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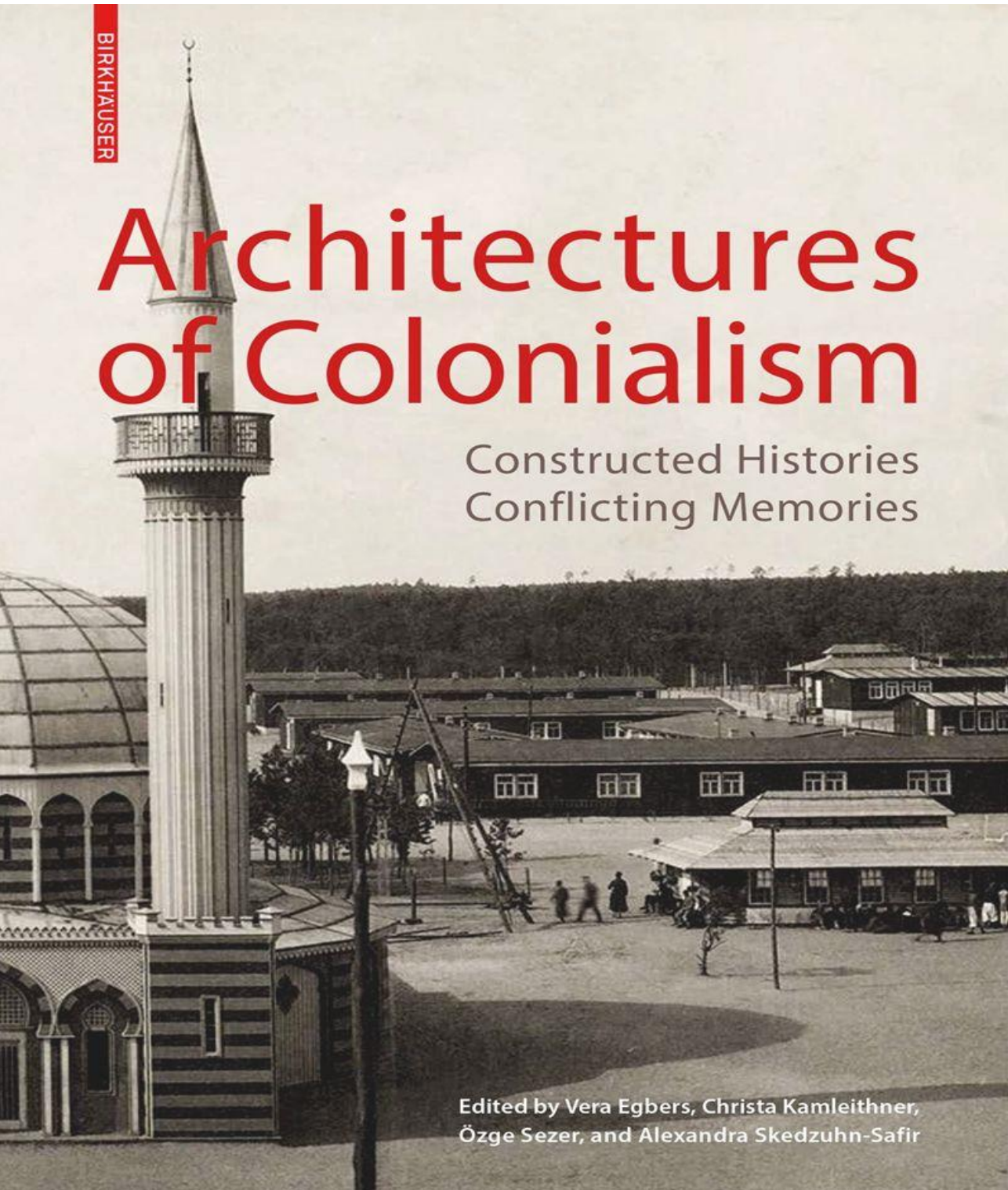

JOAQUIM RODRIGUES DOS SANTOS

(Re)Contextualizing *Goencho Saib*'s Basilica

The Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa as a Paradigm of Contested Transcultural Heritage

When one imagines Goa (India), two images immediately come to mind: paradisiacal beaches with white sand framed by clear seawater, blue sky, and green palm trees; and the impressive red-dish-brown Basilica of Bom Jesus. The Goan beaches are marvelous, like so many other beaches around the world, but the Basilica of Bom Jesus, undoubtedly the Goan *ex libris*, is truly unique.

The basilica is a major symbol of Goa: it houses the tomb of Saint Francis Xavier, the "Apostle of the East"—also known locally as *Goencho Saib*, "Lord of Goa," in the Konkani language—and gives a glimpse of the "Golden Goa" and "Rome of the East," the former capital of the Portuguese Eastern Seaborne Empire that was then one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. Built by the Jesuits at the turn of the seventeenth century, the Basilica of Bom Jesus received the saint's remains soon after his death and subsequently became a major site for Catholic worship in Asia.

In the first half of the 1950s, facing the independence of the Indian Union and its claims over Portuguese India, the Portuguese dictatorial regime, as part of its intention to use heritage as an ideological propaganda instrument, restored[1] the Basilica of Bom Jesus, causing a radical change in its image and simultaneously provoking problems with its conservation. After the integration of Goa into India, the basilica became a paradigm of contested transcultural heritage, incorporating multiple challenges: this Goan architectural masterpiece, with Portuguese and Indian influences, is the subject of a robust debate among those who consider it a colonial symbol, those who reclaim it as a Goan symbol, heritage lovers who demand effective measures to preserve it, those whose subsistence relies on (hazardous) touristic commodification, and Goan Catholics who merely wish for their church to be free of ideological meanings.

