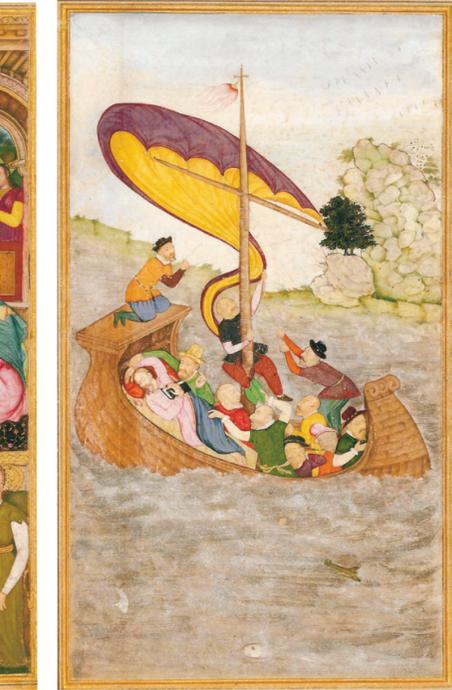


# The Jesuits in India, Vietnam, and the Philippines

## The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissance Art at the Imperial Court of India



In 1595 a Portuguese artist and three exhausted Jesuit missionaries traveled thousands of miles over sea and sun-scorched valley to the fortified capital of the wealthiest Muslim nation on earth. As soon as the artist arrived in the city of Lahore, his hosts pressed him into service to produce scores of small oil paintings of Christ and the Madonna, including copies of the emperor's extensive collection of European Renaissance religious pictures and prints. Meanwhile, his Jesuit companions spent their evenings expounding Christian tenets and debating with priests and mullahs of the world's religions in a special imperial debating hall. They often used the emperor's paintings to illustrate their arguments in an episode from one of the most remarkable cultural exchanges in the history of East-West relations: the three Jesuit missions to the Great Mughal Emperors Akbar (1542-1605; reigned 1556-1605) and Jahangir (1569-1627; reigned 1605-27).

When European travelers entered the palaces and tombs of the Mughal emperors of India between 1580 and 1630, they were astonished to find the walls covered with Italian Renaissance-style murals depicting Christ, the Madonna, and Christian saints. To their delight, they also discovered legions of Mughal artists

at work on miniature paintings, exquisite jewelry, and sculptures featuring the same subjects; many depictions were apparently being used as devotional images. What made the exchange between the Mughals and the Jesuits different from most missionary encounters of the period was that the parties had reached a comparable stage of intellectual florescence and were willing to learn from one another.

Despite this mutual cordiality, however, each side was at work subtly subverting the other. The Mughal emperors openly appropriated the Jesuits' devotional imagery as a form of royal propaganda. The Jesuits, conversely, capitalized upon the images' affinities with Islam, Hinduism, and Sufism (the mystical branch of Islam) to promote their goals of Christian salvation. One of the most prominent aspects of the Jesuit campaign was the Jesuit missionary Jerome Xavier's (1549-1617) Persian-language Catholic literature, which is replete with complex and subtle Indo-Islamic cultural allusions.

*At the same time that the Jesuits were flourishing in Japan and China, they received an extraordinarily warm reception in the Muslim North of India, at the court of the great Mughal Emperors Akbar (1556–1605) and Jahangir (1605–27).*

Figure 1. Cornelius Hazart, *Father Jerome Xavier, of the Society of Jesus and [Grand] Nephew of Saint Francis Xavier, Debates with the Muslims in the Presence of the King of Mogor (Mughal emperor). Jerome Xavier, like the other Jesuit missionaries to the Mughal empire, spent much of his energy at official inter-faith debates hosted by the Emperors Akbar and Jahangir.* (1607)

Figure 2. Anonymous, *The Annunciation, Holiness* or *Dastan-i Masih (Story of Christ)* may have been the most lavishly illustrated Catholic catechism of all time. A collaboration between the Jesuit missionary Jerome Xavier, grand-nephew of Saint Francis Xavier, and the Mughal court historian Abd al-Sattar Ibn Qasim Lahori, the book told the story of the life of Christ using Islamic and Sufi (mystical Islamic) metaphors, and was written in a simplified version of the elegant Persian used at the Mughal court. This delicate scene shows the Annunciation, with the Angel Gabriel kneeling in front of the Virgin Mary.

