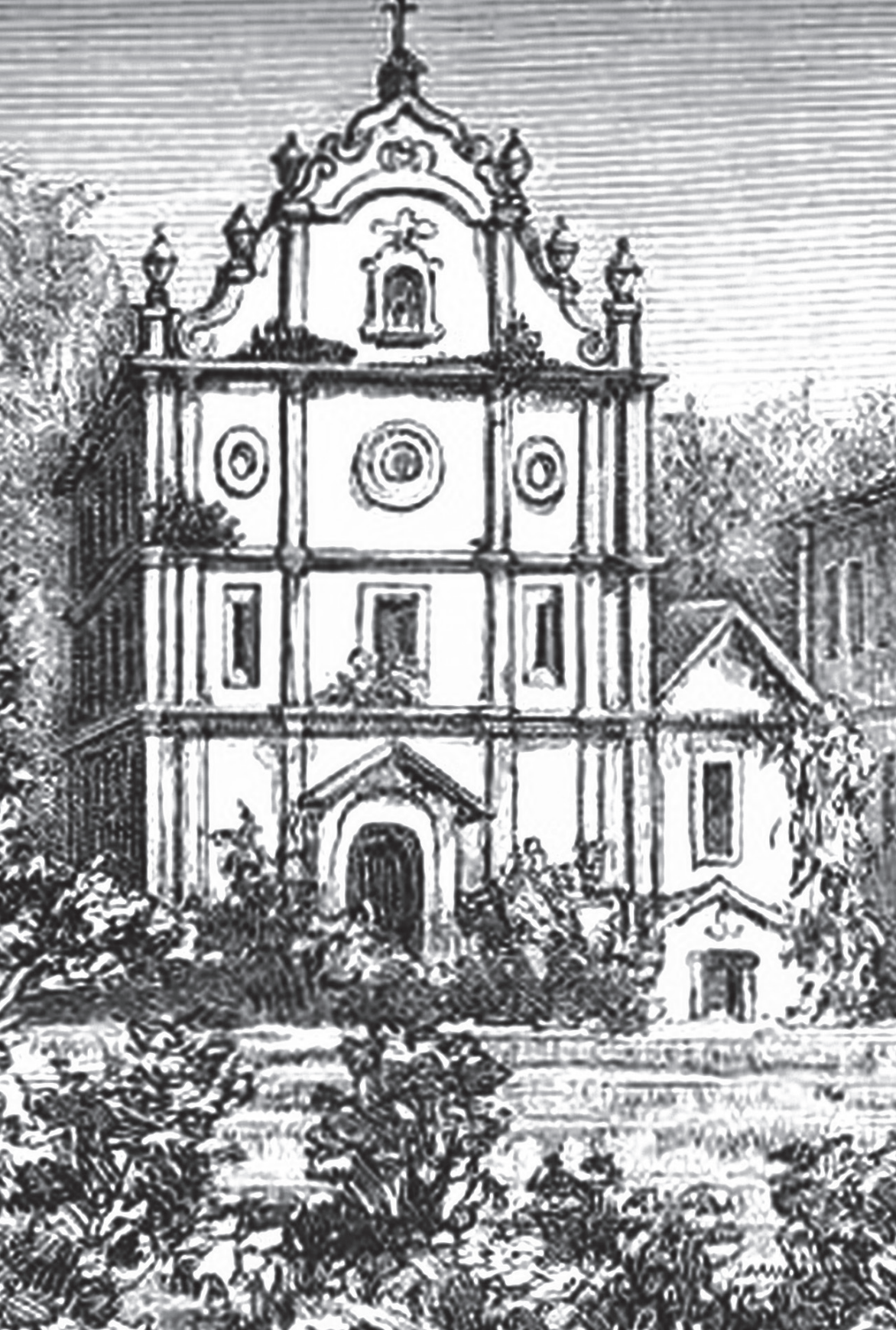
the Dutch went on to attack, from the 1630s on, the Portuguese possessions in the region. The conquest of Sri Lanka began after the Kandyan Treaty of 1638, signed by the Dutch and the Sinhala king Rajasinghe II; following this treaty, Batticaloa was captured in 1638, Colombo was conquered in 1656, and Mannar and Jaffna were both invaded two years later. The Dutch occupation of Sri Lanka brought the decline of most of the Catholic churches built by the Portuguese, a process that became quite systematic in the kingdoms of Jaffna and Kotte.

The resistance of Catholic communities to the iconoclastic spirit of Protestantism (in this case, Dutch Calvinism), averse to all forms of rituality, explains the enormous success of the Oratorian missions undertaken later on, starting from Goa when St. Joseph Vaz arrived in the island in 1687. Indeed, the continuing influence of Portuguese religious architecture in Sri Lanka is evidently related to the arrival of the Oratorians in the latter years of the 17th century. Founded by St. Joseph Vaz under very trying circumstances, the mission carried out a thorough reorganization of the Catholic communities, which entailed the restoration and construction of several churches, as will be seen in the final chapter.



**THE CONGREGATION OF THE
ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI IN
THE PORTUGUESE TERRITORIES**

JOAQUIM RODRIGUES DOS SANTOS



St. Philip Neri (1515–1595) was born in Florence, Italy, and is usually identified as the *Third Apostle of Rome* (after St. Peter and St. Paul)¹⁸. He is credited with having started the tradition of the *Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches*, in Rome, which has since become very popular among Catholics who visit the city. After his arrival in Rome in 1533, St. Philip Neri began his pious works among the sick, poor, and sex workers. While in Rome, he met St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, the two founders of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious congregation engaged in evangelization, but also in education, pious work and art. Coincidentally, the three men were canonized on the same day, 12 March 1622. St. Philip Neri was ordained priest in 1551 and intended to travel to the East as a missionary, but soon changed his mind and decided to accomplish his apostolic mission in Rome.

For some years, St. Philip Neri lived in a religious congregation in the Church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini. In 1575 the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri was formally recognized by a papal bull and granted the small Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella

¹⁸ On the history and activity of St. Philip Neri and the Oratorians, see, among others: BACCI, Pietro Giacomo. *The life of Saint Philip Neri, Apostle of Rome, and founder of the Congregation of the Oratory*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1902; CISTELLINI, Antonio. *San Filippo Neri: Breve storia di una grande vita*. Florence: Memorie oratoriane, 1996; CISTELLINI, Antonio. *San Filippo Neri, l'Oratorio e la Congregazione oratoriana. Storia e spiritualità*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1989; DANIELI, Francesco. *San Filippo Neri: La nascita dell'Oratorio e lo sviluppo dell'arte cristiana al tempo della Riforma*, Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2009; EMANUELLI, Flavia (ed.). *La Congregazione dell'Oratorio di San Filippo Neri nelle Marche del '600*. Florence: Nardini Editore, 1997; TÜRKES, Paul. *Philip Neri: The Fire of Joy*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995; VUAILLAT, Jean. *Saint Philippe Néri: Le saint toujours joyeux*. Lyon: Éditions et imprimeries du Sud-Est, 1967.



Image 14 – St. Philip Neri. Painting by Giovan Francesco Barbieri, or “Guercino”, 1656 (source: *Wikimedia Commons*)

as headquarters; this church was completely renovated soon after, and consecrated in 1577. The members of the congregation – formally known as Oratorians – were secular priests living together under a Rule without having taken religious vows. The Oratorians were in close connection with parishes, serving as clergy and involved in the works of apostolate (conversion and moralization), assistance (to the sick and the poor) and education, as well as in art (especially religious music). Later, other congregations were established in Europe, as well as in Latin America, India and Sri Lanka. These congregations functioned autonomously, but maintained direct connections between them, forming a kind of confederation. Unlike other religious orders, however, they were not subordinated to a central authority. In contrast to the Jesuits, for instance, the Oratorians never developed their own architectural style, neither in Europe nor in Latin America. Many of their churches already existed and were offered to them, while the new ones were built following local practices.



Image 15 – St. Philip Neri meeting St. Ignatius of Loyola. Engraving by Peter Paul Rubens, 1609 (source: *The Ignatian Camino*)



Image 15 – The *Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches* in Rome. Engraving by Antonio Lafreri, c.1575 (source: *Wikimedia Commons*)

Image 17 – Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Rome. Engraving by Francesco Borromini, 1725 (source: Wikimedia Commons)

