

SANTOS, Joaquim Rodrigues dos. "From Rome to Goa: Domes in Goan Catholic Architecture". In: *Identidades y Redes Culturales: V Congreso Internacional de Barroco Iberoamericano*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2021, pp.1035-1043.

IDENTIDADES Y REDES CULTURALES



V Congreso Internacional de Barroco Iberoamericano

From Rome to Goa. Domes in Goan Catholic Architecture

RODRIGUES DOS SANTOS, Joaquim
Universidade de Lisboa

1. Prelude

The Renaissance brought a series of challenges to the architects seeking to revive the cultural and aesthetic values of Classical antiquity, but whose mentality was still rooted in the secular construction models of the Middle Ages. At the dawn of modernity, architects found themselves grappling with the issue of how to design classical church façades, since there were no Christian temples in ancient times, and therefore no classical models on which to base the new Christian churches. As noted by Paulo Varela Gomes, the challenge facing the architects and theorists of the Humanist era was that of finding a façade for Christian temples inspired by classical Greek and Roman models, adjusted to churches with a Latin cross floor plan whose central nave was higher than the lateral naves, and free from Pagan connotations¹.

2. The new Basilica of Saint Peter, in Rome: the origin of the problem

The construction of the new Basilica of Saint Peter, in Rome, which lasted for about a century and a half, was certainly the most debated work within the

architectural culture of the Modern Age. One of the most controversial issues was the addition of towers to the façade, which led, in turn, to further issues². Indeed, apart from the aim of becoming a worthy successor of the former Constantinian basilica and a grand and magnificent symbol of the primacy of Saint Peter and the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, thereby testifying to the long restoration of Rome's importance within the Christian world, the temple was also meant to display a monumentality similar to that of the great Medieval cathedrals, tokens of a fervent Christian faith. Therefore, the request for the addition of towers on each side of the façade, evoking the vertical thrust of the great Gothic towers, was probably regarded as natural.

The project proposed by Donato Bramante (1444-1514) was the one chosen by Pope Julius II (1443-1513) and the construction work began as early as 1506. Bramante's design can be seen on a plan and a medal commemorating the beginning of the work, by Cristoforo Foppa "Caradosso" (1445-c.1527), both on display at the *Gabinetto dei Disegni agli Uffizi*, in Florence. Bramante designed a basilica with a Greek cross floor plan, a dome over the central area and towers on the church's four corners. The four-storey towers were almost autonomous with regard to the building.

1. GOMES, Paulo Varela. "Fachadas de igrejas alentejanas entre os séculos XVI e XVIII". *Penélope: Revista de História e Ciências Sociais* (Lisbon), 6 (1991), págs. 21-4. SANTOS, Joaquim Rodrigues dos. "Da Roma Eterna à Roma do Oriente: Sobre a Problemática do Enquadramento Visual de Fachadas de Duas Torres com Zimbórios Centrais na Arquitetura Religiosa Goesa". *Cadernos PPG-AU* (Salvador da Bahia), 11 (2014), págs. 39-58 y SANTOS, Joaquim Rodrigues dos. "As Portas da Jerusalém Celeste: Proposta de Síntese Formal para as Fachadas de Duas Torres na Arquitetura Religiosa Portuguesa entre os Séculos XVI e XVIII". *Artis - Revista do IHA-FLUL* (Lisbon), 7-8 (2009), págs. 255-279.

2. On the construction of the new Basilica of Saint Peter, in Rome, see among others: BENÉVOLO, Leonardo. *San Pietro e la città di Roma*. Rome - Bari: Laterza, 2004; LOTZ, Wolfgang. *Studi sull'architettura italiana del Rinascimento*. Milan: Mondadori Electa, 1989; NORBERG-SCHULZ, Christian. *Baroque Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1971; PORTOGHESI, Paolo. *Architettura del Rinascimento a Roma*. Milan: Electa, 1970; MURRAY, Peter. *Architettura del Rinascimento*. Milan: Laterza, 1995 (1963). See also: SMITH, Gil R. *Architectural Diplomacy: Rome and Paris in the Late Baroque*. New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1993.