This essay intends to analyze the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa as a paradigm of contested transcultural heritage, briefly mentioning its historical background and architectural characteristics, considering its religious and ideological meanings and their impacts on actions to preserve the basilica's heritage, and especially focusing on the contemporary debate about the preservation of this monument, referring to the main questions and people involved (in which I am also included).

A Jesuit Building and a Pilgrimage Site

But before we analyze the heritage context around the basilica, it is fundamental to know its background. The history, art, and architecture of the Basilica of Bom Jesus have been studied by several researchers, such as Viriato Brás de Albuquerque, Francisco Gomes Catão, Mário Chicó,

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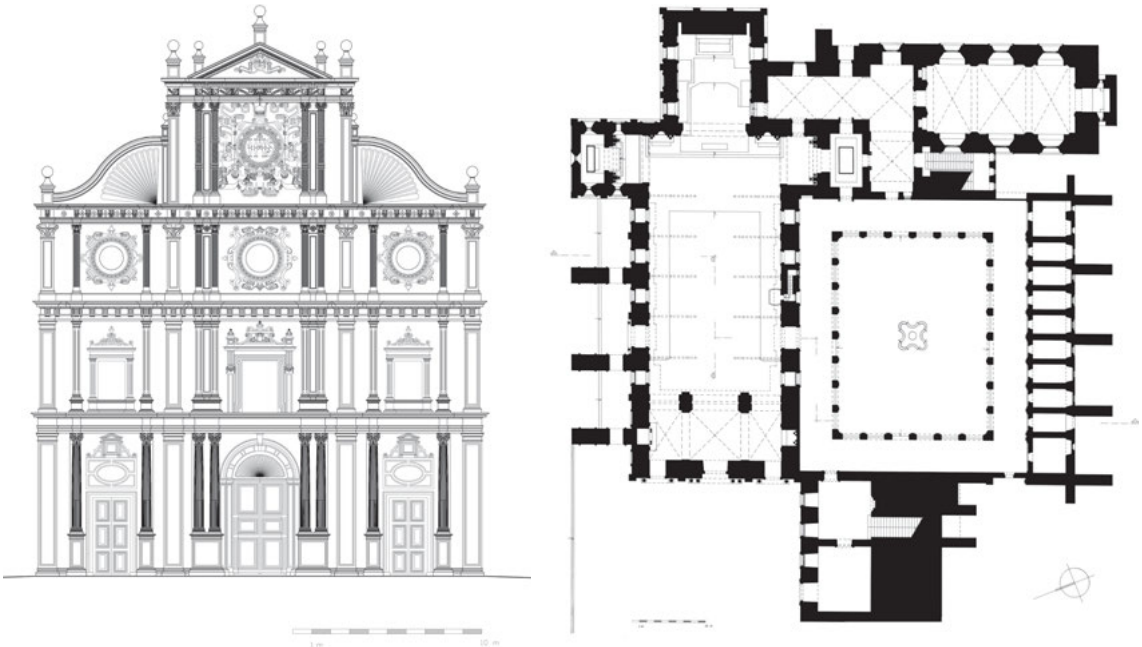
Carlos de Azevedo, José Pereira, Pedro Dias, António Nunes Pereira, Paulo Varela Gomes, and Cristina Osswald.[2] It is widely known that Saint Francis Xavier and his two companions were the first Jesuits to reach Asia in 1542. In the following decades, several buildings were constructed: the College of Saint Paul of the Arches, the College of Saint Roch, the Seminary of the Holy Faith, the Novitiate of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception (all in the city of Goa) and a few other small churches and chapels spread along Tiswadi Island.

The construction of the Professed House of Bom Jesus began at the end of 1585 (or the beginning of 1586) within the city of Goa, according to a plan by the Jesuit provincial Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) with the likely collaboration of Domingos Fernandes (fl. 1578–1597), architect of the Society of Jesus in Goa, and Júlio Simão (fl. 1596–1625), master engineer of Portuguese India.[3] In 1593 the building would have been near completion, and the construction of the basilica, attached to the Professed House, commenced the following year; construction of the main facade began only in 1597 (figs. 1 and 2).

Pedro Dias identified Domingos Fernandes as the probable author of the basilica's plan (a single-nave basilica plan),[4] while António Nunes Pereira proposed that due to the figurative complexity of the basilica's facade, it might have been the creation of Júlio Simão.[5] The facade is divided horizontally into three stories by friezes and vertically into three bays by pilasters; a gable with a Flemish bas-relief cartouche top ends the facade. Italian influences can be seen on the ground floor (portals with Serlian motifs), French influences on the first floor (rectangular windows with French Serlian moldings), Flemish influences on the third floor (oculus with carved cartouche frames), and Indian influences at the top (side *chakra*-type adornments instead of side volutes at the gable). With the exception of the four pilasters in plastered and whitewashed laterite stone that divide the facade into three bays, the whole facade is in granite stone; the rest of the basilica is in plastered and whitewashed laterite stone.