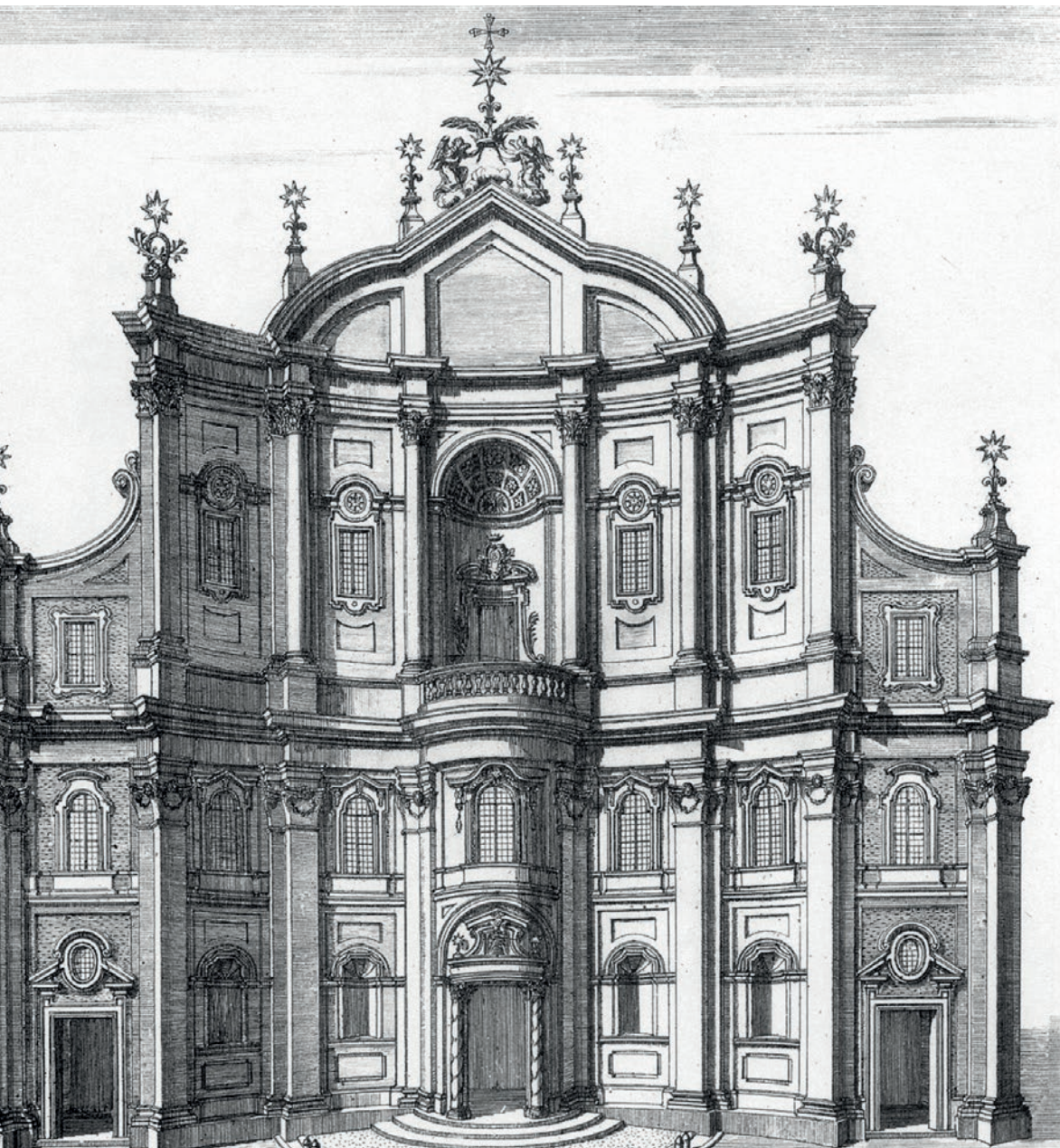
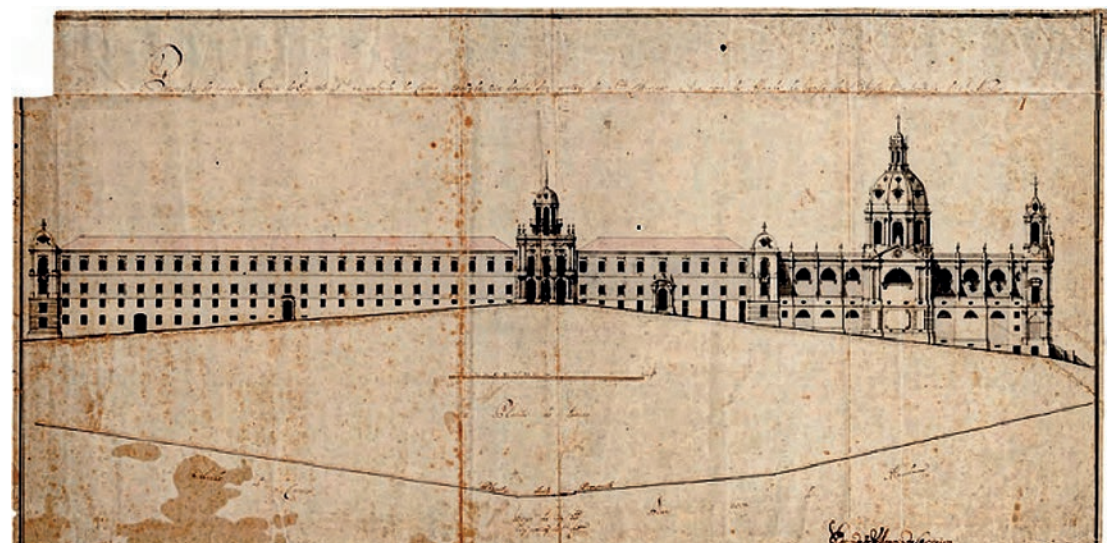


Image 18 – Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella (also called Chiesa Nuova) and Oratory of St. Philip Neri, in Rome (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

Image 19 – Project for the reconstruction of the Convent of the Holy Spirit of Pedreira, in Lisbon, by José Joaquim Ludovice, second half of the 18th century (source: Prospectos do Convento e Igreja do Espírito Santo..., elevation from a private collection published in SO-ROMENHO, Miguel; SILVA, Raquel Henriques da. "Conventos em tempos de crises: O Convento do Espírito Santo da Pedreira de Lisboa – Quatro desenhos de projecto de José Joaquim Ludovice". In: *Revista de História da Arte*, 2015, no. 12, pp. 250-265)



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Image 20 – Palace of Necessidades, in Lisbon, in the beginning of the 20th century (in the site originally occupied by the Convent of Our Lady of Necessities). Photograph by Legado Seixas (source: Arquivo Fotográfico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa)

Image 21 – Vale do Pereiro Estate, in Lisbon (demolished). Photograph by José Artur Leitão Bárci, c.1890 (source: Arquivo Fotográfico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa)

In Portugal¹⁹, the first Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri was founded in 1668. Fr. Bartolomeu de Quental, chaplain and confessor of the Portuguese Royal House, established in Lisbon, with the support of the Spanish Fr. Diego de Liñan, an Oratorian congregation. According to Eugénio dos Santos, in just a few years several other congregations were founded in Portugal and in some of its overseas territories: in Lisbon the Oratorians took over the Church and House of the Holy Spirit, the Convent of Our Lady of Necessities and the estate of Vale do Pereiro; in Freixo de Espada à Cinta, the Convent and Church of St. Philip Neri was established by Fr. Francisco da Silva in 1671; in 1679, Fr. Baltazar Guedes set up a congregation in Oporto, based in the Church of St. Anthony of the Congregated; in 1686, Fr. José do Valle and Fr. Francisco Rodrigues were sent to Braga to found an Oratorian House, and went on to

¹⁹ On the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Portugal, see, among others: CARDOSO, António Monteiro. “O Oratório de S. Filipe Néri em Trás-os-Montes: A Congregação de Nossa Senhora do Vilar de Freixo de Espada à Cinta”. In: *Brigantia*, 1989, vol. 9, nos. 3/4, pp. 55-69; DIAS, José Sebastião da Silva. *A Congregação do Oratório de Lisboa: Regulamentos primitivos*. Coimbra: Instituto de Estudos Filosóficos, 1972; FERREIRA-ALVES, Joaquim Jaime. “Elementos para a história da construção da Casa e Igreja da Congregação do Oratório do Porto (1680-1783)”. In: *Revista da Faculdade de Letras: História*, 1993, series 2, vol. 10, pp. 379-406; GIRODON, Jean. *Lettres du Père Bartolomeu de Quental à la Congrégation de l’Oratoire de Braga*. Paris, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1973; MARQUES, José. “Os Congregados de Braga, no contexto do Oratório português”. In: *Misericórdia de Braga*, 2009, nr. 5, pp. 133-180; SANTOS, Eugénio dos. “Oratorianos”. In: FRANCO, José Eduardo; MOURÃO, José Augusto; GOMES, Ana Cristina da Costa (ed.). *Dicionário histórico das ordens religiosas e instituições afins em Portugal*. Lisbon: Gradiva, 2010, pp. 231-242; SANTOS, Eugénio dos. *O Oratório no Norte de Portugal: Contribuição para o estudo da história religiosa e social*. Oporto: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, 1982.





Image 22 – Church of St. Philip Neri in Freixo de Espada à Cinta
(source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

build the Convent and Basilica of the Congregation of St. Philip Neri; the Oratorian house in Viseu was established in 1689, followed soon after by the construction of the Convent and Church of the Priests of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri; in 1697 began in Estremoz the construction of the Convent and Church of Our Lady of Conception of the Congregated of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri; and, finally, an asylum was also created by the Oratorians in Monção²⁰.

²⁰ SANTOS, Eugénio dos. *O Oratório no Norte de Portugal: Contribuição para o estudo da história religiosa e social*. Oporto: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, 1982.



Image 23 – Church of St. Anthony of the Congregated, in Oporto.
Engraving by Joaquim Vilanova, 1833 (source: *Porto, de Agostinho Rebelo aos Nossos Dias*)

Image 24 – College of Braga, previously the Convent and Basilica of the Congregation of St. Philip Neri in Braga, in the late 19th century (source: *De Braga e bonda*)





Image 25 – Church of the Major Seminary in Viseu, formerly the Church of the Priests of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

Despite their affiliation to the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, the rules followed by Portuguese Oratorians were more severe than the ones of the congregation of the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella. Still, they allowed for the possibility of conducting missionary actions in the Portuguese overseas territories. The Oratorian congregation of Lisbon, which was named Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri and Our Lady of Assumption, was the mother house of the Portuguese Oratorian congregations,



Image 26 – The unfinished Convent and Church of Our Lady of Conception of the Congregated of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Photograph by unknown person in the first half of the 20th century (source: Biblioteca Municipal de Estremoz / Arquivo Fotográfico)

and its rules were the basis for all of them. The success of the Oratorians in Portugal is attributed to several aspects: Fr. Bartolomeu de Quental, one of the first patrons of the Oratorians in Portugal, was a prominent cleric in the Portuguese Royal House, and his allegiance to King Peter II (against his brother Afonso VI, former Portuguese king) was greatly beneficial to his work. The Portuguese Crown had reservations about the Jesuits in general, and decided therefore to back the Oratorians, seen as a countervailing force to the powerful Society of Jesus. Despite these excellent relations with



Image 27 – *The Levitation of Venerable Bartolomeu de Quental*. Unknown painter, mid-18th century (source: *Ascendens*)

Next page:

Image 28 – Church of the Mother of God, in Recife, Pernambuco (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

Fr. João Rodrigues Vitória. Their aim was to act as missionaries among the indigenous peoples and to reinforce the Catholic faith against Calvinist Protestantism, after the Dutch defeat in Brazil. The first congregation was established in Santo Amaro, in the outskirts of Olinda, in 1671, following the regulations of the Oratorian congregation in Lisbon. Shortly thereafter, several missionary villages were created in the Pernambucan *sertão* to evangelize indigenous peoples, among which the Mission of Our Lady of the Mountain, in Ararobá (later Cimbres), the Mission of Brejo dos Padres,



the Crown, however, and despite its outstanding work within Portuguese society in terms of education, assistance and spiritual support, the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri was suppressed in 1834, along with the other religious orders still active in Portugal and the overseas territories.