When Donato Bramante decided to surpass the two most famous buildings of Classical antiquity, “placing the Pantheon over Constantine’s basilica”, he was far from imagining the uproar that the work would cause throughout its long construction period. If the introduction of towers on each side of the façade was already controversial, the addition of a dome over the building’s central area only added to the problem, by introducing a new point of contention, this time regarding the way in which the dome was visually framed by the towers. And this issue became a long-standing problem, which modern architects obsessively tried to solve.

The issue arose when cupolas, which had only been used before in circular buildings, started being applied to buildings with different floor plans. During the Renaissance, architects devised a solution for the construction of cupolas which enabled them to rest only on four points. Moreover, they furnished them with a new element—a drum with windows, allowing for more natural light inside the temples. The resulting

architectural structure, now called dome, was higher, slenderer and had a new and strong visual presence, turning into one of the most striking visual elements in European cityscapes. Accordingly, domes became increasingly valued as one of the main features of the outward composition of Christian temples. However, their massive vertical presence came into conflict with the façades’ lateral towers, which soon led to the issue of the visual framing of these architectural elements.

As for the towers designed by Bramante for Saint Peter’s Basilica, given their autonomy and great height, similar to that of Italian *campanili*, and their placement at the angles of the Greek cross, next to the dome, their visual framing was not an issue. Yet when Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520) succeeded Bramante, in 1514, as architect of the new basilica, he proposed a Latin cross floor plan for which he had designed, according to Sebastiano Serlio (1475-c.1554), a monumental façade with a portico and two elaborate towers. In this design, the towers would frame the dome, which seemed to lose visual importance. It was at this moment that



Fig. 1. Basilica of Saint Peter, in Vatican, Rome, Italy. Photographed by the autor.

the issue of the dome's visual framing started being raised; and this problem would accompany the various developments and hesitations that marked the construction of the basilica, giving rise to heated debates and extending to other religious buildings.

After Raffaello's death, the numerous architects appointed to supervise the basilica's construction work held diverging views, oscillating between a centralized floor plan and a longitudinal one. Baldassare Tommaso Peruzzi (1481-1536), who took over as main architect in 1531, reinstated Bramante's centralized plan; shortly thereafter, in 1536, António Cordiani (1484-1546) —better known as António da Sangallo, the Younger— was put in charge of the work and chose to return to the Latin cross plan, a decision which already denotes a concern with the dome's visual framing: in his solution, the towers were much more distant from the church's central area and the dome, whose cupola rested on two drums.

In 1546, Pope Paul III (1468-1549) invited Michelangelo Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564) to direct the construction of the Vatican's new temple. The solution designed by Michelangelo consisted in a return to the Greek cross plan and the removal of both the protruding section proposed by Sangallo and the towers, thereby confining the whole building to a single volume, crowned by a conspicuous dome. In 1607, Pope Paul V (1552-1621) decided to alter the façade and extend the basilica's main body, turning the Greek cross into a Latin cross; to this end, Carlo Maderno (1556-1629) designed a wide façade with two lateral volumes, on which two towers were to be placed.

Later, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) decided to create a new façade, with two slightly higher towers, which were somehow independent; Bernini may have realized that the previous façade did not allow for the simultaneous contemplation of the towers and the dome as one approached the basilica from the elliptic square he had created in front of the building, surrounded by a colonnade. And it was precisely from this wide, unimpeded space that the effect was to be most striking, since the urban fabric of the Borghi neighbourhood, outside the colonnade, with its buildings of different heights and relatively narrow streets, would prevent visitors from appreciating the towers and the framing of the dome, as well as the grandeur of the religious complex; the contemplation of the façade in all its splendour was only possible after leaving behind the Borghi neighbourhood and entering the spaciousness of Saint Peter's Square, whereupon a feeling of surprise and awe would grip the visitors making their way to the basilica. However, not only were the towers not built, but the dome was also not visible from the square, due to the basilica's longitudinal volume and the façade, which blocked the view.