1 Church of Bom Jesus (c. 1855–62).



2 Elevation and ground plan of the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa (2000).

Another feature of the basilica draws attention: the monumentality of its facade. Portuguese early-modern churches generally had two stories with a pediment or analogous top, but the Basilica of Bom Jesus marked the emergence of a new type of facade, replicated later in the churches of Our Lady of Grace, Saint Anne of Talaulim, and the Cross of Miracles—all in Goa or in its immediate surroundings. This extra level of the basilica's facade, together with its profuse ornamentation, might have been influenced by Indian aesthetics, where there is no monumentality without multiplicity—that is, the more component forms a building has, the more monumental and beautiful it is, regardless of its proportions.[6] Whereas Hindu temples (especially Dravidian ones) have many squat levels due to a more flexible system of proportion, Western aesthetics are attached to the rigid classical proportion system. Therefore, instead of having a facade with many squat levels, the Basilica of Bom Jesus has a three-level facade (an extra story compared to the usual Portuguese facades) yet maintains the Western proportion system, thus creating a higher facade that could compete with local temples.[7]

The basilica's facade became perhaps the most paradigmatic case of Goan architecture, and one of the two Goan types of church facade that are unique in the world (the other is the much later cupoliform church type, such as the Church of Saint Stephen on Juá Island). According to Paulo Varela Gomes, the Basilica of Bom Jesus might have triggered the development of a local taste merging European and Indian influences to create a very distinctive kind of transcultural heritage: it "could have been the building that allowed Indian artisans to domesticate European architectural and ornamental vocabulary, to make it their own."[8]

The unfinished basilica was consecrated by Fr. Aleixo de Meneses (1559–1617), Archbishop of Goa, in 1605. The basilica was finally completed in 1624 and then received the remains of Saint Francis Xavier. The construction of a new vaulted sacristy began in 1652, and in 1659 two chapels were added to the basilica on each side of the false transept: a chapel housing the saint's tomb and a chapel containing the Blessed Sacrament.

Then in 1683, an event occurred that gave more prominence to the basilica: facing the imminent invasion of Goa by the Maratha forces of Sambhaji Bhosale (1681–1689), the Portuguese viceroy Francisco de Távora (1646–1710), Count of Alvor, came to the basilica, opened Saint Francis Xavier's coffin and offered his vice-regal baton, his royal credentials, and a letter pleading for the saint to protect Goa. As Sambhaji had to retreat suddenly to resist a Mughal invasion, this incident was considered a miraculous intercession from the saint. Later, in commemoration of this event, Portuguese viceroys and governors became invested in the basilica.[9]

After two centuries of significant missionary activity across Asia and East Africa, the Society of Jesus, with its center in Goa, was suddenly banned from all Portuguese territories in 1759 by the Marquis of Pombal, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (1699–1782), Portuguese chief minister at the time. The Jesuit complex was assigned to the Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul (known as Vincentians or Lazarians), until this order was also banned in 1790; thereupon, the basilica and Professed House came under an administrator nominated by the Goan Archbishop.[10]

A section of the Royal Archaeological Museum of Portuguese India dedicated to religious art was installed in the Professed House from 1900 to 1935;[11] related to this development, the roof of the Professed House was replaced by one with a slight inclination, substituting Mangalore tiles for the existing country tiles. The importance of the basilica as an essential Catholic pilgrimage site in Asia grew enormously with the initiation of periodical public expositions of the remains of Saint Francis Xavier (also known as Xaverian celebrations), which attracted pilgrims from across the East. During Portuguese rule, these celebrations occurred in 1782, 1859, 1878, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1922, 1931, 1942, 1952, and 1961.[12] The importance of the building grew further with its classification as a Portuguese National Monument in 1932[13] and after Pope Pius XII (1876–1958) elevated the church to a minor basilica in 1946, thus recognizing its vital role in the evangelization of the East.

The Basilica as a Colonial Symbol

The independence of the Indian Union in 1947 and its claims over Portuguese India caused an enormous disturbance within the Portuguese nationalist and imperialist dictatorial regime. Unable to defeat the Indian Union in an armed conflict, the Portuguese regime diplomatically sought support from other countries by justifying the cultural, historical, and religious closeness of Goa, Daman, and Diu to Portugal rather than to India.[14] As had happened in Portugal, Goan monuments and historical celebrations were used by the dictatorship as powerful instruments of ideological propaganda. The Basilica of Bom Jesus, a major symbol of Goa and the pilgrimage place of the Apostle of the East, was chosen for restoration in the context of the celebration of the fourth centenary of Saint Francis Xavier's death in 1952.

Baltazar Castro, a famous Portuguese architect, led the mission to restore the national monuments of Portuguese India from 1951 to 1953. Castro had been the visible face of the regime's

program for the restoration of monuments in Portugal in the 1930s and 1940s. His legacy was marked by a huge number of interventions in monuments, many of them through extensive actions that were facing criticism by the end of the 1940s.[15]

In 1952 Castro ordered the removal of the limestone plaster from the basilica's exterior, leaving the laterite stone exposed after receiving a chemical treatment. Castro had used this kind of feature in numerous "reintegrations" (as the vast heritage works in Portugal, tending to recover the alleged pristine shape of monuments, were referred to by the Portuguese dictatorial regime). Medieval buildings became privileged targets for nationalist reintegrations because they were considered witnesses of the nation's birth—Portuguese roots were supposedly traced to the Middle Ages. Moreover, many medieval buildings survived into the nineteenth century with no plaster, an image appreciated by Romanticism—even if most of the old buildings had originally been plastered. Consequently, images of buildings with a stone wall face became associated with antiquity and, increasingly, with monumentality due to the large Portuguese castles, palaces, and monasteries with this characteristic of a lack of plaster.[16]

It is unsurprising, then, that Castro would opt to deplaster the basilica. By leaving the laterite exposed, Castro was providing the Basilica of Bom Jesus a kind of medievalized image, enhancing its ancientness and monumentality by correlating it with the revered Portuguese medieval cathedrals and monasteries. Moreover, by boosting its agedness, highlighting the monument was even more ancient than the famous Taj Mahal, the dictatorship's propaganda was justifying historically and culturally the maintenance of Portuguese India. These intentions were complemented by the massive pilgrimage of Catholics from all over the East to Goa for the Xaverian celebration of 1952 (fig. 3).