Out of all of Portugal's overseas territories, it was in Pernambuco, in Brazil²¹, that the Oratorians were most active: Fr. João Duarte do Sacramento, an enthusiastic follower of Fr. Bartolomeu de Quental, left for Brazil²² in 1659, joined by another Oratorian priest,

²¹ On the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Brazil, see: HOORNAERT, Eduardo. *História da Igreja no Brasil: Primeira Época – Período Colonial*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1983; LIMA, Ebion. *A Congregação do Oratório do Brasil*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980; MELLO, Evaldo Cabral de. “A briga dos Néris”. In: *Estudos Avançados*, 1994, vol. 8, no. 20, pp. 153-181.

²² Before travelling to Brazil, Fr. João Duarte do Sacramento tried to leave for India as a missionary. However, he was blocked by the Portuguese Crown. See: MELLO, Evaldo Cabral de. “A briga dos Néris”. In: *Estudos Avançados*, 1994, vol. 8, no. 20, p. 155.

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Image 29 – Map showing the Oratorian missions in Pernambuco, by José da Silva Pinto, 1813 (source: *Mapa topografico em que se mostram as terras que forão os reverendos cogregados...*, map from the Biblioteca Nacional do Brasil)

in Tacaratu, the Mission of the Mother of God, in Tapessurama, the Mission of Our Lady of the Presentation, in Ipojuca, and the Mission of Our Lady of Presentation, in Limoeiro²³. However, these missions were abandoned in the end of the 17th century and replaced by temporary missions. In 1680 the Oratorians started building the Church of the Mother of God in the city of Recife, which was to be their headquarters; from then on, the Brazilian Oratorians became more focused on the urban communities of Recife.

Another congregation from the Portuguese overseas empire, the Congregation of the Oratory of the Holy Cross of Miracles²⁴, established in Goa, India, also followed the rules of the Oratorian congregation of Lisbon. However, the Oratorian congregation of Goa is a *sui generis* case, which will be mentioned below. According to Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes, until the Pombaline reforms of the second half of the 18th century, the native clerics were relegated to secondary positions – or even interdicted – in most Catholic religious orders in-



Image 30 – Church of the Holy Cross of Miracles, depicted by Antonio Lopes Mendes, c.1862–71 (source: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal)

stalled in Goa. This situation, unlike that of other European countries, was seen as iniquitous by the Goan native clergy, especially because these clerics were of Brahmin origin, the highest (and dominant) caste in India²⁵. The congregation of Goan priests under the rule of the Oratorian congregation of Lisbon could be seen as an exception to this awkward situation, since they were allowed to behave almost as regular monastics and to continue their evangelization and missionary work, acting therefore as a kind of native Asian religious order.

It is no wonder, then, that a congregation of Goan priests gathered in 1682 in a small chapel in the Tiswadi Island. In 1684 the Church of the Holy Cross of Miracles, located in the Boavista Mount (in the city of Goa) and rebuilt in 1669–71, was given to the new congregation and

²³ LIMA, Eblon. *A Congregação do Oratório do Brasil*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980.

²⁴ On the Oratorian congregation in Goa, see: LOPES, Maria de Jesus dos Mártires. *Goa setecentista: Tradição e modernidade*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos dos Povos e Culturas de Expressão Portuguesa – Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 1996; NUNES, Manuel da Costa. *Documentação para a história da Congregação do Oratório de Santa Cruz dos Milagres do clero natural de Goa*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1966; REGO, António da Silva. *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente – Índia*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1993; REGO, Sebastião do. *Cronologia da Congregação do Oratório de Goa*. Lisbon: Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2009; ŽUPANOV, Inês. “Goan Brahmans in the Land of Promise: Missionaries, Spices and Gentiles in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Sri Lanka”. In: FLORES, Jorge (ed.). *Re-Exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007, pp. 171–210.

²⁵ LOPES, Maria de Jesus dos Mártires. *Goa setecentista: Tradição e modernidade*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos dos Povos e Culturas de Expressão Portuguesa, 1999, pp. 147–151. See also: XAVIER, Ângela Barreto. *A invenção de Goa: Poder imperial e conversões culturais nos séculos XVI e XVII*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008.



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Image 31 – Exterior of the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in Gangolli (source: courtesy of Fr. Charles Noronha)

Image 32 – Interior of the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in Gangolli (source: courtesy of Fr. Charles Noronha)



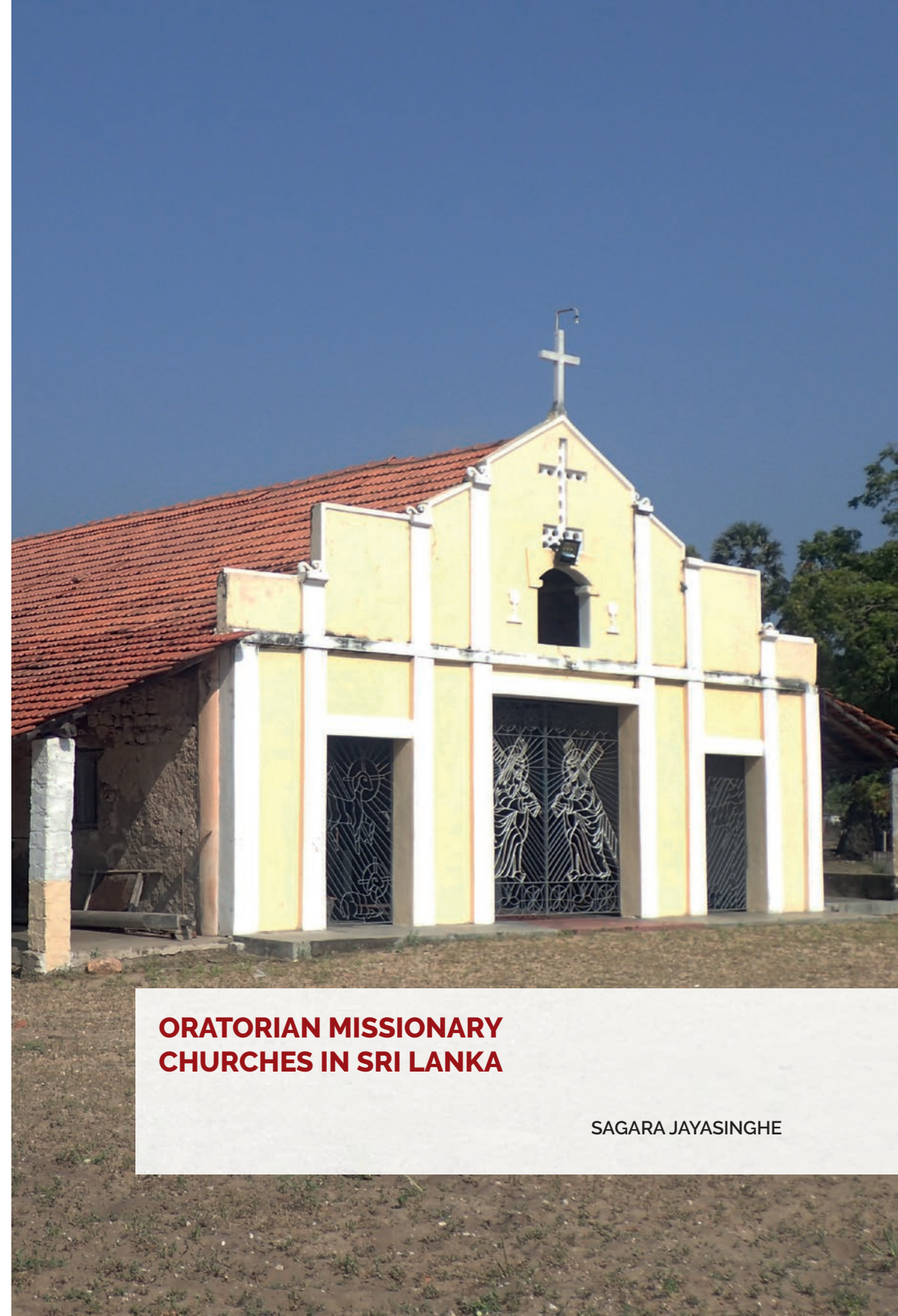
became its headquarters. In 1685 St. Joseph Vaz joined the congregation. It was on his initiative that Fr. Bartolomeu de Quental was asked to allow the Goan congregation to adopt the rules of the Oratorian congregation of Lisbon – a process that began in 1691, was formally accepted in 1706 and was supported by the Portuguese Crown. The Goan congregation, affiliated to the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, started growing fast, and soon a convent was attached to the church, with spacious cells and dormitories. Accordingly, the native clergy of this congregation rose to more privileged positions within the ecclesiastic hierarchy in Goa and India. The Goan Oratorians became increasingly important, which led them to partially replace the Jesuits in the education and training of the local clergy, following the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Portuguese territories, in 1759.