3. The Church of our Lady of the Divine Providence, in Goa: a reprise of the roman problem

In the early 17th century, Goa was the magnificent capital of Portugal's vast overseas empire in the East, extending from the Cape of Good Hope, in South Africa, to Nagasaki, in Japan. The city was a flourishing global metropolis, whose epithet "Rome of the East" became increasingly apposite, and was further enhanced by the arrival, in the mid-17th century, of priests from the Congregation of Clerics Regular of the Divine Providence —commonly known as the Theatines. Shortly after their arrival, these new priests succeeded in obtaining permission to build their religious complex, comprising the Church of Our Lady of the Divine Providence and the Convent of Saint Cajetan³.

According to Rafael Moreira, the church was designed by the Theatine Carlo Ferrarini (fl.1644-1683), with Francesco Maria Milazzo (fl.1644-1669), also Italian, as the master builder. The floor plan denotes the influence of the Theatine churches of northern Italy, especially the pilgrimage church of Madonna della Ghiara, in Reggio Emilia: the building follows a quincunx pattern, consisting of a centralized floor plan, shaped as a Greek cross, contained within a square, with cupolas over the four arms of the cross and a dome over the crossing. The introduction of this kind of plan was a novelty in Goan religious architecture, characterized mainly by longitudinal buildings; equally innovative was the construction of a magnificent dome over the church's crossing, the only one of its kind in the eastern territories under Portuguese influence.

3. On the religious buildings of the Theatines in Goa, see: GOMES, Paulo Varela. *Arquitetura, religião e política em Portugal no século XVII: Planta centralizada*. Porto: FAUP Publicações, 2001; MOREIRA, Rafael. "Riflessi della Ghiara nell'India Portoghese: La chiesa dei teatini a Goa". In: *Conference. La Basilica della Ghiara: Il miracolo della città. Reggio Emilia*, [s.n.], 1997 (extract). On the Goan religious architecture, see also: PEREIRA, António Nunes. *A Arquitetura religiosa cristã de Velha Goa: Segunda metade do século XVI - primeiras décadas do século XVII*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2005; DIAS, Pedro. *História da arte portuguesa no Mundo (1415-1822): O Espaço do Índico*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores e Autores, 1998; KOWAL, David Martin. "The Evolution of Ecclesiastical Architecture in Portuguese Goa". In: PEREIRA, José, PAL, Pratapaditya (ed.). *India & Portugal: Cultural Interactions*. New Delhi: Books & Books, 1995, págs. 70-87; AZEVEDO, Carlos de. "The churches of Goa". *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (Berkeley), 3, 15 (1956), págs. 3-6; CHICÓ, Mário Tavares. "Igrejas de Goa". *Garcia da Orta* (Lisbon), special issue (1956), págs. 331-336 y CHICÓ, Mário Tavares. "Aspectos da arte religiosa da Índia Portuguesa (A arquitetura e a talha dourada)". *Boletim da Agência-Geral do Ultramar* (Lisbon), 318, págs. 119-132, 1951.



Fig. 2. Church of Our Lady of the Divine Providence, in Old Goa, Goa, India. Photographed by the autor.

The Theatine priests came from Italy and were not bound to the *Padroado Real Português* (Portuguese Royal Patronage); they were more closely connected to the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation, run directly from Rome, and which by then was fiercely intent on countering the almost exclusive spiritual dominion exerted in Asia by the Portuguese Kingdom. This might explain the Theatines' decision to build an architectural complex worthy of their institution—and, above all, a complex that would stand out from the other religious buildings founded by the Portuguese in Goa. Their direct connection to Rome, rather than Lisbon, may also have had a significant weight in the architectural solution that was followed, which shows a clear Italian influence and strong allusions to Rome, and especially to the Vatican. The Theatines set out to build a church in Goa whose façade would be “a replica of the frontispiece of Saint Peter’s Basilica, in Rome”, complete with a “magnificent dome, unique in India” and worthy of the epithet “Rome of the East”.

The construction took only four years and a few months: the church and the dome were both built

between 1656 and 1661. The decision to build the church’s current façade was taken about 12 years later and executed in only two years (between 1673 and 1675). This façade, as mentioned earlier, was also completely different from the ones favoured by the Portuguese and Indo-Portuguese traditions⁴.