This situation was exploited by the Portuguese regime to display Goa, Daman, and Diu as an overseas province belonging to a multicontinental country with historical, cultural, linguistic,

3 Public exposition of the remains of Saint Francis Xavier (1952).

4 The Basilica of Bom Jesus in 2018.

and religious affinities, following Gilberto Freyre's (1900–1987) Lusotropicalist premises. Goans were encouraged to absorb Portuguese-influenced characteristics to manifest their differences from the people of the Indian Union. This strengthening of the role of the Basilica of Bom Jesus as a symbol of the territory was, therefore, disseminating a subliminal message: Goa was Catholic with a westernized culture and, thus, closer to Portugal than to the Indian Union.[17]

Up to 1952, there had been little contestation over the Basilica of Bom Jesus, but from this date on, this would become a constant in the basilica's history. The basilica's drastic change in image from whitewashed lime plaster to reddish-brown laterite began to attract criticism from a segment of Goan cultural elites—even in newspapers, despite the regime's censorship.

These criticisms were triggered by the collapse of the Arch of the Viceroys at the beginning of August 1953. This monument had also been restored by Baltazar Castro, who had removed its plaster. A couple of weeks after the restoration was completed, the arch collapsed under heavy rainfall during a storm. This event was a blow to the dictatorship's propaganda efforts, and soon it drew criticism in Goan newspapers, blaming Castro for the disaster.[18] The exposure of laterite to the monsoon's effects weakened it, leading to its collapse.

The criticism was then extended to what had been done to the Basilica of Bom Jesus: the recreation of an idealized image for the basilica that had never existed before, prioritizing its aesthetic value over its historical value and conservation. Besides the know-how Castro acquired in Portugal, his restoration criteria might have been influenced by a misconception that Goan churches had not originally been plastered; however, local technicians were aware that lime plaster was always used to protect laterite stone, especially against rainwater—in fact, due to the vulnerability of the laterite stone of the basilica walls, three arch buttresses had already been built in 1862 to support the basilica's north facade.

In 1957, only five years after the basilica's deplastering, the Government-General of Portuguese India sent a telegram to Lisbon urgently requesting Baltazar Castro to replaster the basilica, since the laterite was disaggregating; however, this request was denied by engineer Eugénio Sanches da Gama (1892–1964), who demanded the maintenance of the deplastered facade for aesthetic reasons, according to the regime's speech.[19] Newspapers branded this change to the basilica's image an atrocious disfigurement that was the product of a deformation of taste.[20] Such criticisms of Castro's actions became criticisms against the dictatorial regime, and the basilica itself consequently came to be regarded as an imperialist symbol by many who were struggling against the colonial regime. Additionally, the immense pilgrimage of 1952 created some constraints as not only pilgrims but also tourists began visiting the basilica in increasing numbers. The year 1952 was indeed a disruptive key moment in the history of the basilica.

Another problem emerged for the Basilica of Bom Jesus in 1959, relating to preparations for other major celebrations used by the Portuguese regime for ideological purposes in the following year: the fourth centenary of Prince Henry the Navigator's death and the 450th anniversary of the Conquest of Goa by Afonso de Albuquerque. By order of the Portuguese Governor-General Manuel Vassalo e Silva (1899–1985), a musealization plan for Old Goa was proposed by a committee led by José António Ismael Gracias Jr. (1903–1993); two years later, the restorer Luís Benavente (1902–1993) was sent to Goa to coordinate work on the monuments.[21]

Benavente immediately noticed the disaggregation of the basilica's laterite stone, and by November 1961, he had produced a report calling the basilica's deplastering, which he claimed had occurred without satisfying a single justifiable criterion, a huge error. Consequently, he ordered the replastering of the basilica as soon as possible to correct this error—not only to recover the monument's initial character but, above all, to preserve the durability of the building.[22] However, there was no time to implement Benavente's directive. In December 1961, a mere month after his report was released, the Indian army entered Portuguese India in Operation Vijay and ended 450 years of Portuguese domination.

Jurisdictional and Identity Idiosyncrasies at the Basilica

This former Jesuit basilica in Goa remains a paradigmatic case of contested transcultural heritage, incorporating multiple challenges (fig. 4). For four and a half centuries, during the Portuguese administration, this heritage was created and conserved by following Western premises moderated by local influences: little by little, along with its increasing religious importance, the basilica also began acquiring an ideological meaning linked to Portuguese colonialism, which grew exponentially during the nationalist dictatorship at the end of Portuguese rule. The incorporation of Goa into India brought some idiosyncrasies concerning the preservation of the Basilica of Bom Jesus, not only by intensifying problems originated by the aforementioned intervention of 1952 but also by creating new ones.[23]

With Goa's integration into India, the basilica and all other listed monuments of former Portuguese India came under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the Indian state institution responsible for cultural heritage, including national monuments. During the Portuguese era, although the basilica was listed as a national monument, it continued to belong to the Catholic Church: maintenance and repair work could be done by the Catholic

Church itself, albeit with authorization from the Portuguese administration and usually with its financial support—a remnant partially inherent to the commitments of Portuguese Overseas Patronage.[24]

Under the ASI's surveillance, the Catholic Church is also allowed to use the Basilica of Bom Jesus for religious purposes, but all interventions are restricted to ASI technicians or are under the ASI's scrutiny. Classified monuments of Goa, Daman, and Diu are, in fact, *sui generis* cases among India's national monuments. In India, religious monuments with liturgical usage require the consent of their owners to be listed as national monuments, and only after securing positive consent can they be placed under the ASI's management.[25] Therefore, only very few cases of "living" religious monuments are under the ASI's management. However, after the integration of Goa, Daman, and Diu into India, a mere formal transition placed all monuments listed by the Portuguese—including religious monuments still in use, such as the Basilica of Bom Jesus—under the ASI's jurisdiction.

