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For our Father General

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

I say therefore that their laws are divided into four [parts]. Their names are *Irucu*, *Eihiru*, *Xama*, *Adaru*:<sup>1</sup> each of which is divided into two parts, one purely spiritual or substantial [sustancial] while the other is called *carmam* [Karman] and it seems to be the laws in which are contained all the things that pertain to their rites and their mode of conduct. The law which is called *nhana* [jñana] is followed by the *saniaxes* [sannyasi]. Those who become *saniaxes*, neither perform sacrifices, nor learn, teach of do *equiam* [ekkiyam] and they spend their life in contemplation of how to attain *Parabrama* in order to unite themselves with him and become the same thing as him and enjoy his presence. The second part that they call *carmam* is divided in three laws, that is: *Eihiru*, *Irucu*, *Xama*. In *Eihirurvedam*, they teach the manner in performing sacrifices that are infinite because for every thing they have a special one. Their ceremonies [are], both general and particular. The one they call *Irucu*, comprise in itself all the *mandirōis* [mantras] to be recited at each of the sacrifices and ceremonies. In the third are contained all the tunes of the *mandirois* that have to be recited in different tunes according to each ceremony. This is the law of the highest esteem among them. They say that it came into being with the Brahmans. With the *raixos* [rajas] came into being the *Ehiru* and with *comutins* [komatis] came into being *Irucu*.<sup>2</sup> The fourth law is called *Adaru*, the other name of which is *nhanam*. What it contains is of the highest authority and although they only have a part of [this law], nobody contradicts it in anything. It is the source of [knowledge of] the manner of doing *corumin* [kudumi], of tying the string, and the *mandirois* to be said at that time,

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<sup>1</sup> Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso mentions here the four Vedas - Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda.

as well as of what is to be done at the marriages and the procedures of the *saniaxes*. These are more like witchcraft for killing, for doing vile things and for ordering demons.<sup>3</sup> Since some of these things they consider as supernatural and others as necessary for salvation, they call it a *spritual* or substantial law, which is *nhanam*. They also teach the names of the fires in which their sacrifices are to be made. There are three [fires]: the fire *patião*, the fire *daquixana*, and the third *agavaniam*. Each of them has a name according to the *mandiram* with which they make them. They serve for different sacrifices with different *mandirois*. This much about the laws.

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

How many are the stages [of life] to be found in this machine of Brahmanism (*maquina do bramanismo*) and what is contained in each of them; all the sacrifices to be done, beginning when the woman is pregnant, when she gives birth, when they name the child, when it is taken out of the house [for the first time], when it is given solid food, the *mandirōis* are to be recited for each of these occasions, the ceremonies for cutting *corumbi* with its sacrifices, those for tying the string and for marriages, obligations of the *bramaxaris*, of the married men, of *vanaprasanten* and of *saniaxis*, how to become a *saniaxi*, what are the ceremonies to be performed and how many types of *saniaxis* exist in all and who was their founder, what is the meaning of their

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<sup>2</sup> The division of the society into four varnas (colors) is evoked here. Brahmans, Ksatriyas (rajas), Vayshas (komatis = merchants). The fourth group ( Shurdras) are missing from his description.

<sup>3</sup> Kudumi is a tuft of hair left on the shaved head of a Brahman.

staff which they call *tandu*, their ablutions and ceremonies connected with food, their *langenes*, that is the signs they put on their head, what the Brahmans believe and profess regarding the creator of the universe, what is the relation with the creator, the sacrifices and ceremonies when they install a *lingam* to be there forever, the manner in which they perform *puxei* [puja] for it, the tools of a Brahman for the *puxei* in the *pagode* [temple], how many types of *puxei* there are, the ceremony and the sacrifice of the *teivasam*, how to do the solemn *equiam*, some differences within the sects of the *pandaras*, and the signs they use in order to be recognized as to which sect they belong. There may always be something more [to say], but all presented here is taken from the authentic books and their laws.

