



ESSAYS ON BUILT HERITAGE OF PORTUGUESE INFLUENCE IN GOA

*The Church and Convent of
Our Lady of Mount Carmel,
Chimbel*

Sidh Losa Mendiratta & Fernando Dias Velho

Essays on Built Heritage of Portuguese Influence in Goa:

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Foreword

Over the 25 years of its presence in India, Fundação Oriente has been deeply committed to the safeguarding of cultural heritage, paying particular attention to tangible and intangible heritage that speaks to our collective memory.

Goa, for its historic importance and architectural richness, is where we have been focusing our endeavours. By fostering research, promoting training programmes and collaborative projects of conservation and restoration, we learn tremendously not only about our common past and about the uniqueness and splendour of this territory but also about a future that we aspire to be collaborative and of mutual benefit.

The survey and research that gave body to this publication fulfils many of our ambitions and its importance gave way to a social movement much beyond our expectations. It started with the aim of having comprehensive drawings of the convent and church of *Nossa Senhora do Carmo* in Chimbél, since apart from very few photographs there were no plans or drawings of the building. There was an urgent need to develop this survey since the condition of the ruins was very precarious and, at the time, they were not classified by local authorities. Any collapse would mean losing many layers of history permanently. Then came the possibility of getting a grasp of the full structure with technological help that allowed the architects to draw 2D plans based on the data collected. The historical research undertaken in Goa and Portugal for the preliminary report prepared brought to light the interesting and socially rich history of Chimbél and this site.

At the time the report was presented, a considerable number of residents from Chimbél, together with likeminded prominent institutions and personalities from Goa, came together with the scholars in charge of the project and started a movement that aimed at safeguarding these ruins, its classification by the state government and, ultimately, its conservation. This informal movement achieved what should be the ultimate objective of any heritage site, to establish a feeling of belonging and ownership among the members of a community over their historical grounds. Through their efforts, the ruins of *Nossa Senhora do Carmo* in Chimbél reached social media and printed press but, most importantly, the authorities in charge.

Fundação Oriente is grateful to Dr Sidh Losa Mendiratta and Architect Fernando Dias Velho for their commitment in putting together the present study that will allow the present and future generations to get hold of their heritage and collective memory. A note of gratitude to the Mount Carmel Conservation Association of Chimbél for its partnership in this project with the hope that it will bring awareness to Chimbél's heritage and its capacity to get the community closer together.

Carlos Monjardino

Chairman of the Board of Directors, Fundação Oriente

Foreword

The citizens lead movement to protect the historic ruins of *Nossa Senhora do Carmo* was borne out of a desire by the residents of Chimbel to protect this important, but forgotten part of Goa's heritage. This publication authored by Sidh Losa Mendiratta and Fernando Dias Velho published by Fundação Oriente in collaboration with the Mount Carmel Conservation Association of Chimbel (MCCAC) explores the architectural and historical dimensions of the site. It is the first in a series of events that the Association plans to organise to keep the memory of these ruins alive in the public's imagination.

A note of acknowledgment to Fundação Oriente for its valuable efforts towards creating awareness of the historical and social importance of these ruins, which the present publication is a result. The ruins once housed the Tertiary Carmelite order – the first native Catholic order in India to accommodate priests of a non-Brahmin background. This native order and the convent that housed them had been inextricably linked with the life and development of the village of Chimbel through its history. It was the progressive spirit of this institution that helped influence the spiritual calling of many residents of the village. Fr. Eusico Pereira grew up in Chimbel and attended mass at the church of the *Nossa Senhora do Carmo* when it was still standing. Decades later he attended a talk by Fernando Dias Velho that inspired him to return to his native village and organise its residents into the MCCAC, dedicated to the protection of this endangered site.

The site has also played an important role in Goa's social and medical history. The *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* ran a home for destitute women and orphaned girls, whom they housed in the old convent and who were reintegrated into Goa's social fabric by the same institution with a lot of help by the local residents. In its later years, the old convent housed the *Asilo de Alienados*, Goa's first mental health institution. The difficult lives of the mental health patients and their caretakers are still fresh in the memory of the older residents of Chimbel. It is in honour of those rejected by society that we strive to save these historic ruins. Their stories have been sidelined by history, but the preservation of the site will keep their memory alive.

In our quest to protect the site, we have been aided by the MLA of the St. Cruz constituency, Shri António Fernandes, who has always extended a generous helping hand to the MCCAC. It was through his influence and guidance that the State Government of Goa has declared the ruins a protected site.