This jurisdictional idiosyncrasy of the Catholic monuments of Goa, Daman, and Diu started causing friction between the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman and the ASI. As the most important Catholic religious buildings in Goa are listed as national monuments, and are thus under the responsibility of the ASI, the Catholic Church's authority over these buildings is substantially conditioned—unlike the places of worship of other religions that are still in use and therefore are not classified as national monuments. Indeed, while Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and other religions' places of worship can freely undergo maintenance, extension, remodeling, and other modifications according to the owners' wishes, Catholics cannot do the same with the major churches of Goa, Daman, and Diu. This jurisdictional situation has left Catholics from the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman feeling somewhat discriminated against, leading to conflict with the ASI. Tense relations have been nurtured by situations pushing the limits on both sides.[26]

The Basilica of Bom Jesus is at the center of these disputes: along with the See Cathedral, it is one of the most important churches of Goa, used daily for religious celebrations and as a place of pilgrimage—perhaps the main place of Catholic worship in the East due to the presence of Saint Francis Xavier's tomb. Despite this importance, however, the ASI's rules rigidly curtail the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman's authority over the basilica.

The postcolonial significance of the basilica has also been a target of ideological clashes, often provoked by misunderstandings. The last decade has seen the rise of Hindu nationalist feelings throughout India, which have been reflected, to varying degrees, in government policies. Goa was not immune to this ideological wave, with serious effects on Catholic heritage and especially major monuments, such as the Basilica of Bom Jesus.

Just as the Portuguese regime ideologically explored the basilica as a colonial symbol, those who opposed the colonial regime—especially non-Catholic freedom fighters—did the same. In the postcolonial period, the basilica's image as a colonial symbol persisted within many strata of the Indian society, including in Goa. By extension, many people in India, especially in the last decade, have associated Catholics with these ideological meanings as colonial remnants, with the progressive radicalization of many segments of Indian society. Among the contemporary Catholic community, it is commonplace to hear lamentations from those who increasingly feel that they are part of a contested minority after decades of being merely Indian citizens, like everyone else, irrespective of their religion.

Older people among the Catholic elites still have a nostalgic affection for the Portuguese period and continue to speak in Portuguese, thus exacerbating the anti-Catholicism of the right-wing Hindu nationalist ideology. For those who wish to erase the Portuguese layer from India, the eradication of the Basilica of Bom Jesus would certainly be desirable. Moreover, many Catholics might consider the ASI's refusal or delay in performing repairs to the basilica as signaling its intention to hasten the decay of the monument, leading to its eventual collapse.[27]

An (Alleged) Goan Architectural Feature: The Laterite Stone Wall Face

The strained relations between the ASI and the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman have exacerbated the main threat to the Basilica of Bom Jesus today—namely, the lack of plaster on its facades. Visible signs of deterioration of the basilica's laterite stone have increased the polemic about replastering since at least the 1990s (fig. 5). Water infiltration from monsoon rain unleashed the disaggregation process of the laterite stone, and the ASI intended to take measures to tackle the problem. Paradoxically, however, the ASI was halted by protests from Goan Catholics, supported by a substantial portion of the Catholic clergy.

In fact, until a couple of years ago, a considerable number of Goans believed that the basilica in its current form, without plaster, had always existed. This "illusion of immanence" was a consequence of the fact that most people had only known the contemporary basilica's structure; only a few elders remember when the basilica was plastered and whitewashed, and these individuals are disappearing rapidly.

5 Detail of the condition of the laterite stone (left) compared with the granite stone (right) (2018).

As a matter of fact, the simple, sober, and robust image of the deplastered basilica became part of the construction of the postcolonial Goan identity.[28] The exposed laterite used in buildings came to be considered a Goan architectural characteristic. It is easy to find churches with lateral facades without plaster, such as the Church of the Holy Spirit at Margao or the Church of Our Lady of Mercy at Colva. However, there is persistent doubt about whether the facades of these other churches were always in laterite or if they were deplastered at some point in the past—and if so, one needs to know if it happened before or after the deplastering of the Basilica of Bom Jesus in order to assess possible influences on the removal of plaster from these churches.

It is also curious to observe the Chapel of Saint Sebastian at Arpora, with its side facade painted in red, as it was deplastered—perhaps due to the influence of the Basilica of Bom Jesus or perhaps motivated by an intention to concede a Goan architectural image. For instance, the new facade of the Chapel of Santa Cruz in Calangute is made of laterite,[29] and a new chapel built in Baga, located between Calangute and Arpora, is completely devoid of plaster, something unusual in Catholic religious architecture in Goa. Similarly, a few newly built houses have adopted the characteristics of a traditional Goan Catholic house but without plaster. In fact, the use of laterite wall face in Goan architecture seems to be a postcolonial input—but not necessarily with a decolonial meaning.

In the 1960s, right after Goa's integration into India, architects Bruno Souza (b. 1925) and Sarto Almeida (1924–2020) decided to establish their own offices in Goa; Souza was born in Goa, while Almeida was the son of Goan emigrants to Tanzania. Soon after, Souza and Almeida's architecture increased their visibility and associated them with the new architectural identity of a recently assimilated territory of India. The laterite stone-wall face was a feature of some of Souza and Almeida's buildings.[30]

Like other famous Indian architects of their generation, Souza and Almeida absorbed influences either from Le Corbusier (1887–1965) or Louis Kahn (1901–1974), who worked in India respectively in the 1950s and 1960s. Le Corbusier and Kahn used raw materials (concrete, bricks, stone) in their buildings in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad, showcasing bare building materials and structural elements—the "honest use of materials" was by then defended in modernist and brutalist architecture.