In fact, many of the Goan priests were trained by Jesuits, which is why missionary ideals were firmly embedded in their minds. Goa (Bardez and Salcette), Kanara, Sri Lanka, Malabar, and even distant regions such as Madagascar, Eastern Africa, Indonesia and Timor, received Oratorian missions from the Goan congregation. Despite the restricted admission to the religious orders, the native priests had become indispensable for carrying out the work of evangelization, as they were conversant with the local languages, culture, and customs. This was especially evident in Kanara: after the loss of the Portuguese bastions, this territory saw an intense dispute between the *Padroado*

do Oriente (the Eastern Patronage) and the *Propaganda Fide*. To counter the latter's influence, St. Joseph Vaz was sent to Kanara from 1681 to 1684, in order to rally the Catholic communities under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Goa. During his missionary work in Kanara, St. Joseph Vaz founded several churches, including one in Gangolli (near Kundapura) – the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, which was probably founded to replace or rebuild another church from the Portuguese period. In spite of several renovations over time, this humble church retains a notable resemblance to the Oratorian churches in Sri Lanka, with its three-nave plan, the monumental columns dividing the central nave and a single gable roof²⁶. Unfortunately, it was demolished some years ago and replaced by a new one.

Many other Oratorians from Goa continued St. Joseph Vaz's evangelization work in Kanara, as well as in Sri Lanka, where they were most successful (as will be seen below). However, after the Portuguese state expelled all religious orders from its territories in 1835 (including Goa), the Oratorian convent and church were abandoned, putting an end to the activity of Goan Oratorians.

²⁶ Besides Kanara, Malabar's churches may also have similarities with the Oratorian churches in Sri Lanka, since Sri Lankan Catholics were under the direct patronage of the Bishop of Cochin, himself a member of *Padroado do Oriente*.



ORATORIAN MISSIONARY CHURCHES IN SRI LANKA

SAGARA JAYASINGHE

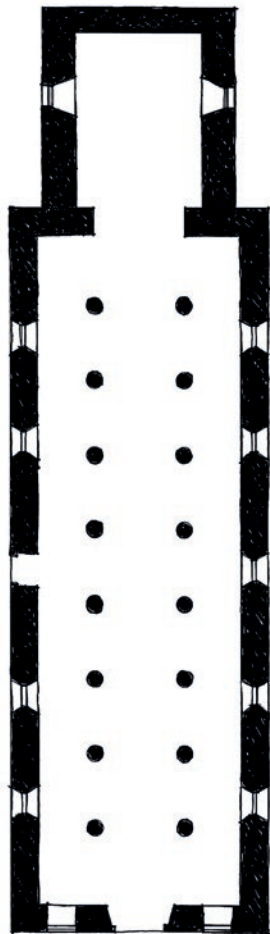


The Origins of missionary architecture in Sri Lanka²⁷

As mentioned earlier, the Catholic missionary architecture in Sri Lanka emerged in the middle of the 16th century, with the arrival of the members of several missionary religious orders under the patronage of Portugal's *Padroado do Oriente*. The chronicles *Conquista Spiritual do Oriente*, by Paulo da Trindade, and *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, by Fernão de Queiroz, provide an extensive list of churches built by Portuguese missionaries in the territories they evangelized, as stressed by Hélder Carita. In Sri Lanka, however, none of the original churches have survived, except for the remains of the Jesuit Church of the Holy Trinity, built in 1641 in Chankanai, in the Jaffna peninsula. The record drawn up in 1903 by John Penry Lewis, the Government Agent of Jaffna, about the state of the ruined churches includes references to the spatial organization of notable religious buildings erected by Portuguese missionaries during their stay. According to this record, the nave of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Chankanai, was divided into three aisles by two rows of pillars, eight on each side. The chancel, made of coral stone, was vaulted and separated from the nave by a triumphal arch. The roof of the nave seems to have been lower than that of the chancel²⁸. Today, however, the façade and the pillars are completely destroyed, and only the nave walls and the chancel remain.

²⁷ This text is mostly based in the following article: JAYASINGHE, Sagara. "Edifices in Dark Days: Origin, Types and Development of Oratorian Missionary Churches in Sri Lanka". In: *Antiphon*, 2016, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 279.

²⁸ LEWIS, John Penry. "The Portuguese-Dutch churches of Jaffna". In: *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*. Colombo: Office of the Times of Ceylon, 1916, vol. 2, p. 48.



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Image 34 – Ruins of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Chankanai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

On the left:

Image 33 – Plan of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Chankanai, based on the survey by John Penry Lewis, 1903 (source: LEWIS, John Penry. *The Portuguese-Dutch churches of Jaffna*)



religion. After the expulsion of all missionaries of the Portuguese *Padroado do Oriente*, native Catholics were left without a single priest for about four decades. During this period, most of the Portuguese missionary churches were demolished or remodelled to accommodate the newly established Calvinist brand of Christianity – the Dutch Reformed Church. The Dutch anti-Catholic attitude in other colonies in Asia was not as severe as it was in Sri Lanka.³¹ In fact, the religious policy of the Dutch VOC was motivated as much by political considerations as by religious convictions³². Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the campaign to convince the native Catholic population to convert to the new reformed faith was not very successful. The more severe the persecution of Catholics, the stronger their original faith became. This emphatic rejection of Protestant spirituality in Sri Lanka contributed greatly to the success of the Oratorian missions sent from Goa, an Indian territory under Portuguese rule³³.

³¹ PILENDRAN, Gnanamuthu. *Tamil Catholic Literary Tradition of Sri Lanka*. Jaffna: Catholic Student's Union, 1998, p. 12.

³² BARCATTÀ, Bede. *The Sylvestro-Benedictine Prelates and the Sri Lankan Church*. Kandy: Montefano Publications, 1995, p. 2.

³³ CARITA, Helder. "Ceilão/Sri Lanka". In: MATTOSO, José (dir.). *Património de origem portuguesa no Mundo – Arquitetura e urbanismo*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011, p. 349.

The Dutch occupation of Sri Lanka began with the expulsion of the Portuguese in the middle of the 17th century²⁹. Since the Portuguese Crown and the Catholic Church were closely linked in the State of India, the Dutch, as soon as they gained possession of the maritime territories³⁰, used all available means to rid Sri Lanka of the Catholic

²⁹ The Dutch conquest of Sri Lanka was carried out by the East India Company, commonly known as VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie).

³⁰ BARCATTÀ, Bede. *The Sylvestro-Benedictine Prelates and the Sri Lankan Church*. Kandy: Montefano Publications, 1995, p. 2.

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Image 35 – The “Plakkaat” (or Edict) issued by the Dutch against the practice of Catholicism in Sri Lanka (source: Commemorative volume of the Pope’s visit to Sri Lanka, 1995)

Image 36 – Exterior of the former Jesuit church of Vaddukoddai, remodelled by the Dutch and currently being used as Cathedral of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

As already mentioned, the Congregation of the Oratory of the Holy Cross of Miracles was founded in Goa in the second half of the 17th century. Affiliated to the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, the Goan congregation acted almost as a native religious order. Composed mainly of Catholic Brahmin priests from Goa, it is thought by many to be the only native Asian missionary order to have supplied missionaries to another Asian country – in this case, Sri Lanka. This missionary outreach is also recorded as the first case of a nation-wide mission territory operated entirely and exclusively by Asian missionaries. The activity of the Oratorian mission in Sri Lanka can thus be seen as a unique and epic episode within the global history of the expansion of Catholic Christianity.

St. Joseph Vaz was the founder of the Oratorian mission in Sri Lanka. He stealthily entered the island in 1687, as a beggar, and gradually encountered the local communities. He began his apostolate in Jaffna and moved afterwards to Kandy, which became the centre of his missionary work³⁴. After being part of the Diocese of Cochin for nearly 300 years, Sri Lanka became an autonomous Apostolic Vicariate in 1834, despite the strong protests of

³⁴ BARCATTÀ, Bede. *The Sylvestro-Benedictine Prelates and the Sri Lankan Church*. Kandy: Montefano Publications, 1995, p. 3.

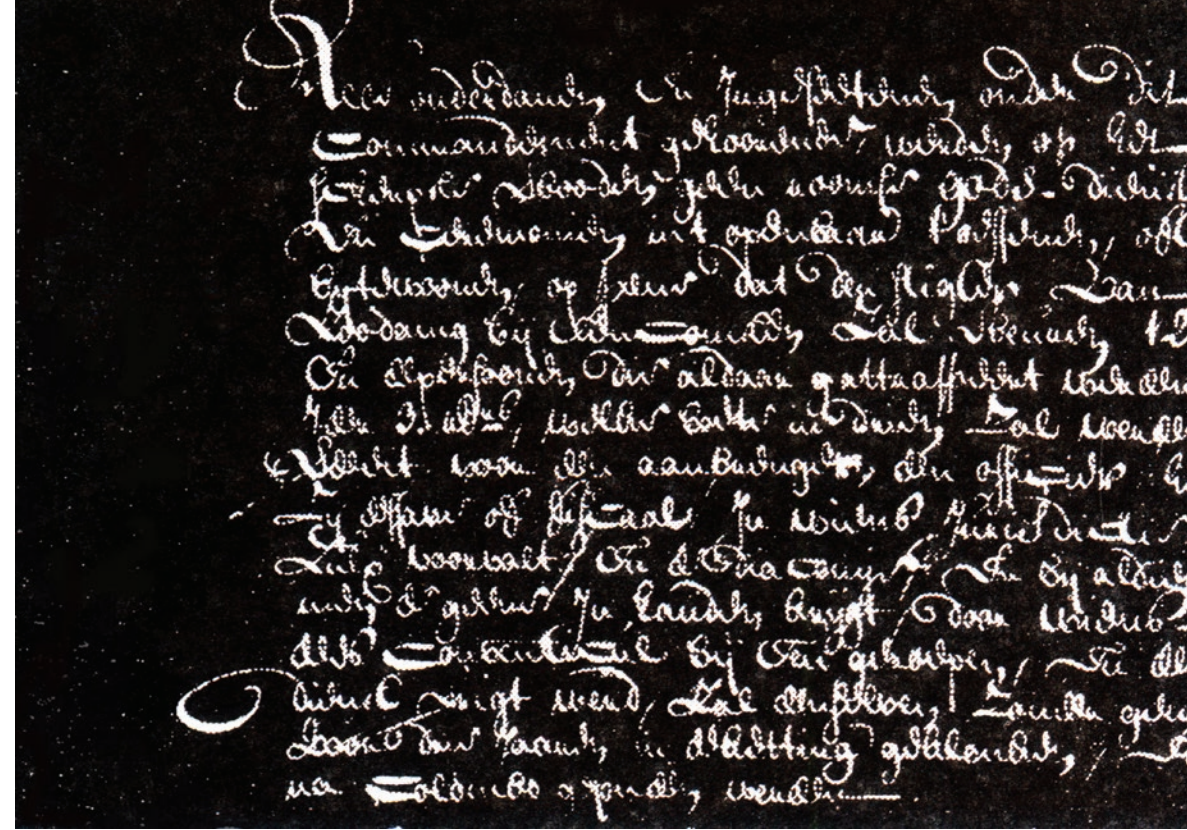




Image 37 – Interior of the former Jesuit church in Vaddukoddai
(source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

the *Padroado do Oriente*³⁵. The new vicariate was directly dependent on the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, usually known as *Propaganda Fide*. However, an Oratorian missionary, Fr. Vincent do Rosario, was appointed in 1838 as the first Vicar Apostolic of Sri Lanka, and succeeded in 1843 by another Oratorian missionary, Fr. Antonio Caetano, the last missionary sent by the Goan Oratorian congregation.