The MCCAC is also thankful to the former Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Town and Country Planning, Shri Vijai Sardesai, for beginning the process of declaring the historic ruins a protected site. We are also thankful to the current Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Town and Country Planning, Shri Chandrakant Kavlekar, for continued support to us through his department to secure and protect the site.

Our social movement has received a lot of support from Prajal Sakhardande (Goa Heritage Action Group) who was tireless in his efforts in reaching out to the local Panchayat and various government bodies. The proactive efforts of Nondita Correa Mehrotra and Tahir Noronha (Charles Correa Foundation) and Edgar Ribeiro (Former Chief Town Planner of India) were critical for the classification process to cross its final hurdle through government authorities. It is a partnership we hope to continue in the future. We would also like to thank Gerard da Cunha, Natasha Fernandes (Museum of Christian Art), Heta Pandit, Jason Keith Fernandes and Fátima da Silva Gracias for helping this publication at various times during its journey.

To the journalists who helped and keep helping with the cause, Paul Fernandes, Nalini Elvino de Sousa, John Lino, Aliya Abreu, Iris Cecília Faith Gomes, Alexandre Moniz Barbosa and Gerard de Sousa, thank you.

Every social cause requires a series of benefactors to support public causes and for this the MCCAC is grateful to the financial support provided by Sunith Velho towards this publication. Through his help and guidance, Fr. Archibald Gonçalves (Superior of the Carmelite Monastery) has been a key player in enabling us to sustain our community lead effort.

The Mount Carmel ruins and grounds form an important natural space for the village of Chimbél and are its last remaining green cover. The MCCAC strives to protect both these important assets. We would like to thank Fernando Dias Velho for initiating the heritage listing process, and along with Lester Silveira and Ayaz Basrai, guiding us with their technical support.

The strength of this vision and our grassroots community movement is only possible due to the hard work and persistent efforts of the members of the MCCAC. Without the dedication of Maria Nifa Fernandes, Caetano Fernandes, Ana Gracias, Brian Gonçalves, John Lobo and Alex Mendonça, Goa would have lost one of its most prized archaeological treasures.

Lourdes Conception

President of the Mount Carmel Conservation Association of Chimbél

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Arminio Ribeiro for his invaluable help in getting this project started and for his guidance throughout this long process. We would also like to thank Ashish Rege and Vishvesh Kandolkar (Goa College of Architecture) for their assistance in the initial phase of the project. A note of gratitude is due to Commissioner Sanjit Rodrigues (Corporation of the City of Panjim) for his instrumental contact with the Institute of Public Assistance (Provedoria), Goa, and for helping us obtain permission to visit the site. Our special thanks to Vinayak Volvoikar and Sonia Fadte from the Provedoria.

The process of studying the ruins in Chimbél was a challenging task and it was aided by many people along the way. We would like to acknowledge: Paul Fernandes (Times of India) for bringing the historic nature of these ruins to the notice of the public through his articles and helping us source material for the publication; Fr. Archibald Gonçalves (Superior of the Carmelite Monastery) and Fr. Eusico Pereira for their unstinting support both financially and in helping us interact with the residents of Chimbél.

We would also like to thank our collaborators who have worked continue to be associated with this project, including Ayaz Basrai, Jarudhi Negi, Bikram Aditya Nath and Yatharth (Busride Lab) for their help with the present publication, site assistance and the architectural renderings. The oral histories recorded by Lester Silveira (The Balcão) and a host of other work done by him go a long way in getting this mission accomplished and added a very significant social layer to this publication. Thank you Siddesh Naik and Paresh Vengurlekar for their technical assistance on site, and Shashank Srinivasan (Tech for Wildlife) for the site photography. We would also like to thank Ajinkya Malkar and Satyajit Kambli (Studio Woodpecker) for the architectural renderings that formed part of this publication.

We are also grateful to Fundação Mário Soares, Direcção de Infraestruturas – Gabinete de Estudos Arqueológicos da Engenharia Militar, Direcção do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas – Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, and Arquivo Histórico Militar for making the historical images reproduced in this book available to us.

There are a host of other people who have helped us with our research work in Goa through the years, including Luís Coelho Velho. We thank Sunith Velho and Branca Pegado for their financial help with the project from its inception. Oswaldo Coelho Velho, who reached out to his vast network of friends in Goa and Portugal, who helped open doors for us. We would also like to thank Sushil Kumar Mendiratta, Ralph de Souza and Vasco Monteiro for helping us with pre-publication finances. José Filipe Monteiro contacted people on our behalf when dealing with matters of personal archives of Goan families based in Portugal, for which we would like to thank him. A note of gratitude to Telma Antão for opening the archive of the Antão family

in Portugal. To Atish Fernandes, thank you for always helping us in small and thoughtful ways in Goa. A note of gratitude to Christina Sell for your pointers with the text in its last days.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Fundação Oriente Delegation in India and its director Inês Figueira for making this publication possible, together with the Mount Carmel Conservation Association of Chimbel. Within the MCCAC, for their perseverance and hard work in bringing the community together, we would like to thank its President, Lourdes Conception, Caetano Fernandes, Maria Nifa Fernandes and, especially, Ana Gracias and Brian Gonçalves.