Yet the most influential architect undoubtedly would have been the British-born architect Lawrence "Laurie" Baker (1917–2007), who designed a long list of buildings across India. Unlike modernist architects, Baker's architecture was based on regional building practices and the use of local materials, adopting methods from Indian vernacular architecture combined with modern technologies and creative designs; the focus was on creating low-cost, efficient buildings. Baker's multi-volume buildings with curvilinear shapes and raw materials were indeed a source of inspiration for many Indian architects beginning their careers in the post-independence period.

In this way, Souza and Almeida marked the postcolonial architectural panorama of Goa, made of old-fashioned or kitsch buildings. They were joined by Charles Correa (1930–2015), another Goan-descendant architect who designed some buildings in Goa. His Kala Academy, located in Panjim, became a landmark of contemporary Goan architecture, where laterite wall face is abundantly used. In fact, these three architects received and blended modernist influences, together with Baker's ideas and vernacular influences, to create a local architecture.[31]

This use of laterite wall face as a characteristic of Goan architecture affected the preservation of Goan built heritage. For instance, the Reis Magos Fort was restored in the 2010s according to the plan of Gerard da Cunha (b. 1955), a Goan-descendant architect who had worked with Laurie Baker before establishing himself in Goa. Cunha removed the remaining plaster on the fort walls, assuming that Portuguese forts in Goa had not been plastered.[32] However, this was a tremendous misunderstanding, since all Portuguese forts had indeed been plastered. His opinion might have been influenced by Baker's works and the assumptions of Souza, Almeida, and Correa, but the deplastered Basilica of Bom Jesus might have also had some influence on his assumption regarding the use of laterite wall face in Goan architecture.

At the same time, the "rediscovery" of ancient pre-Portuguese monuments in Goa, especially from the Kadamba Empire period, might have contributed to the debate on Goan architecture. Some pre-Portuguese temples were listed as national monuments by the Indian government in 1982:[33] Structures such as the Manguesh Temple at Cortalim, the Saptakoteshwar Temple at Khandepar, the Mahadev Temple at Tambdi Surla, and the Jain Basti Temple at Bandora, all abandoned, presented a laterite stone face. However, the lack of plaster does not necessarily mean that these structures were deplastered. The plaster might have been lost over the years, with the abandonment of worshippers; in fact, plaster samples were found in some of these monuments. This feature could have contributed to the assignment of whitewashed limestone plaster as a characteristic introduced by the colonial presence; therefore, using exposed laterite in buildings might mean a return to Goan architecture's initial physiognomy.

The Contemporary Debate on the Basilica's Preservation

The Basilica of Bom Jesus was confirmed as an Indian national monument in 1982, during the reformulation of the listed monuments of Goa, Daman, and Diu.[34] In 1986 the basilica, together with other churches and convents of Goa, was also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the proposal, a specific criterion was dedicated to the basilica: beyond its fine artistic quality, the presence of the tomb of Saint Francis Xavier was considered a symbol of an event of universal significance for the influence of the Catholic religion in Asia.[35] In addition, in 2009, the basilica was ranked as one of the "Seven Wonders of Portuguese Origin in the World" through a popular vote.[36]

Nevertheless, the damage to the Basilica of Bom Jesus observed by Luís Benavente in 1961 continued to increase, and by the new millennium, disaggregation was clearly visible in the exposed laterite stone of the facades. Conscious of the basilica's vulnerability, archaeologist Nizamuddin Taher, by then in charge of the ASI Goa Circle, began raising awareness with the aim of preventing further damage to the basilica. However, Taher's intention was met with vehement opposition by the Catholic Church and Catholic believers: on the one hand, the opposition was caused by tense relations between the ASI and the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman; on the other hand, Catholic believers who had never known a plastered and whitewashed version of the basilica, and thus believed it had never been plastered, had difficulty accepting change to the basilica's image.

In response, Taher proposed the use of a new technique that he had developed, the "laterite pack," used to restore the Dhamnar caves in Bhopal and parts of the ruins of the Augustine convent in Old Goa. The laterite pack is a composite mortar, made of lime mortar, laterite lumps, and

powdered broken bricks, used to fill cavities of deteriorated laterite surfaces, mimicking both the texture and color. Although not a solution to effectively preserve the exposed laterite, at least this technique could temporarily stall the stone's disaggregation. Eventually, Taher considered his technique a first step in the slow process of changing the mindset within the Goan community, leading to the replastering of the basilica.[37]

The laterite pack was, however, merely a palliative, temporary, and located solution, since the real conservation problem continued to exist. Furthermore, when applied, the laterite pack was revealed to be a kind of pinkish patchwork standing out from the original reddish-brown laterite, thus affecting the global image of the monument—not to mention the lack of studies on the long-term effects of the laterite pack on laterite stone. The consolidation of a heterogeneous stone like laterite, which has large pores, is not feasible, and if not plastered with a sacrificial layer, such as plaster, it continues to erode; moreover, the wetness caused by rainfall leads to the bio-colonization of the stone, accelerating its degradation.[38] These issues ultimately bolstered the opposition to the use of the laterite pack technique, including among heritage lovers.

The mid-2010s marked a turning point in the contemporary debate about the preservation of the Basilica of Bom Jesus. In 2016, Taher's intentions were still being criticized, and a few supporters of the basilica's replastering were publically rebuked, including by Catholic priests.[39] However, little by little, the awareness-raising about the importance of safeguarding Goa's cultural heritage began to yield results, not only among opinion-makers and cultural elites but also among the Goan public.