³⁵ Four autonomous Apostolic Vicariates were created between 1832 and 1836 in the Indian and Sri Lankan territories under the *Padroado do Oriente*, namely the vicariates of Madras, Calcutta, Coromandel and Sri Lanka.



Image 38 – Portrait of St. Joseph Vaz. Unknown painter, first half of the 18th century (source: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal)

In 1847 Sri Lanka was divided into two vicariates: the northern Vicariate of Jaffna and the southern Vicariate of Colombo. Henceforth, with the influx of new missionary congregations from Europe, the two vicariates were gradually entrusted to the French congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and to the Sylvestro-Benedictine Congregation, of Italian origin. Consequently, the Goan Oratorian activity in Sri Lanka came to an end in 1874, with the death of the last Oratorian missionary, Fr. Mathes Caetano. During a period of 150 years, and despite various difficulties, the religious space of the Roman Catholic Church in Sri Lanka was solely occupied by the Oratorians and their decidedly Indo-Portuguese architectural traditions³⁶.

³⁶ JAYASINGHE, Sagara. "The remains of Faith: Portuguese-influenced ecclesiastical art and architecture in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka". In: CUROPOS, Fernando; SILVA, Maria Araújo da (ed.).

The network of Oratorian churches in Sri Lanka

As regards the Oratorian building models in Sri Lanka, the ultimate architectural solution seems to have been developed autonomously, as a response to prevailing political and economic conditions, as well as to certain aspects of the environmental conditions of the region in which the models evolved. Writing about the old Cathedral of Jaffna, Swaminathapillai Gnanaprakasas confirms this view: “(...) St. Mary’s Cathedral is a large edifice but without any pretensions to architectural effect. It is an old Goanese style with low walls and two rows of wooden pillars running through the middle of the nave. Begun in 1789 to replace the little shed which had done duty for church under the Dutch penal laws, it was made ready for use in 1794 by Father Leonardo Ribeiro of the Oratory of Goa (...)”³⁷.

The members of the Goan Oratory played a decisive role in the reconstruction and restoration of the territorial network of Catholic churches in Sri Lanka as it existed at the end of the Portuguese era: first, under the influence of the Portuguese *Padroado do Oriente*, during the time of the Dutch persecution, and later with the relaxation of religious policies by the British. This fact is clearly corroborated by the Portuguese inscription on one of the roof beams in the nave of the famous Church of St. Anne, in Palakuda³⁸: “reconstructed by Father Pedro de Noronha, from the Congregation of the Oratorians, in 1843 AD”.

Colloque de L’Asie Portugaise: Des arts et des lettres. Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2017.

³⁷ GNANAPRAKASAS, Swaminathapillai. *XXV Years’ Catholic Progress*. Jaffna: St. Joseph’s Catholic Press, 1999, p. 104.

³⁸ Called in the present day as Talawila.

R.º P.º P. DE NORONHA, DA CON. DO ORA. A. D. 1843.

Image 39 – Portuguese inscription at the Church of St. Anne, in Palakuda (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Similarly, the Oratorians were able to establish a new architectural tradition, adapted to the temporal and spiritual needs of the native Catholic population. This “Oratorian model” (sometimes referred to in contemporary chronicles as “Goanese style”), as well as the entire context in which it emerged, is unique to Sri Lanka. It is the inimitable achievement of an Asian missionary Catholic congregation, unparalleled in the wider history of Christian architecture. From the point of view of the comparison between “form and space”, Oratorian church models are radically different from those found in other Christian contexts in Sri Lanka. The “Oratorian model” privileges a particular experience of religious space, different from the ones favoured by other Christian denominations in the island.

During the first decades of activity, the Oratorians established their mission stations according to the island’s main geopolitical divisions: while most of the low-lying maritime territories were under the authority of the Dutch VOC, the forest and mountain areas around Kandy belonged to the Sinhalese Kingdom of Kandy³⁹. In the Dutch territories, a “secret chapel” might be erected whenever influential Catholics were the heads of the community⁴⁰. Sometimes, holy images belonging to the old Portuguese churches, rescued from the Calvinist iconoclasts

³⁹ ŽUPANOV, Inês. “Goan Brahmans in the Land of Promise: Missionaries, Spices and Gentiles in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Sri Lanka”. In: FLORES, Jorge (ed.). *Portugal – Sri Lanka: 500 Years*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2006, pp.171–210.

⁴⁰ BOUDENS, Robert. *The Catholic Church in Ceylon under the Dutch rule*. Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1957, p.157.



Image 40 – Interior view of the nave of the Church of St. Anne, in Palakuda (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

and hidden away, were worshipped in those secret chapels⁴¹. In contrast, a large number of “public churches” were built in the Kingdom of Kandy, due to the freedom of public worship that existed within its boundaries. In public churches, the missionaries stayed on longer and the celebrations attracted people from distant places, including those subjected to the Dutch rule⁴². By 1746, eleven public churches had already been built, two of them⁴³ in the form of monasteries with sufficient room to house their members⁴⁴.

⁴¹ GNANAPRAKASAR, Swaminathapillai; PAVILUPILLAI, Mariampillai. *Catholicism in Jaffna*. Jaffna: St. Joseph’s Catholic Press, 1986, p. 14.

⁴² PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 2005, vol. 1, p. 321.

⁴³ The religious houses in Puttalam and Bolawatte.

⁴⁴ See: PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1983, vol. 2.

Eventually, the Oratorians were able to divide the mission territories in Sri Lanka into eight districts, positioning their members in these new centres. With time, under very trying circumstances, they succeeded in building a reasonable number of churches and chapels in both political sides of the island. According to James Tennent, by the beginning of the 18th century the Roman Catholics were in possession of 400 churches in all parts of Sri Lanka, while the Dutch Presbyterians had barely 100 congregations and converts⁴⁵.

After the banishment of the Oratorians from the Kingdom of Kandy, in the middle of the 18th century, their activities were confined almost exclusively to the western and northern low-lying maritime territories, as well as to the forest area of the northern mainland territory of Vanni⁴⁶. After almost a century of persecution, the substantial relaxation of the Dutch anti-Catholic policy allowed the Oratorians the freedom to exercise their faith and to continue building in the aforementioned regions. One example of this leniency was the official offer to the Oratorians of a plot of land in Colombo, for the construction of a church. This was where the “legendary Miracle” of the Oratorian missionary Fr. Anthony took place, eventually giving rise to the famed Shrine of St. Anthony, in Kochchikade, where it remains to this day⁴⁷. It is also worth mentioning that this was the first time that the Catholics exercised their freedom to perform religious activities in the city of Colombo.

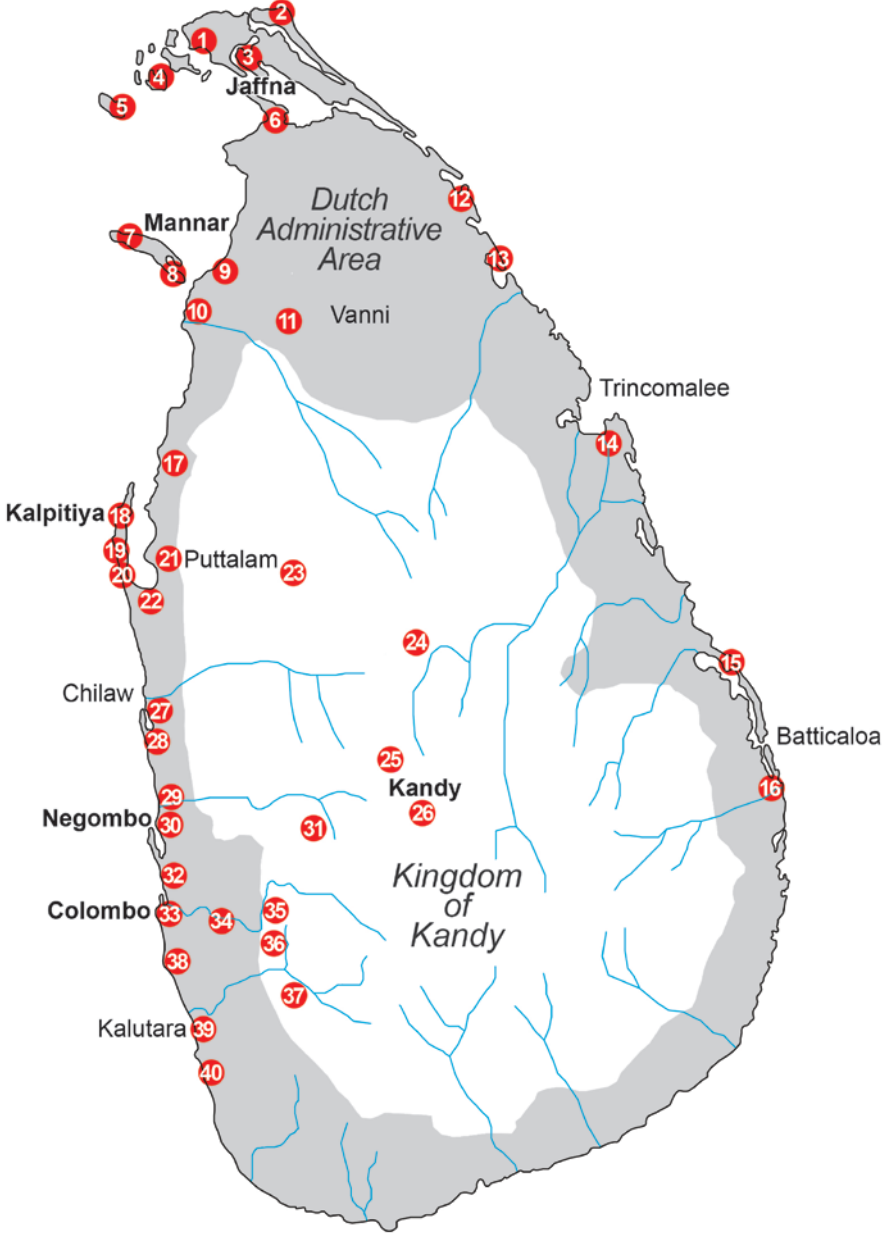
With the advent of the British administration, the Oratorians were gradually relieved of the restrictions previously imposed on them by the Dutch, and given more opportunities to expand their

⁴⁵ TENNENT, James Emerson. *Christianity in Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998, p. 53.