*Dedicated to Professor Alito Siqueira (1955–2019)
a friend, mentor and guide*

Introduction

The ruins of the old church and convent of the Tertiary Carmelites in Chimbél were, until recently, virtually unknown to the outside world. Except for a handful of scholars and some residents of Chimbél village, very few people were aware of this archaeological site, and fewer still had seen the ruins.

This intriguing veil of mystery over the site has a sense of *damnatio memoriae*¹ about it, a topic that will be explored in this book. Hidden from view and deeply receded in collective memory, one is tempted to think that, had the ruins been quietly demolished, very few would have noticed the disappearance of an 18th century church and adjoining conventual structures.

Fortunately, during the last three years, this situation has changed. The archaeological site in Chimbél has been rescued from oblivion, thoroughly documented, and featured in the media. Following visits by community leaders and archaeologists, in August 2019 the Government of Goa initiated the process of protecting the site under the ‘Goa (Land Development and Building Construction) Act 2008’, as listed in the section titled ‘List of Buildings and sites of Historic and Aesthetic Importance’.²

This decision has – hopefully – halted the process of decay and destruction that had engulfed the heritage building since the 1950s, when it started to be closed down. Wing by wing, the structures were abandoned, never to be repaired again. The convent’s church, originally consecrated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel (*Nossa Senhora do Carmo*), was the last part of the building to be shut down and deserted, in the early 1980s.

The authors first came across information on this archaeological site in the form of a photograph by historian Pedro Dias, published in 2005.³ In that powerful image, a moss-weathered church façade, with vegetation already clinging to its walls, peers out of the jungle, enticing us with its baroque-inspired design. From this starting point, we began collecting information on the site, and managed to visit it briefly in 2017 – only to be expelled by a zealous caretaker. That unfriendly reception was the decisive factor that triggered our documentation work.

The task of comprehensively documenting the archaeological site in Chimbél was carried out in April 2017, and faced many logistic challenges. The wholehearted support from the director of Fundação Oriente in India, Inês Figueira, helped us achieve our objectives.

Following the topographical survey, the work of scouting for written and visual documentation about the heritage site began, a fundamental task since the history of Chimbél was practically absent from most secondary literature, especially works written in English. A wide net was cast over archives and libraries in Goa and Portugal, and also the British Library and the Archivio Segreto in Rome. Weeding through 18th and 19th century manuscripts, official correspondence, and the periodical press, Chimbél’s



checkered past began to emerge. Simultaneously, we faced the challenge of reconstituting the plans and sections of the original buildings, and tracing their changes through time. Ideally, the task of virtually rebuilding ruined heritage structures of such complexity entails an archaeological intervention and the removing of debris from critical areas, thus allowing them to be surveyed and studied. This archaeological work would have been of critical importance for Chimbel considering the very scarce visual documents of the debris-covered heritage structure known to exist. Since such an archaeological intervention was not possible within the scope of this project, the authors had to deal with various levels of uncertainty, especially during the initial phases of the architectural analysis and reconstitution work. Partial aspects of this research were published in Fundação Oriente's journal, in 2018, wherein reconstitution drawings of the church of *Nossa Senhora da Serra* were first proposed.⁴ Shortly after the publication of the article, and through the efforts of Fernando Velho, it was possible to retrieve and study a set of photographs of the church's interior and exterior previous to its collapse.⁵ This breakthrough material, and other elements patiently gathered and analyzed, allowed us to revise and correct the reconstitution drawings for this book.

From the survey days of 2017 to the publishing of this book, three years have gone by. Books are often painfully slow endeavours. But to the authors, once committed to the project, it always feels like a rush against time. During these three years, many people have become aware of the archaeological site in Chimbel, acknowledging its heritage importance. The challenge to preserve this heritage site is enormous. This book aims to put Chimbel back on the heritage map, by comprehensively describing the multi-layered history of the site, and by demonstrating its crucial cultural significance to Goan society.



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2. Church of *Nossa Senhora do Carmo*, Chimbel, Goa, ca.1760-1780, façade (photo by Mário Chicó, 1951).
Courtesy of Fundação Mário Soares – Documentos Mário e Alice Chicó.