Figure 3. Jozsi Szepsy *During a Storm at the Sea of Galilee*. Mughal India, 1602–4. Pigments, ink, and gold on paper, 7.8 x 4.4 inches. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Figure 4. Anonymous, *Entry into Jerusalem*. Mughal India, 1602–4. Pigments, ink, and gold on paper, 7.8 x 4.4 inches. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art.



Among the most influential Jesuit media for indoctrination were the Persian language catechisms written between 1595 and 1607 by Father Jerome Xavier (1549–1617), the superior of the third mission, with the help of the Mughal court historian Abd al-Sattar Ibn Qasim Lahori (fl. 1590s–1615). These bible stories, lives of the saints, and fictitious interfaith debates were crafted in the literary Persian style, full of Sufi metaphor and built on a Neoplatonic philosophical framework that was shared by Islam and Christianity. Similarly, the lively miniature paintings that accompanied them—done by a team of court painters likely led by Manohar (fl. 1582–c. 1605)—were commissioned from Mughal artists in a style closely akin to the Indo-Persian idiom of the day, with rich landscapes and jewel-like colors.

At times the artists also copied European engravings, but they never let such models dominate the scene. The paintings also show the influence of Jesuit theater, as the artists likely based them on theatrical productions done on the mission, and they include stage-like architectural settings, elaborate props, dramatic gestures, and several mis-en-scène figures such as priests and altar boys. The most important were the two editions of the *Mirat al-Quds* (Mirror of Holiness), which were prepared for Akbar and Prince Salim (the future Jahangir) in 1602.

Figure 5. Gavin Alexander Bailey in *The Jesuits and the Arts*, 1540-1773 (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

## The Jesuits in the Philippines

The Spanish Philippines offered a very different setting for mission work than did China, Japan, or India. The Philippines had been conquered by the Spanish in 1565, so the situation there was similar in certain respects to that in Latin America.

The Philippine missions outside Manila produced some of the most unusual baroque church architecture in the world during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The earliest churches on the islands adapted to indigenous architectural traditions.

The Jesuits quickly played a leading role in church architecture in the Philippines, sending several highly qualified architects from Spain, Italy, and elsewhere, and since some of them were specialists in fortification architecture they also served the needs of the colony as a whole. One of the remarkable things about these Jesuit architects is the number of them who were priests, since most architects, sculptors, or painters in the Society were lay brothers.

Figure 6. Gavin Alexander Bailey in *The Jesuits and the Arts*, 1540-1773 (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

*The art of the Jesuit missions in Japan, China, India, and the Philippines is often more acculturative than it first appears. Art forms that on the surface seem predominantly European were often profoundly hybrid in nature, and even proclaimed messages that were a far cry from their original Euro-Christian models. If art can serve as an international language and a way of bridging cultures—as Francis Xavier and Alessandro Valignano believed—it can also do the opposite, in allowing two different and even conflicting meanings to coexist in a single image. For the art of the Jesuit missions in Asia demonstrates a cultural plurality that parallels that of the artists who made it.*

The Chinese artisans of the *Parían* section of Manila were among the most skilled sculptors of Christian religious art in Asia. Although they also executed sculptures, retables, and furniture in a wide range of native hardwoods, their specialty was fine-quality ivories.



Figure 7. St. Michael the Archangel, ivory. Saint Michael, 32.8 inches high. Devil, 18.9 inches high. Private collection.

Figure 6. Main entrance to the Fort of Santiago, Manila.