There have been a few reasons for this change in perspective. One was the arrival in Goa of some Portuguese researchers with new perspectives free from local conditioning and in possession of knowledge from documental sources in Portuguese archives. Investigations by art historians and architects, such as Pedro Dias, António Nunes Pereira, Paulo Varela Gomes, Cristina Osswald, and me, allowed us a deeper knowledge of the history and artistic characteristics of the basilica.

The role of Paulo Varela Gomes also requires a special mention. By studying the basilica within the context of Goan Catholic religious architecture, Gomes developed the idea of the uniqueness of Goan architecture in many of its features, refusing the use of the expression "Indo-Portuguese." As mentioned before, by stating that the Basilica of Bom Jesus might have initiated a kind of architecture unique to Goa—a Goan architecture—Gomes's assertions surely contributed to instilling feelings of pride among Goans, who started to recognize the exceptional nature of their heritage.

Also meriting special attention are my efforts to explain the restoration process performed by Baltazar Castro in 1952 and Luís Benavente's intention to replaster the basilica at the end of the colonial period, based on official documental sources found in Portuguese archives. In fact, as Benavente had done half a century earlier, I argued that replastering the basilica would both increase its durability and recover its historical and artistic authenticity.

Goan scholars and heritage lovers also became more involved in safeguarding the basilica: Edgar Ribeiro, Vishvesh Kandolkar, and Fernando Velho, among others. While Ribeiro has been defending for a long time the implementation of a heritage protection zone in Old Goa, Kandolkar analyzed the basilica as part of the construction of the postcolonial Goan identity in his PhD thesis. All of these actors have engaged in awareness-raising actions (e.g., newspaper

articles, seminars, meetings) with local priests and communities, the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, political decision-makers, and even ASI technicians. In fact, while scientific articles and other papers by Portuguese and Goan scholars provide scientific support for the preservation of the basilica, these awareness-raising efforts are gradually bearing fruit by educating people, explaining the problem, resolving their doubts, showing documental evidence, and supporting their concerns.

Recent worries increased the Goan community's interest in the preservation of the basilica. Protests against the construction of new buildings, and especially a flyover inside the protected zone of the Basilica of Bom Jesus, have gained momentum.[40] However, energetic protests against the rainwater damage, which were lodged during some lengthy maintenance work performed by the ASI on the roof of the Professed House, presented an opportunity to unite the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, Catholic believers, and heritage lovers around the same preservation aim.[41]

In fact, this rainwater damage became a warning about a major future concern: the impact of climate change on the basilica, which must be mitigated.[42] It is not only rainwater problems that are now affected by climate change, increasing the disaggregation of the laterite and fomenting the invasion of infesting herbs and other microorganisms; vibrations caused by heavy traffic from the nearby highway affect the basilica's structural integrity, and air pollution, also related to the highway, causes severe harm to the basilica, since carbon monoxide reacts with water, forming acids that attack the laterite stone. Besides the highway, deforestation in and around Old Goa, caused by unplanned urban expansion, is contributing to the drainage of increasingly heavy rainwater directly to the low terrain where the historic center of Goa is located, causing massive flooding of the unprepared drainage system of the site.[43] The basilica, which is situated lower than the surrounding ground, undoubtedly suffers from substantial problems of capillarity infiltration.

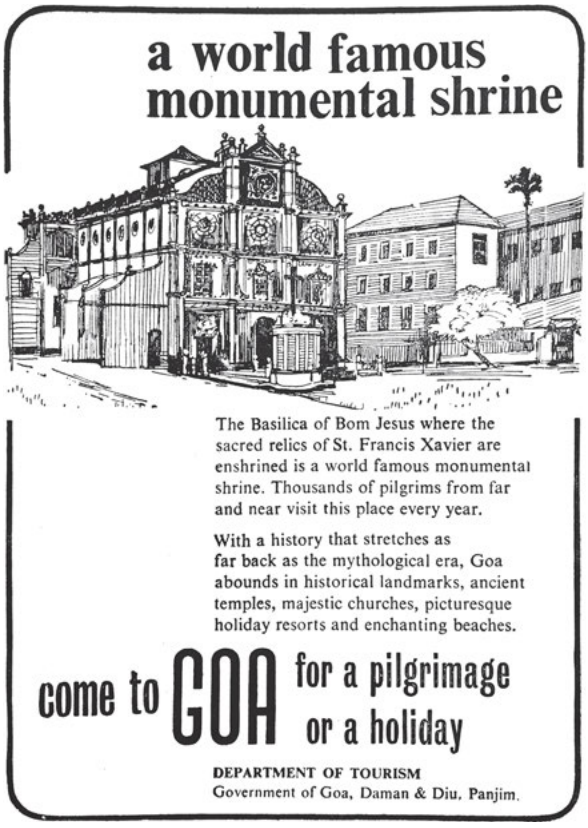
Epilogue

For the first time, the replastering of the basilica is being discussed as a feasible option.[44] It has been a long time since Baltazar Castro removed the plaster of the basilica in 1952, but now some of the stakeholders in Goa seem to be heading toward a common position on the basilica's preservation. Several experts in conservation from India and abroad have been called upon to take part in the debate and have given their input in a clear and pedagogical way. Local priests, such as Fr. Patrício Fernandes, with the support of the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, are raising awareness in their communities; heritage lovers and scholars persist in their efforts to safeguard this unique heritage; and even the general public has started to progressively accept the idea of replastering the basilica.