The façade of Goa’s Theatine church is explicitly inspired by the façade designed by Carlo Maderno⁵ for the Vatican: the central two-storey section, divided into three subsections and surmounted by a pediment, is structured by colossal columns; on both sides of the central section, two further subsections are divided

4. MOREIRA, Rafael. “Riflessi della Ghiara nell’India Portoghese: La chiesa dei teatini a Goa”. In: *Conference. La Basilica della Ghiara: Il miracolo della città. Reggio Emilia*, [s.n.], 1997 (extract).

5. Carlo Maderno was also the main architect of the Theatine’s headquarters in Rome, the Church of Sant’Andrea della Valle.

by equally colossal pilasters; over the entablature that supports the pediment, a further storey is divided into seven subsections crowned by a balustrade. This façade is not identical to Maderno's, but it does contain clear allusions to Saint Peter's Basilica, even though the Goan temple lacks the Roman basilica's lateral subsections (on which the towers, which were never built, were to rest).

Curiously, the debate surrounding the addition (or not) of towers held during the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica, in Rome, was also held in Goa, albeit in a smaller scale. In Portugal's religious architectural tradition, large churches, such as cathedrals, usually had frontal façades flanked by towers. For Paulo Varela Gomes, the two towers of Goa's Theatine church appear to be the product of a last-minute decision to follow the Portuguese model⁶. The addition of the towers led to a somewhat dubious result, as they are not coherently integrated in the façade.

What is worse, the towers accentuate the problem of the dome's visual framing, since the latter was clearly visible from the churchyard prior to the construction of the current façade, when the centralized floor plan brought the dome nearer to the building's outer edge—as is the case, for example, with the façade of the Church of Sant' Agnese in Agone, in Rome, designed by Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) and intended as a veiled criticism of the solution adopted in the Vatican.

The construction of the current façade entailed the expansion of the building's frontal volume, which contributed to a partial obstruction of the view of the dome from the churchyard—which also happened in the Roman basilica, when the centralized plan was replaced by a longitudinal one. Adding to this problem, the construction of the towers meant that only from a great distance could one fully contemplate the dome, which was arguably the Theatines' main architectural and ideological symbol in Goa. Therefore, at the urban level, the dome could not be seen in all its glory either from the churchyard or from the city streets, flanked by buildings; nonetheless, in Goa's urban landscape, the dome stood out when observed from the hills surrounding the city, and was also a prominent element of the cityscape when seen from the Mandovi river or the islands overlooking the city.

4. Cupoliform Churches: an ingenious goan solution

It was precisely the profile of the Church of Our Lady of the Divine Providence that gave rise to a *sui generis* type of religious façade, specific to the Goan territory and applied in several Franciscan churches—especially in the Bardez *taluka*, located in the northern part of the territory. Many of these churches were initially modest. Over the years, however, they were demolished and totally or partially rebuilt (some of them more than once) with the aim of increasing their size, improving their construction and enhancing their image.

The Church of Saint Stephen was founded in 1759 in the island of Juá, which is located opposite the island of Tiswadi and offers a view of the city of Goa. The church had a Western structural and formal organization, but with significant concessions to the Indian tradition regarding the decoration. It is therefore a good example of the vernacular hybrid style that is typical of Goan culture. However, its most peculiar feature is undoubtedly the false dome placed above the façade's central section, close to the building's front edge, between the two towers. This unique feature of Goan religious architecture had already been mentioned by Mário Tavares Chicó (1905-1966) and Carlos de Azevedo (1918-1974) during their "Mission to Study the Monuments of Goa, Daman and Diu", which took place in 1951. Chicó and Azevedo noted that these false domes seemed to play the role of traditional church pediments⁷.

Four decades later, José Pereira focused on churches with this kind of façade and called them "cupoliform churches", a term that was generally adopted. Initially, the author saw these false domes as a reference to Hindu temples and a way of competing with them in terms of magnificence and symbolism, by means of bulkier and more decorated façades. Later, however, he went on to detect the influence of Goa's Theatine church, whose imposing dome may have led the architects to create two-dimensional copies for the churches, which were more modest⁸. Shortly thereafter, José Manuel Fernandes offered a brief analysis of this kind of Baroque Indo-Portuguese façade⁹, which was further developed, more recently, by Paulo Varela Gomes.