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Begins the Summary of the ceremonies and the manner of behaving of the Brahmans of these parts of India according to their laws and their doctrines

Among the things that I occupied myself with for the past twenty years while I resided in Madurai by the order of the holy obedience, one of them was to find out about the manner of behaving of this gentility (*jentelidade*), especially the Brahmans, because all the other people are considered as incapable of whatever merit or any other thing by which to obtain the glory. This is what in his stories says Juden [Cutan], a important doctor: a king visited his kingdom and encountered a man who performed penitence for many years by having his head on the ground and his feet in the air. The king approached him and asked why has he been doing that penitence? And he responded that it for his salvation and for achieving glory (*ir a gloria*). The king ask him to tell him what was his caste? Since he responded that he was not a Brahman, immediately he cut his head, saying that only Brahmans are allowed to achieve glory and no other person. Just like that, the Brahmans keep with them the things of the law and preserve them with a lot of integrity.

In order that Your Paternity can see what these absurdities and affronts are (*doer-se dellas*), with the divine favor I wrote them in this notebook taken word by word from their laws, their authentic stories and their important doctors. And it is said in the Fourth law that the life stages (*estado*) of the Brahmans is divided into four types of men, one is *bramaxari* [brahmacharya], or those who after receiving a thread learn the law; another is that of married men who are called *gragastar* [grhastya];

another is that of hermits whom they call *vanaprastam* and yet other is that of *saniaxes*. In these four life stages it is required that he be well born and that the ceremonies were performed for him when the woman is in the fourth and sixth month of pregnancy, when he is born, when they give him a name, when they give him solid food and when they do the ceremony of *curumbi* [kutumi] at the age of thre. At the age of eight in the month of April they would perform the ceremony of tying the thread.

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

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

And since with the help of God it will be said the way in which one becomes *saniagem*, his way of life and all that he respects and is obliged to do in his diabolical religion, and how many types of *saniaxes* there exist, all clearly taken from the

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

Source:

Original autograph of the treatise in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Goa 59, ff. 1r-142

Published version in Joseph Wicki, S.I., (editor), *Tratado do P.e Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hiduismo (Maduré 1616)*, Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramaions, 1974.

*On Indian heathenism*

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

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

Interest in Brahmanical life-cycle rituals and their "sciences", "laws" and "authentic" books reached its apogee by the end of the sixteenth century and a few relatively competent first-hand accounts were written in the first decades of the seventeenth century. One remarkable non-Jesuit account is by Frey Agostinho de

Azevedo (1603). His text was a part of a report for the royal council of Philip III on his Portuguese India. What is remarkable in his presentation is that Indian paganism is conceptualized as a system rather than a jumble of unconnected rites and customs. Diogo do Couto in his *Fifth Decada* (1612) faithfully plagiarized Azevedo's text.<sup>4</sup> A similar fate befell another expert Jesuit account of Indian cosmology - Jacome Fenicio's, *Livro primeiro da Seita dos Indios Orientais, e principalmente dos Malauares* (1609). Parts of his treatise found their way into published works by Philippus Baldaeus and Manuel de Faria y Sousa.<sup>5</sup> While the Dutch chaplain Baldaeus is already notorious for intentionally borrowing both written and pictorial material for his book *Afgoderye der Oost-Indische heydenen* (Idolatry of the East-Indian Heathens) without acknowledging and even disparaging his sources, the situation with the Jesuit and Catholic compilations is less clear-cut. The accumulation of knowledge concerning Indian religious practices in view of conversion and for celebration of the heroic missionary deeds in Asia demanded cut and paste technique by the literary experts in Europe. The fact that the missionary text arrived in various transcriptions without signatures of the authors - since they were writing for the Greater Glory of God and not for their own - their appropriation by publishers was greatly facilitated. On the other hand, the documents produced by the field work experts, the men of action such as Jesuits were often perceived as too close to and too implicated in the indigenous explanations and categories. A view from afar censured all that was not immediately acceptable or clear to the European audience.

Although some Jesuit manuscripts acquired a second life with the help of the plagiarizers and borrowers, some manuscripts were all but forgotten in the archives. One such text is Antonio Rubino's, *Relatione d'alcune cose principali del regno di Bisnaga*, in which he described the idolatry practiced in the rump kingdom of

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<sup>4</sup>Rubies, Joan-Pau, "The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism; Antonio Rubino's Account of the History of Religion of Vijayanagara (1608)", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 3 (2001), p. 228. Couto, Diogo do, *Da Asia, Decada Quinta Parte Segunda*, (Lisboa: Livraria Sam Carlos, 1974), pp. 1-48.