However, the problem now seems to be of a different nature: since at least the nineteenth century, the Basilica of Bom Jesus has been a pilgrimage site that is especially crowded during the Xaverian celebrations, but its classification as a World Heritage Site, together with the state jurisdiction of the ASI, turned it into a buzzing touristic hotspot. The intense pressure of cultural and religious tourism placed on the basilica has several consequences, such as greater degradation owing to massive use and, consequently, higher maintenance costs.

Tourism is a major source of revenue but is also twisting the local reality.[45] The commodification and touristification of monuments in Old Goa are generating economic gains, visible in souvenir shops, eating places, and new houses that are multiplying, without any planning, across Old Goa's lands with potential archaeological remains, but this tourism is not offering significant benefits to the preservation of these monuments. There is a lack of sustainable touristic management (fig. 6).

Indeed, the most peculiar fact is that, right now, it seems that tourists, even unintentionally, are themselves an obstacle to the preservation of the basilica—especially those coming from other parts of India. The "red basilica," as the Basilica of Bom Jesus is often called, is a sought-after *ex libris* of Goa, different from all the other old, whitewashed Catholic churches in India, making it unique. In fact, this epithet conjures images of several Indian monuments where red is the prominent color (red fort, red palace, red temple, etc.) and one of their charming aspects. For instance, the main gate of the city wall of Diu, another former Portuguese territory, was painted in red after its integration into India and now resembles a red fort. In fact, one may wonder if the deplastering of the basilica might have been adopted somehow as part of an "Indianization" process, based on premises related to the debate on Goan architecture with a laterite wall face.



6 Touristic advertisement about Goa with an illustration of the Basilica of Bom Jesu, 1966.

To conclude, the Basilica of Bom Jesus is today a contested transcultural heritage site seen as a Goan peculiarity by Indians, as a colonial remnant by right-wing Hindu nationalists, a Lusitanian cultural legacy by Portuguese (and Westerners), and as a symbol of Goan identity by Goans, especially Catholic believers. However, its preservation is far from assured, while the contestations continue and time continues to pass without any concrete measures taken to protect this legacy of humankind.

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1 The terms "restoration" and "restorer" used in this essay must be understood in the same way as they were perceived in the mid-twentieth century by the Portuguese dictatorial regime, when heritage was used as an instrument of ideological propaganda.
2 See, for instance: Osswald 2013; Gomes 2011; Pereira 2005; Dias 1999.
3 Pedro Dias also mentions the Jesuit master builders Luís Castanho and Francisco Domingues, as well as Giovanni de Manolis, as being in charge of the woodwork and Diego Ferrán as responsible for the quarries in Bassein, from where the granitic stone of the facades was brought. Cf. Dias 1999, 290–91.
4 Dias 1999, 288.
5 Pereira 2005, 228–29.
6 On Indian aesthetics, see for instance Dehejia 2014; Hussain and Wilkinson 2006; Sudhi 1997.
7 Santos 2009.
8 Gomes 2011, 68–70.
9 Saldanha 1990, vol. 1, 174–75.
10 Kloguen 1831, 79.
11 Melo 1952, 240–47.
12 On the Xaverian celebrations, see Kandolkar 2021a; Gupta 2014; Vicente 2002.
13 "Ordinance no. 1.360," *Boletim Official do Governo Geral do Estado da Índia* 27 (April 1, 1932), 405; "Decree no. 532," *Boletim Official do Governo Geral do Estado da Índia* 15 (February 19, 1932), 205.
14 On the end of the Portuguese colonial regime in India, see Lopes 2017; Stocker 2011; Bègue 2007; Couto 2006.
15 Santos 2015.
16 On the "reintegration" of monuments in Portugal during the dictatorship, see Tomé 2002 and Neto 2002.
17 On the Lusotropicalism, see Santos 2020; Souza 2001; Freyre 1961; Freyre 1952.
18 "Recordando o Passado" 1953. See also Neves 1953.
19 "[Official Report]" (typescript), Lisbon: Historical Overseas Archive, 'Former Overseas Ministry' Fund, 'Estado da Índia' Collection, file no. 632024, 1957.
20 Ry 1959.
21 On the musealization plan for Old Goa, see Santos 2016.
22 Benavente 1961.
23 Santos 2017.
24 Kandolkar 2020.
25 "Act no. XXIV of 1958: The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958," *The Gazette of India* 221, Part II (August 29, 1958), 155–69.
26 Santos 2017, 243–54.
27 This statement can be easily observed in talks with the local Catholic community and by reading newspaper articles—some of them mentioned in this essay.
28 On the construction of the postcolonial Goan identity see Kandolkar 2020b; Kandolkar 2015.
29 Silveira 2020.

30 Velho 2020.
31 Kanekar 2019.
32 Cunha 2017.
33 "Notification 9–4–79–WET," *Official Gazette – Government of Goa, Daman and Diu*, Series 1, no. 22 (August 26, 1982), 183–84.
34 Ibid.
35 https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/234 (accessed in June 2021).
36 https://projetos.7maravilhas.pt/portfolio-items/7-maravilhas-de-origem-portuguesa-no-mundo-old (accessed in June 2021).
37 Taher 2020. See also Taher 2017.
38 Rodrigues and Santos 2021. See also, among others, Das 2008 and Kasthurba et al. 2006.
39 "Plastering Basilica" 2016.
40 "Amid Pressure" 2020.
41 Fernandes 2020; "ASI Has Neglected" 2020; Joseph 2020; "Rector Slams ASI" 2020; Gama 2020; "Take immediate steps" 2020.
42 Kandolkar 2021b.
43 Fernandes 2021b.
44 Fernandes 2021a; Souza 2021; Monteiro 2021.
45 On tourism in Goa see Kandolkar 2020c; Kandolkar 2016; Trishur 2013.

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