6. GOMES, Paulo Varela. *Arquitectura, religião e política em Portugal no século XVII: A planta centralizada*. Porto: FAUP Publicações, 2001.

7. AZEVEDO, Carlos de. *Arte de Goa, Damão e Diu*. Lisbon: Pedro de Azevedo - Leiloeiro/Livreiro, 1992 (1970).

8. PEREIRA, José. *Baroque Goa*. New Deli: Books & Books, 1995.

9. FERNANDES, José Manuel. "Urbanismo e Arquitectura no Estado da Índia (Índia Portuguesa): Alguns Temas e Exem-

It was the latter author who claimed that the Church of Saint Stephen was the first to display a cupoliform façade, explicitly influenced by Goa's Theatine church as regards the dome and, to some extent, the decoration, which sets it apart from more traditional Goan churches. Indeed, the church in Juá ended up giving rise to a distinctly Goan façade model, which would be reprised in five more cases; in all of them, the façades were (re)built in the 19th century but retained a generally Baroque appearance. The Church of Saint Aleixo, in Calangute, whose initial foundation dates back to 1595, was rebuilt in the mid-18th century, and its cupoliform façade dates from the second half of the 19th century. The Church of Our Lady of Conception, in Moirá, founded in 1636, was rebuilt between 1800 and 1836, but the cupoliform façade is probably from the late 19th century. The Church of Santana, in Bodiem, founded in 1801, was totally rebuilt in 1893 with a cupoliform façade. The Church of Saint Cajetan, in Assagan, founded in 1775, was rebuilt in 1897 with a cupoliform façade. Finally, the façade of the Chapel of Our Lady of Miracles, in Loutolim, founded in 1677, was refurbished in the late 19th century, also acquiring a false dome¹⁰.

The façades of these churches were generally divided into two storeys containing five subsections, with the divisions between storeys and the edge of the upper storey marked by balustrades. There was a door on each of the three central subsections, and the central one contained the main doorway, which was wider and more decorated than the others; the doors on the ground level were surmounted, on the second storey, by windows—usually bay windows. The side sections were decorated with niches and crowned by one-storey bell towers rising above the cymatium; both the openings and the niches were arched and distributed throughout the façade in a somewhat palatial manner.

Yet the most distinguishing feature of this kind of façade was undoubtedly the false dome crowning the central section, between the two towers. This element consisted in a two-storey-high brick wall, slightly curved at the front, which was placed where the pediment used to stand, that is, along the surface of the façade, crowning its central section. The false dome was composed of a fake drum divided into three sections separated by pilasters, each containing a niche, and an entablature, which was then crowned



Fig. 3. Church of Saint Stephen, in Juá Island, Goa, India. Photographed by the autor.

by a simulated skylight, equally divided into three sections. These false domes were thus no more than a scenographically carved wall, creating the illusion of a real dome when looked at frontally, from the churchyard.

5. Goan hindu temples: a unique and peculiar influence

If cupoliform churches are in themselves an unusual result of the aesthetic appropriation, on the part of Goan Catholics, of the dome of the Church of Our Lady of the Divine Providence, it is even more surprising that this appropriation should also have been used in Hindu temples.

Like the cupoliform churches, these temples—hereafter referred to a “cupoliform temples”, by analogy with the corresponding churches—were also mentioned by Mário Chicó and Carlos de Azevedo while noting, during their study mission in Portuguese India, the singularities of various Goan temples in the New Conquests area, especially in the Pondá taluka. Indeed, these historians

plificações”. In: PINTO, Maria Helena Mendes y GARCIA, José Manuel (coords). *Vasco da Gama e a Índia*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1999, págs. 271-293.

10. GOMES, Paulo Varela. *Whitewash, red stone: A history of church architecture in Goa*. New Deli: Yoda Press, 2011.



Fig. 4. View of the backside of the false dome, Church of Saint Stephen, in Juá Island, Goa, India. Photographed by the autor.

suggested that Goan builders might have looked for inspiration, when designing these Hindu temples, in Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque decorative motifs, as well as in the combination of volumes with a clear Western provenance, in an attempt to merge Christian sources of inspiration with Hindu programmes. Among these volumes, the *garbhagriha* (the *sanctum sanctorum*, the most sacred room in the temple) was crowned by an octagonal *shikara* with decorative motifs and balustrades, surmounted by a cupola and a skylight—evoking somehow the dome of the Theatine church¹¹.