<sup>5</sup> Charpentier, Jarl, *The, Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais, (Brit. Mus. Ms. Sloane 1820) of Father Jacobo Fenicio, S.J.*, (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri-A.-B., 1933). Baldaeus, Philip, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also of the Isle of Ceylon*, (transl. From Dutch and printed at Amsterdam, 1672), (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1996), Sousa, Manuel Faria y, *Asia Portuguesa*, vols. 3, (Lisboa, 1666-1675),

Vijayanagara in Vellore (1608).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, *História do Malavar* (1615) written by a Portuguese Jesuit Diogo Gonçalves appeared in print only in the twentieth century. He is a militant, "nationalist" Portuguese more than willing to provide strategic information about, for example, a location of a rich temple in Kerala and openly invited Portuguese army to attack and pillage it.<sup>7</sup>

One of the features that distinguishes Gonalo Fernandes Trancoso from other Jesuit proto-ethnographers of the same period is that in the beginning of his career he had no special predilection for ethnographic writing or any kind of writing at all. He was one of those Jesuits recruited locally in India and he traded his unsuccessful military career in the army of the *Estado da Índia* for the missionary career among the "soldiers of Christ", as the Jesuits were often referred to. According to Jacinto Pereira who wrote his necrology in 1621, Fernades Trancoso joined the Society of Jesus in 1561 on the island of Mannar. His "conversion" occurred when he was lying wounded during the doomed expedition to Jaffnapatam by D. Constantino de Bragana's armada. The next step in his Jesuit career was his stay in the College of St. Paul in Goa in order to study Latin, cases of conscience, and other subjects necessary for ordination. By 1583 he was a Procurator for the Fishery Coast Mission (*Missão da Pescaria*) and a priest. Working among the Parava pearl fishing community on the extreme south of the Indian peninsula was a hard but satisfying task he successfully performed. He had learned Tamil well enough to preach, hear confessions and administer numerous parishes scattered along the sandy strip of land from Cape Comorin to the temple town of Rameswaram. It was around 1595 that he was posted in Madurai which was at the time the capital of the Nayaka rulers and one of the major temple towns of South India. Nominally, his duties were to tend to the Catholic Parava merchants who moved inland, although he also sporadically played a role of Portuguese "ambassador" at the court. The friendship between the Nayakas and the Estado da India relied mostly on the importation of horses which was in hands of Portuguese merchants. What the Jesuits were not allowed to do in Madurai was proselytism and conversion.

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<sup>6</sup> The integral text was published in Rubies, Joan-Pau, "The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism; Antonio Rubino's Account of the History of Religion of Vijayanagara (1608)", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 3 (2001), p. 228. Couto, Diogo do, *Da Asia, Decada Quinta Parte Segunda*, (Lisboa: Livraria Sam Carlos, 1974), pp. 1-48..

<sup>7</sup> Wicki, Joseph, (ed.), *P. Diogo Gonçalves S. I. Historia do Malavar*, (Quakernbrück: Robert Kleinert, 1955), p. 83.



This situation radically changed with the arrival of a young Italian Jesuit, Roberto Nobili who, in Fernandes Trancoso's opinion, turned the mission upside down. Nobili pretended, wrote Fernandes Trancoso in 1610, that "there are some or even big difference between us in religion".<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Italian denied that he was a "Portuguese", he donned heathen dress of a sannyasi, ate vegetarian food cooked by Brahman cooks, conversed only with Brahmans and high castes and dissociated himself completely from the Catholic Parava church and its priest. The separation of churches which for the Portuguese missionary veteran amounted to schism was finally what prompted him to denounce his young coreligionist to the superiors in Cochin and Goa. It was to his surprise that he discovered that Nobili had powerful support in his Italian superiors, such as Alberto Laerzio, and that *accommodatio* was the hallmark of this particular missionary approach already in practice in China. After furious exchanges between the two missionary camps that went on in Madurai and that began to involve Nobili's few high-cast converts and Fernandes Trancoso's Paravas, the war of treatises and letters began. Nobili's Latin texts, garnished with theological quotations and analogies, started to circulate and be read and discussed among the Jesuit theologians in Cochin and Goa.