## The Jesuits' Voyage to Siam (1686)



*Éclypse de Soleil à Siam en 1688. au mois d'auril, Elle fut Spectée par les Jesuites Missionnaires et Mathématiciens envoyez par le Royaux Indes orientales en 1687. Ce fut à Louvo dans le palais du Roy qu'on Observa en Presence de ce prince qui estoit avec le Ministre d'une grande Salle de son Palais assis sur un fauteuil, et les Jesuites avec ses Constance qui leur servoit d'interprete estoient assis les pieds croisez sur un grand tapis de Turquie on devoit une rangée de mandarins Prosternez la teste Contre terre Des Deux Costez on se servoit en cette occasion de la belle machine paralladique qui est une espèce d'horloge, on est attaché une lunette d'approche qui suit le Mouvement du Soleil, on voit là le Mandarin oprapitrattha qui vint voir depuis cette Machine, cest Celuy qui Test Emparé du Royaume de Siam et à Cassé les Français.*

Figure 8. Observation of an Eclipse of the Sun at the Jesuit Observatory in Siam. Jesuit watercolor, late 17th century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.

*In many regions, from China to Rajasthan, the Jesuits gained the confidence of the ruling elites by building or staffing observatories and demonstrating their astronomical acumen.*



**VOYAGE DE SIAM.**  
LIVRE CINQUIÈME  
RETOUR DU VOYAGE de Siam.  
Près qu'on eut résolu que jere-tournerois en France, Monsieur Constance redoubla les témoignages d'amitié dont il m'avoit honoré jusqu'alors, me disant qu'il fouhaitoit que nous eussions

## French Jesuit Scientists at the Court of Siam

A journey of nearly seven months would bring Louis XIV's embassy to King Narai of Siam. In addition to the ambassador himself and his official entourage, were six French Jesuits, all destined for missionary work in the East. The Jesuits, however, bore *petites lettres patentes* declaring them "Mathématiciens du Roi." They carried telescopes, quadrants, seconds-pendulum, burning glasses, microscopes, thermometers, and barometers, as well as memoirs and instructions concerning the scientific observations they were to make on behalf of the Paris Académie Royale des Sciences.

After arriving at the king's summer palace, the Jesuits quickly made preparations for observing a lunar eclipse, predicted for 11 December [1685]. As the king of Siam wished the observation of the eclipse be made in his presence, the Jesuits set up their instruments, preparing one telescope for the king's use. At about 3 a.m. the Jesuits readied themselves. Some were "sitting upon Persian Carpets, some at the Telescopes, others at the Pendulum, and others were to write down the time of the Observation. We saluted his Majesty with a profound inclination of Body, and then began to observe." During the eclipse, the king asked the Jesuits various questions regarding the eclipse, while one of his officials brought "six Cassocks and as many Cloaks of flowered Satin" for the assembled Jesuits. Wishing to look through the longer telescope which Fontenay had been using, the Siamese king allowed Fontenay to rise in his presence to bring it to him. This gesture, Tachard reported, was a mark of rare favour in the context of Siamese customs.

Finally, the Siamese king announced to the assembled Jesuits that he intended to ask Louis XIV for "twelve Mathematicians of our Society." These twelve Jesuit mathematicians were to staff an observatory to be built "in imitation of Paris and Peking." The new group of Jesuits would arrive to find observatory, house, and church already built for them at Louvo as well as at the capital city of Siam.

Figure 9. Jesuit Fathers Observe an Eclipse of the Sun Accompanied by the King of Siam. Engraved frontispiece of the book of Voyage de Siam des pères jésuites envoyez par le roi aux Indes et à la Chine (Paris, 1686). Bibliothèque historique de Lyon.

*The Jesuits played a similar role in parts of Asia, such as Vietnam, where Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660) created a written version of the Vietnamese language based on Latin letters (quoc-ngu) that replaced the Chinese-based system already in play and that is still in use today.*

Figure 10. Anonymous, *Jesuit Fathers Observe an Eclipse of the Sun Accompanied by the King of Siam*. Engraved frontispiece of the book of Voyage de Siam des pères jésuites envoyez par le roi aux Indes et à la Chine (Paris, 1686). Bibliothèque historique de Lyon.