⁴⁶ Vanni is a common name referring to the forest areas in the vast dry zones found in most of northern Sri Lanka. Currently, the term applies particularly to the districts of Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Mannar.

⁴⁷ On the legend of the miracle performed by Fr. Anthony, see: JAYASINGHE, Sagara. *Guide to the Permanent Exhibition – Museum of St. Anthony*. Colombo: St. Anthony’s Shrine, 2013.

Locations of Oratorian mission stations



- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 – Sillalai | 21 – Puttalam |
| 2 – Point Pedro | 22 – Kuruvilulam |
| 3 – Jaffna | 23 – Galgamuwa |
| 4 – Kayts | 24 – Wahakotte |
| 5 – Delft | 25 – Wauda |
| 6 – Punnarim | 26 – Kandy |
| 7 – Pesalai | 27 – Chilaw |
| 8 – Mannar | 28 – Madampe |
| 9 – Mantota | 29 – Kammala |
| 10 – Arippu | 30 – Negombo |
| 11 – Madhu | 31 – Narangoda |
| 12 – Mullativu | 32 – Weligampitiya |
| 13 – Atambil | 33 – Colombo |
| 14 – Kottiyar | 34 – Hanwella |
| 15 – Puliyantivu | 35 – Sitawaka |
| 16 – Kalmunai | 36 – Maniyangama |
| 17 – Pomparippu | 37 – Ratnapura |
| 18 – Kalpitiya | 38 – Moratuwa |
| 19 – Etale | 39 – Kalamulla |
| 20 – Maripo | 40 – Beruwala |

network of churches. Vito Perniola provides a comprehensive account of over 280 churches and chapels built by the Oratorians, along with their locations and dedications⁴⁸. Later, from 1832 onwards, the Oratorians came to enjoy full religious freedom. Since then, the number of Catholics rose all over the island and the places for Catholic worship became insufficient and hopelessly inadequate.

Image 41 – Geopolitical division of the Sri Lankan territories between the Dutch and the Sinhalese rules, and the locations of Oratorian mission stations (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

⁴⁸ PERNIOLA, Vito. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The British Period*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 2012.

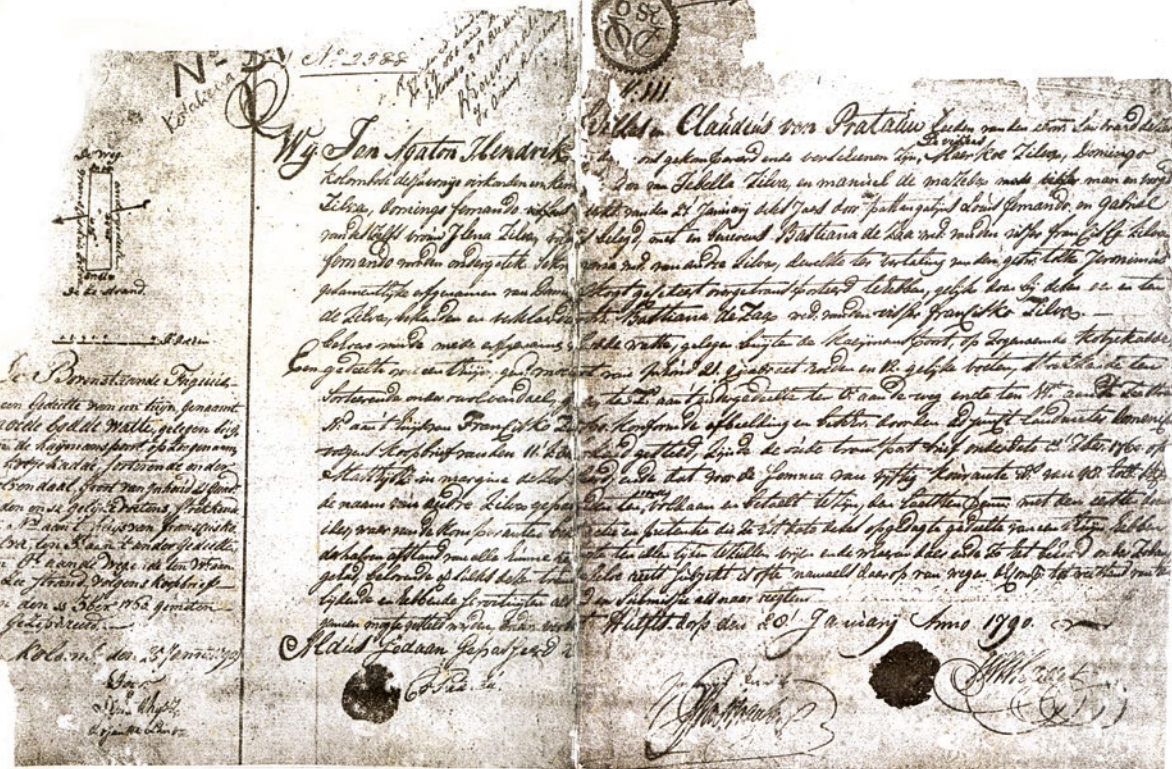


Image 42 – The VOC title deed concerning the land in Kochchikade (Colombo) where the Church of St. Anthony was later built. This land was officially handed over by the Dutch on 20 January 1790 (source: Archives of the Archbishop’s House, Colombo)

quate. Enlarging the existing churches and building new ones became, therefore, a priority⁴⁹.

Regarding the larger churches built during these thriving years, it is worth highlighting the work of Fr. Pedro de Noronha, an Oratorian missionary who built two architecturally significant churches – one in Parappankandaal, in the mainland of Mantota (possibly built between 1838 and 1840) and the other in Palakuda, in the peninsula of Kalpitiya (built between 1840 and 1843). These two

⁴⁹ DEP, Arthur. *The Oratorian Mission in Sri Lanka (1795–1874): Being a history of the Catholic Church*. Colombo: self-published book, 1987, p. 14.

buildings are arguably the most perfect and complete examples of the church model that came to define the Oratorians’ architectural legacy in Sri Lanka. The Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Parappankandaal, the stronghold of the Oratorian congregation during the conflict between the *Padroado do Oriente* and the *Propaganda Fide*⁵⁰, is presumably the largest and most important Oratorian church built on the island. Although the façade and nave columns have been subjected to major structural and architectural modifications during the last decades, the overall building is relatively well preserved. As for the Church of St. Anne, in Palakuda, although modern-day interventions and disproportionate additions have distorted the building’s original structure, the architectural details of Oratorian origin are still visible on the nave.

The Oratorian church model and its spatial features

The simplest and most common church type used during the last period of the Oratorian missions consists in a building with three naves, two rows of pillars or columns, a triumphal arch and a narrow chancel (with a roof that is usually higher than that of the nave). The introduction of two rows of wooden columns in the nave might have been an alternative to the masonry columns previously found in churches from the Portuguese period. This alteration is one of the most specific and conspicuous features of the Oratorians’ architectural style, along with the narrow chancel with a triumphal arch.

This change in the interior of the Oratorian churches in Sri Lanka corresponds to the adoption of a new church type, which can be named the “Oratorian model church”. The spatial layout of this new archi-

⁵⁰ Also known as the “Mantota Schism”. For more details, see: DEP, Arthur. “The Padroado-Propaganda Conflict in Sri Lanka, 1845–1850”. In: *Aquinas Journal*, 1985, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 46–51.



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Image 43 – Exterior view of the Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Parappankandaal (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Image 44 – Interior view of the Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Parappankandaal (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)



tectural type is quite similar to that of the aforementioned Church of the Holy Trinity, in Chankanai, built by the Portuguese, and seems to indicate the successful assimilation of previous Portuguese influences⁵¹. The best-known example of this new model is the spatial layout of the Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai, one of the oldest and foremost Catholic missionary stations of the Oratorian era. This church, currently known as “Karthar Kovil”⁵², is presumably the oldest surviving Oratorian church in the island of Mannar. Unfortunately, it is badly run-down. The façade was remodelled in the middle of the 20th century, a common practice in other Oratorian churches.

Concerning the construction of larger churches in the main Oratorian mission stations, another variant of the above church type consisted in introducing two side chapels – one on each side of the chancel – with two symmetrical arches also placed on both sides of the triumphal arch. This variant is visible in the Church of St. Anne, in Keerimalai, the Church of St. James, in Kilaly, and the Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam.

⁵¹ JAYASINGHE, Sagara. “Edifices in Dark Days: Origin, Types and Development of Oratorian Missionary Churches in Sri Lanka”. In: *Antiphon*, 2016, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 279.