A response to Nobili's rhetorical propaganda for his experimental accommodationist mission had to be concocted urgently from Fernandes Trancoso's side.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, these are the texts that ignited, a long controversy that culminated in the Malabar rites quarrel in the middle of the eighteenth century. The points of disagreement between the two Jesuits were irreconcilable. While Nobili admiringly recognized in Brahmans the learned men of European antiquity and tried to imitate their life style, or as he would call it their "political customs" in order to gradually weaned them over to Christianity, for Fernandes Trancoso, the Brahmans were learned in diabolical sacrifices and mantras. The "ceremonies" and the "mode of conduct" that he describes in detail in his treaties were geared to prove that the Brahman way of life was their religion and he, in fact, gave it a name - the Brahmanism (*o bramanismo*). By adding the suffix *ism* to an Indian word, Fernandes Trancoso made it into a concept that comes closer to the later notion of Hinduism as a

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<sup>8</sup> Arcivum Romanum Scietatis Iesu, Rome, Goa, 51, ff. 29r-31v.

<sup>9</sup> S. Rajamanickam, a Jesuit biographer and apologist of Roberto Nobili, has recently come to the conclusion that this treaties was not written by Fernandes Trancoso but by an Indian convert in Madurai. It is obvious that this work is "heterological" and based on information provided by the local

unified religion of all the Hindus. His was a solitary move and since his text received almost no attention at the time and he had no immediate followers.

The reason why his text ended in the archives too soon were many. Some can be clearly detected in the translated paragraphs and some can be inferred from them. His text is badly written, as if he never looked back into what he writes. It is full of unnecessary repetitions, run in sentences, undeveloped thoughts, ungrammatical forms and the most confusing orthography. He was obviously untrained as a writer, unlike, for example, his antagonist Roberto Nobili whose superior rhetoric was part of his success in the controversy. Fernandes Trancoso was aware at least of some of these problems but attributed it to the obscure and even dangerous material that he tried to transpose into Portuguese. "Sometimes there will be places that will appear obscure to understand [although] in Portuguese, but it seemed more convenient [like that] in stead of changing words, not because they kill and the meaning gives life, but because one and other in these matters (*nesta materia*) kill."<sup>10</sup>

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

Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso provides very few similitudes: for example, he agrees that the learned Brahmans resemble the Church doctors and that the emblems such as the tuft of hair and the thread can be likened to the Muslim "toque and tunic".

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informants, but the final touches in terms of the selection of the material and rhetorical equipment is most certainly the work of Fernandes Trancoso.

<sup>10</sup> Wicki Tratado, p. 219.

But these are exceptions, since for him Indian (or Tamil, to be more precise) heathenism is simply unique. It is the absence of comparison that gives his text an unusually modern anthropological veneer. One after another, in thirty nine chapters, he does what he promises in the introduction: he described an entire life-cycle of an ideal Brahman man from the first day of conception until death. It is an ethnographic description of a prescribed, and not necessarily actual ritual performances, the fact that he does not make all too clear.

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

Heathenism itself, according to missionary opinion, lacked meaning - since it was devoid of Christian meaning - and was fuelled either by diabolical forces or by mechanical, senseless repetition. Some more sophisticated Jesuit writers, such as Diogo Gonçalves, diagnosed the absence of free will (*livre alvedrio*) in heathenish rites and customs. Unable to fashion their own agency, the heathens were bound to stick to and repeat their rituals. Fenicio has similar solution. Heathenism is for him a product of the carnal people who possess no spirit.<sup>11</sup> Hence the metaphor of a diabolic device (*ingénio tão diabolico*) or a Brahmanical machine, a kind of *perpetuum mobile* that keeps people in "darkness".<sup>12</sup>

Even if the knowledge of Indian gentility was still hotly debated among the Jesuits themselves, especially the theological and ontological fine points, were far from harmonized and rarefied, they all worked with the same hermeneutic paradigm. The goal was to distinguish diabolic from religious and superstitious from social. One of the biggest questions was whether caste was a religious/superstitious or social/civil phenomenon. If it were social, as Nobili claimed, it could be permitted to the Indian

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<sup>11</sup> Fenicio, p. 67

<sup>12</sup> Fenicio, p. 1.

converts together with all the life-cycle ceremonies that accompanied it. If it were superstitious, as Fernandes Trancoso claimed, it had to be abolished altogether. In this sense, the ceremonies and the mode of behavior of the Brahmans presented in his treaties belonged to the world that had to disappear with the advent of true Christianity. However, the future decided otherwise.

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