José Pereira also highlighted this peculiarity of Goan temples, mentioning the names and dates of a few examples. According to this author, the first

temple with a *garbhagriha* denoting the influence of the Theatine dome was the Temple of Saptakoteshwar, in Narvem, in the Bicholim *taluka*; although the temple was paid for by Shivaji (1627-1680), a Maratha leader, the architect drew inspiration from classical Catholic architecture and designed a *garbhagriha* that evokes also the aforementioned dome¹². Curiously, Narvem's temple is situated only two and a half kilometres, along a straight line, from the Church of Saint Cajetan, in the island of Juá; therefore, as was the case with the first cupoliform church, the distant shape of the Theatine dome might have been visible from the hills surrounding the Narvem temple.

11. AZEVEDO, Carlos de. *A arte de Goa, Damão e Diu*. Lisbon: Pedro de Azevedo - Leiloeiro/Livreiro, 1992 (1970).

12. PEREIRA, José. *Baroque Goa*. New Deli: Books & Books, 1995; PEREIRA, José. "The Evolution of the Goan Hindu Temple". In: PEREIRA, José, PAL, Pratapaditya (ed.). *India & Portugal: Cultural Interactions*. New Deli: Books & Books, 1995, págs. 88-97.



Fig. 5. Temple of Nagueshi, in Bandode, Goa, India. Photographed by the autor.

David Kowal also took up the issue of the mixture of Western and Hindustani influences in Goan temples from the 17th and 18th centuries, apart from other influences (Mughal, Bijapuri, Maratha, etc.), and saw the *shikara* of the Temple of Saptakoteshwar as a product of the influence of Muslim Bijapuri architecture—especially the adoption of an octagonal cupola, in conjunction with the balustrade usually found in several Goan churches. Moreover, Kowal provided further evidence for the idea that the Marathas sponsored the reconstruction of other temples in the mid-18th century—namely in Pondá, where the Temple of Manguesh, in Priol, the Temple of Nagueshi, in Bandode, and the Temple of Shantadurga, in Kavlem, are good examples¹³.

13. KOWAL, David Martin. "The Hindu Temples of seventeenth and eighteenth century Goa: The maintenance of a sacred integrity and the process of East-West cross fertilization". *Portuguese studies review* (Lisbon), 1/29 (2001), págs. 398-434.

However, recent studies conducted by Amita Kanekar seem to show that the Goan temples' *shikaras* appeared as early as the 19th century, after the beginning of the Portuguese dominion, in the second half of the 18th century¹⁴. The final results of this research are eagerly awaited and may bring precious information about the emergence and development of this peculiar kind of *shikara*, profoundly different from the Nagara *shikaras* prevalent in northern Hindustani areas, but also from the Dravida *shikaras* (or *vimanas*) of southern India and the Vesara *shikaras*, a combination of the two previous variants, found mostly in the subcontinent's central area.

14. KANEKAR, Amita. "The Politics of Renovation: The Disappearing Architecture of Goa's Brahmanical Temples". In: SANTOS, Joaquim Rodrigues dos (ed.). *Preserving Transcultural Heritage: Your Way or My Way?* Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, 2017, págs. 253-263.

6. Final notes

The problem of the visual framing of façades with two towers and central domes in religious architecture emerged during the construction of the new Basilica of Saint Peter, in Rome, and was never truly solved. The issue was also left unsolved during the construction of the Roman basilica's Goan replica, the Church of Our Lady of the Divine Providence. However, its significant influence on other Goan buildings led to a very peculiar type of Indo-Portuguese—or, even better, Goan—religious façade:

the so-called cupoliform churches, which provided a possible solution to the issue of the dome's visual framing in temples with a longitudinal floor plan, resorting to the scenographic ruse of placing a false dome between the towers, above the façade's central section. And this same influence would even extend to Goa's Hindu temples, through a process of trans-cultural appropriation. These two types of religious temple testify to the singularity of Goan architecture, whereby European influences are acclimatized and incorporated into Indian cultures.