⁵² In Tamil, “Karthar” refers to the image of Christ after the Scourging at the Pillar and the Crowning with Thorns; “Kovil” is the Tamil word for a distinct style of Hindu temple with Dravidian architecture. However, Catholics in northern Sri Lanka also use this term when referring to their place of worship.



Image 45 – Exterior of the Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai, before the renovation in the mid-20th century (source: LEWCOCK, Ronald; SANSONI, Barbara; SENANAYAKE, Laky. *The Architecture of an Island: The living heritage of Sri Lanka*)

Image 46 – Exterior of the Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)



Image 47 – Interior of the Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

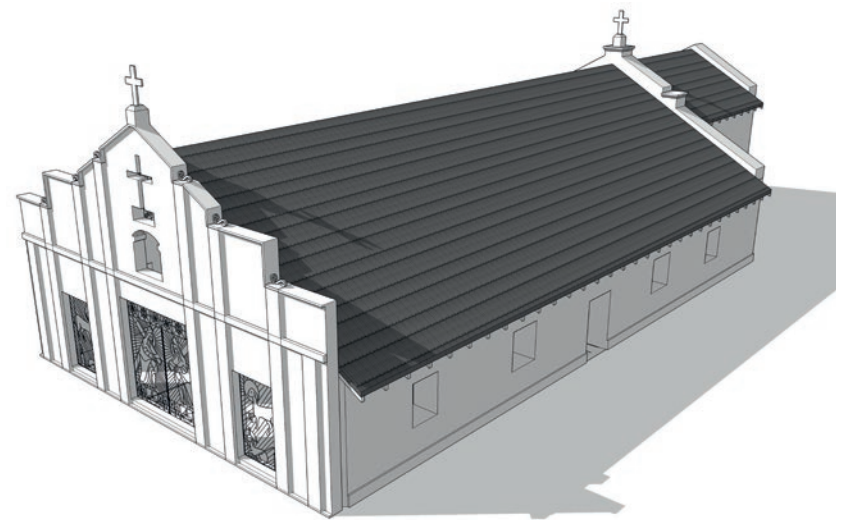


Image 48 – Three-dimensional view of the primitive Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

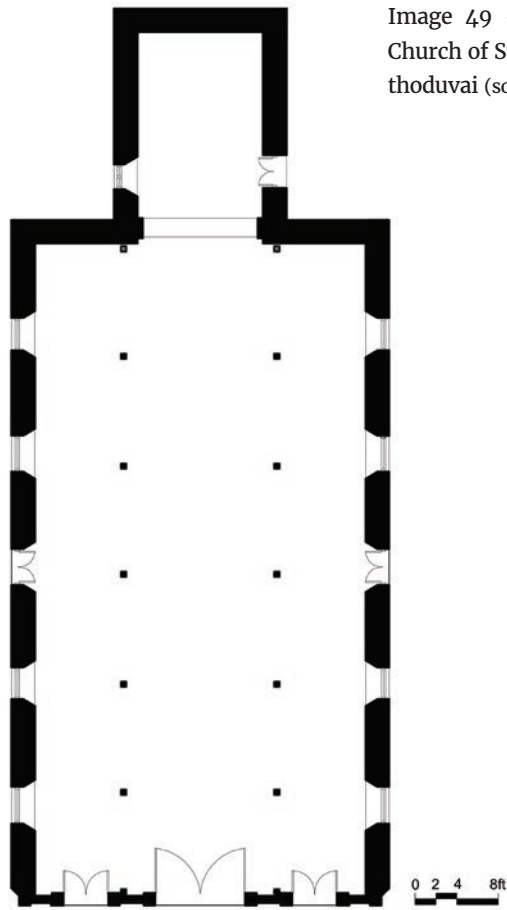


Image 49 – Plan of the primitive Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaitthoduvai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)



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Image 50 – Exterior of the Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

Image 51 – Interior of the Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)

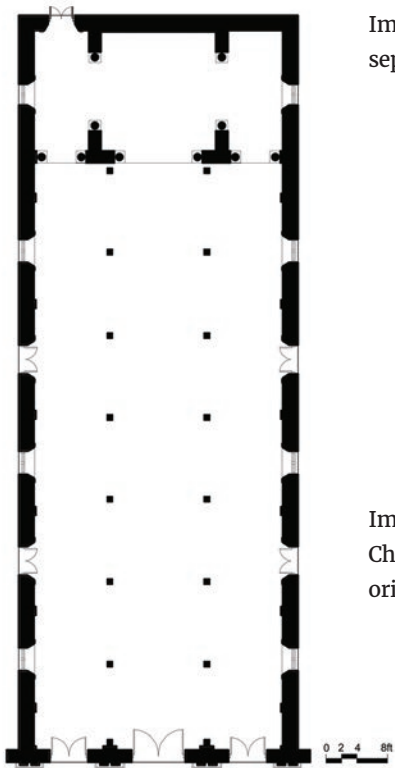
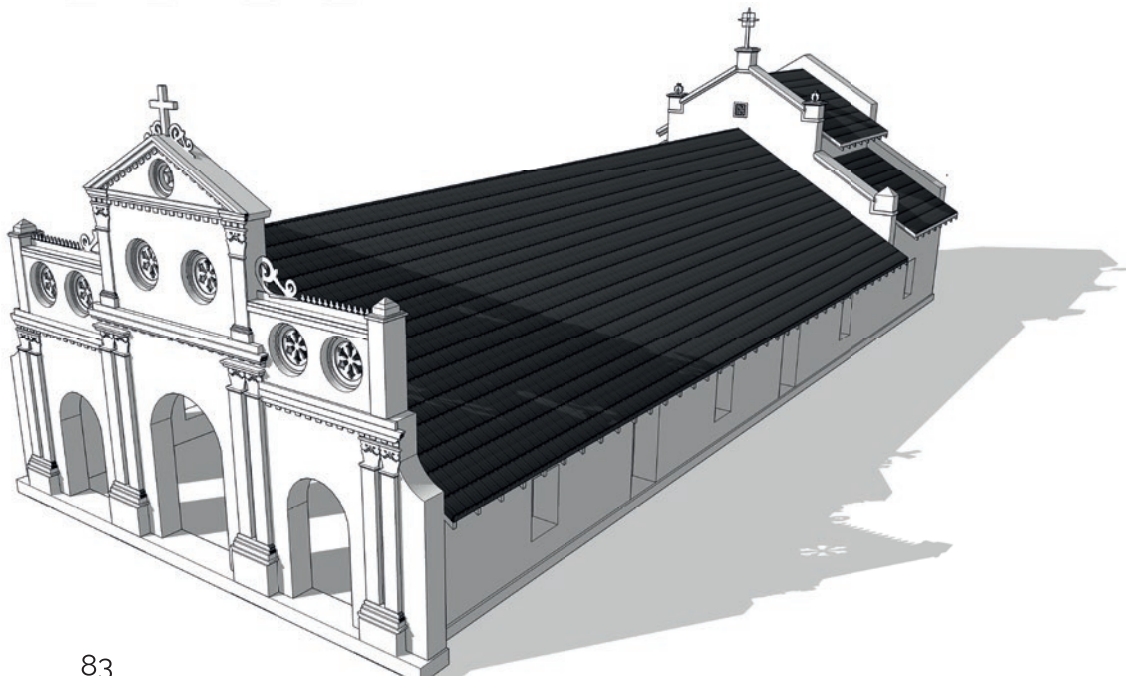


Image 52 – Original plan of the Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Image 53 – Three-dimensional view of the Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam, in its original form (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)



Concerning the use of materials, these churches are mostly made of timber and masonry, thereby following the region's main building traditions. They are also adapted to the local climate, with their usual East-West orientation intended to minimize the exposition to direct sunlight. The churches' narrow and elongated shape, similar to that of other religious buildings in the region, allows them to be filled with natural light and properly ventilated. The roof, covered with clay tiles, acts as a thermal mass that renders the interior more comfortable. On both walls of the nave, the doors and windows are placed in front of each other in order to enhance cross ventilation⁵³.

In conclusion, the practical architectural solutions tested by the Oratorians in Sri Lanka appear to have triggered a rejuvenation of the Catholic churches, creating a distinctive style which began to penetrate the vast hinterland of the northern vicariate, from Puttalam to Mannar, Jaffna and the small islands surrounding it. The Oratorians erected many churches in their mission territories in Sri Lanka, at least until the emergence of a new architectural trend, promoted by the European missionaries of the *Propaganda Fide*, who had a distinct preference for Gothic and Classicist architecture⁵⁴. Yet even during this period, and even when the master builders were European, the "Goanese style" continued to influence the construction of churches in northern Sri Lanka. This is evident on the naves of the Church of St. Mary and the Church of St. Thomas, both in Delft Island and both dating from the early 20th century, where the architectural legacy of the "Oratorian model church" is clearly visible. Although these churches are smaller in scale, the roof structure is very similar to that of the Oratorian Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Parappankandaal.

⁵³ JAYASINGHE, Sagara. "Nineteenth century Catholic Church architecture in Sri Lanka: Evolution of a tropical model". In: EMMITT, Stephen; ADEYEYE, Kemi (ed.). *International Conference on Integrated Design: Building Our Future*. Bath: University of Bath, 2016, pp. 291-299.

⁵⁴ PEIRIS, Anoma. *Imagining Modernity: The Architecture of Valentine Gunasekara*. Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake, 2007, p. 95.

In most Oratorian churches in northern Sri Lanka, the cultural conventions and religious sensibilities of the native community have often determined the interior decorations. Historically, the northernmost Kingdom of Jaffna was established nearly a thousand years ago, and before the conversion to Catholicism of the inhabitants of northern Sri Lanka, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the population was mostly made up of Tamil Hindus. Their traditions and beliefs, although not completely identical, are close to those of the people of southern India. According to Hindu beliefs, the architectural constructions had to follow rigid rules and hierarchies⁵⁵; therefore, Hindu temples (or “kovils”) used to have verandahs, courtyards, pavilions and walkways, often supported by columns (usually made of timber) with elaborate capitals decorated with brackets. It is interesting to note that, due to a process of cultural assimilation, the architectural detailing of the most conspicuous element of the Oratorian architecture in Sri Lanka – the interior wooden columns – seems to have been influenced by the details of vernacular Hindu buildings of the region. These columns are surmounted by mortised capitals with four-sided decorative brackets, which carry the load of the large beams, thereby preserving a building method typical of the ancient Hindu tradition.

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Image 54 – Exterior view of the Church of St. Mary, in Delft Island (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Image 55 – Interior view of the Church of St. Mary, in Delft Island (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

⁵⁵ LEWCOCK, Ronald; SANSONI, Barbara; SENANAYAKE, Laky. *The Architecture of an Island: The living heritage of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Barefoot, 2010, p. 53.





Wood carved retables⁵⁶ are another architectural element testifying to the Portuguese influence in local cultures of the region, and to its impact on the Oratorian building programme in Sri Lanka. These retables feature gilded woodwork, painted relief work and sculptures. The finest example still found on the island is the old retablo reinstated at the new Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Pesalai. However, the Churches of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam, of St. James, in Kilaly, and of Sts. Peter and Paul, in Palakuda, still retain their old retables. The overall composition and layout of these retables bear a clear reference to their counterparts in Kerala, and especially in the outskirts of Cochin, where the Portuguese had a profound influence in the local Catholic art and culture.

Image 56 – Details of a wooden column from the Church of St. Anne, in Keerimalai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

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Image 57 – Interior view of the old Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Pesalai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)



This cultural interchange is further corroborated by Swaminathapillai Gnanaprakasara's description of the decorative retablo placed in the Church of St. Nicholas, in Navanturai, an old Oratorian church. According to his description, this church is a unique example of the Portuguese influence in Sri Lankan art: the sixteen artistic panels display beautiful drawings of birds and flowers, probably brought from Cochin⁵⁷. But some retables are decorated with plants and figurative motifs inspired by the local aesthetic culture, incorporated in these elaborate works of art. The clearest illustration of this influence is the retablo of the Church of St. Joseph, in Kathankulam.

⁵⁷ GNANAPRAKASARA, Swaminathapillai. *XXV Years' Catholic Progress*. Jaffna: St. Joseph's Catholic Press, 1999, p. 135.

⁵⁶ A retablo (or altarpiece) is a wooden structure which incorporates elaborate sculptures and/or paintings, placed behind the altar, on a masonry or wooden pedestal, or in other locations inside the church. This structure is referred in Tamil as "Sinkasanam", which means "throne".

The Remains of Dark Days

Today, the remains of churches following the aforementioned “Oratorian model” are unfortunately very sparse, scattered across the old missionary stations of the northern vicariate, particularly in the outskirts of Jaffna, Mannar and Kalpitiya. In the last years, I have visited and documented more than 20 of these buildings. Although most of the churches are now either ruined, run-down or heavily remodelled, the Indo-Portuguese influence – albeit a second-hand influence, mediated by that of the Goan Oratorians – is still tangible, testifying to the intense and dynamic religious and political encounters of the past centuries.



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Image 58 – Retable from the old Oratorian church, reinstated at the new Church of Our Lady of Victory, in Pesalai (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Image 59 – Retable in the Church of St. Joseph, in Kathankulam (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)



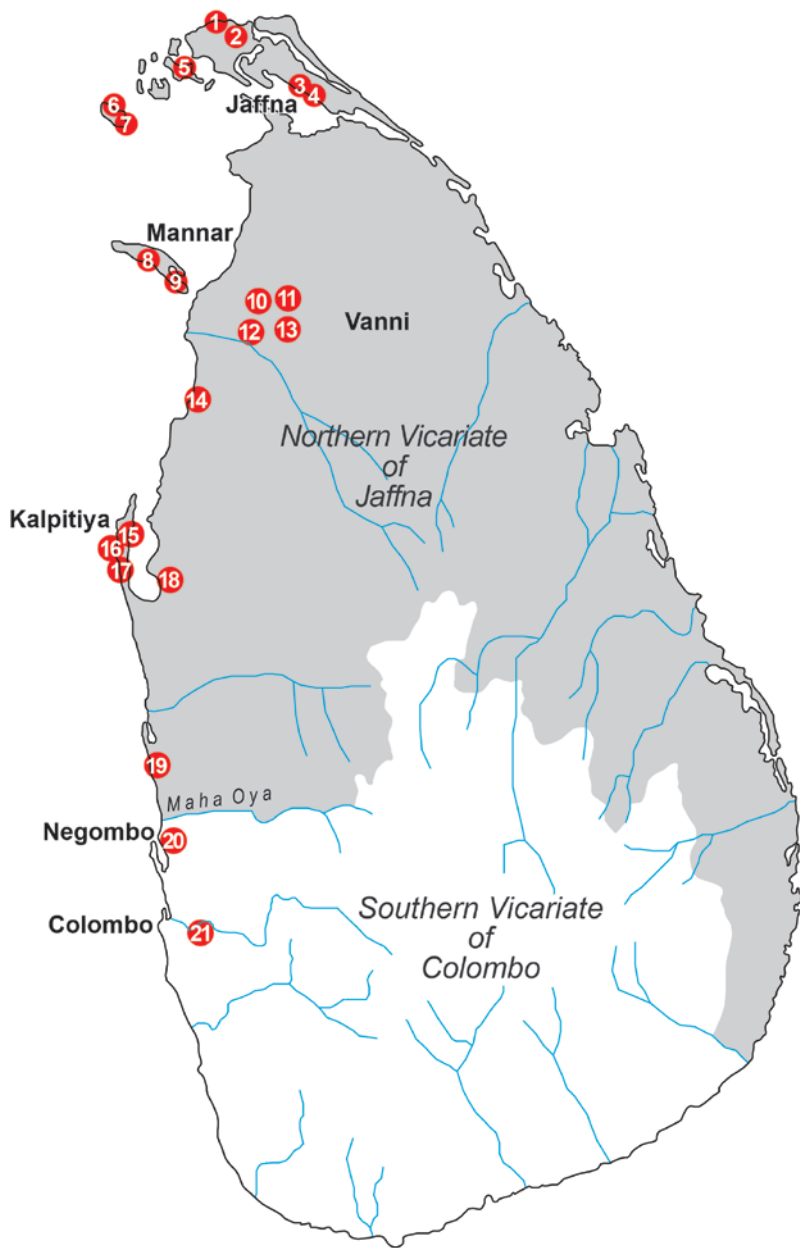


Image 60 – Map with the locations of the churches following the “Oratorian model” that were surveyed by the author (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Locations of the churches with “Oratorian model” surveyed by the author

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 – Church of St. Anne, in Keerimalai | 13 – Church of St. Joseph, in Kanthankulam |
| 2 – Church of St. James, in Ilavalai | 14 – Church of the Queen of Heaven, in Mullikulam |
| 3 – Church of St. James, in Kilaly | 15 – Church of Sts. Peter & Paul, in Palakuda |
| 4 – Church of St. Michael, in Kilaly | 16 – Church of St. Anne, in Talawila |
| 5 – Church of St. Mary, in Allaippiddi | 17 – Church of St. Sebastian, in Narakkalliya |
| 6 – Church of St. Mary, in Delft Island | 18 – Church of St. Mary, in Puttalam |
| 7 – Church of St. Thomas, in Delft Island | 19 – Church of St. Mary, in Mattakotuwa |
| 8 – Church of St. Bartholomew, in Olaithoduvai | 20 – Church of St. Lazarus, in Hunupitiya |
| 9 – Church of St. Mary, in Mannar | 21 – Church of St. Anne, in Nawagamuwa |
| 10 – Church of Our Lady of Refuge, in Salampan | |
| 11 – Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, in Palayadipudukulam | |
| 12 – Church of Our Lady of Assumption, in Parappankandaal | |

A good example is the Church of St. James, in Kilaly (near Jaffna). The original church dates back to the Portuguese era, and its fame is echoed in the Jesuits’ Annual Letters as early as 1641, as mentioned by Swaminathapillai Gnanaprakasara⁵⁸. Even after serving as battleground in the recent civil war that embroiled the region, the architectural inheritance of the Oratorian model is still visible in the current building. The architectural and decorative details of Oratorian origin still prevail in the slender wooden columns and the ruined wooden retable.

Recently, however, the architectural traditions established over three centuries through various forms of Indo-Portuguese influence are being swept away, as can be seen in the new religious buildings

⁵⁸ GNANAPRAKASARA, Swaminathapillai. *XXV Years’ Catholic Progress*. Jaffna: St. Joseph’s Catholic Press, 1999, p. 69.



Image 61 – Day of the annual church festival of the Church of St. James, in Kilaly, after a 17-year occupation by military forces (source: courtesy of Kalyani Balathas)

promoted by local Catholic communities. This situation is clearly exemplified by the reconstruction of the Oratorian Church of St. Mary, in Mannar, a 175 year-old building: according to the Portuguese inscription found on a beam on the roof, this church was built in 1834 by Fr. Francisco de Mendonza, an Oratorian missionary of Goan origin⁵⁹. But despite the antiquity of the church and its historical, cultural and artistic value, it was demolished some years ago and replaced by a new one, which is being built nearby.

⁵⁹ GNANAPRAKASAR, Swaminathapillai. *XXV Years' Catholic Progress*. Jaffna: St. Joseph's Catholic Press, 1999, p. 221.



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Image 62 – Exterior view of the old Church of St. Mary, in Mannar, already demolished (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

Image 63 – Interior view of the old Church of St. Mary, in Mannar (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

All things considered, it is shocking to see that buildings such as the Church of St. Mary in Mannar, which are of significant aesthetic and historical value, were (and are still being) razed to the ground and rebuilt, with no reference to their religious and architectural origins. Accordingly, the safeguarding of these lesser-known pieces of cultural heritage, unique in Sri Lanka (and in the whole world), has become a vital need. Otherwise, they will vanish forever...



Image 64 – Exterior view of the old Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, in Palayadipudukulam, during the demolition process (source: Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos)



On the left:

Image 65 – Exterior view of the new Church of St. Mary, in Mannar, still being built (source: Sagara Jayasinghe)

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