

as inheritance and credit. This chapter also contains a brief and ultimately unsatisfying exploration of women's appearances in these records, in a section titled "Marriage and the World of Women" ("il mondo femminile"). The discussion in this section elides women's participation in other aspects of the lay community (such as their participation in credit transactions). Further, it suggests that marriage and family were a concern for only women. The section would have been strengthened with further reference to more of the many recent studies that examine women's roles within the institutions of medieval Christianity.

Tanzini's book makes a noteworthy contribution to the fields of legal and ecclesiastical history. His refusal to simply mine archival records for colorful stories is particularly noteworthy. I would recommend the book to any graduate student planning archival work, as well as to all scholars of legal and ecclesiastical history.

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Writing Tamil Catholicism: Literature, Persuasion and Devotion in the Eighteenth Century. Margherita Trento.

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"A catechist (*upatēci*) without compassion—a cloud without water. A catechist (*upatēci*) without learning—a businessman without capital. A catechist (*upatēci*) without virtues—a dancer without legs. Learning and virtue are the catechist's (*vētiyar*) two hands" (99). These aphorisms, a quotation of Beschi's *Vētiyarolukkam* translated by Margherita Trento, summarize the main topics of her book *Writing Tamil Catholicism*—that is, the identity and formation of the local catechists active in South India from the early seventeenth until the eighteenth centuries, as well as the extraordinary literary talent of the Italian Jesuit missionary Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747) in using classical Tamil poetic codes to write Christian contents. In analyzing these two issues, the rich historical documentation used by the author is remarkable: her documentation is gathered through field and archive research, which allows her to make a careful historical and philological reconstruction of Tamil Christian literature and to reevaluate the veracity of some folk memories.

The book is divided into three sections, titled, respectively, "Spiritual Institutions," "Rhetorical Education," and "Catholic Poetry in a Tamil World." Through the sources connected to the inquiry on the canonization of the Jesuit missionary João de Brito (1647–93), who was executed in the village of Ōriyūr, and the documents connected to the Malabar rites controversy, the reader is introduced to the institution of the Madurai mission and the spiritual retreats for the catechists organized in the village

of Āvūr. Through this rich historical documentation, the author reconstructs the voices and identity of the catechists and their relationship with missionaries. It is also underlined how until the nineteenth century the religious identity of Catholic catechists could reinforce their local social identity and leading position inside the community, creating catechist dynasties, as in the case of the Vellalas family.

In the first part of the book, Trento explains the reason why, in the early eighteenth century, the Jesuits' residence at Āvūr, and the nearby villages of Ēlākkuṛicci and Vaṭukarpēṭṭai in the Kaveri region, became centers of Tamil Catholicism, in which catechists and their families were trained with the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. Three Tamil manuals written by the missionaries and used during the catechist retreats are here analyzed: the *Ñānamuyarci* spiritual exercises attributed to the Jesuit Carlo Michele Bertoldi (1661–1740), indicated as the main promoter of the successful retreats in the 1720s and early 1730s; and Beschi's works *Vētiyarolukkam* (Discipline for the catechists) and *Vētaviḷakkam* (Illustration of the scriptures), written to fight Lutheran teachings at Tranquebar.

The second part is focused on the Ēlākkuṛicci School for catechists founded by Beschi in 1730 and the textbook used there, the Tamil *Grammar Toṇṇūlvilakkam*. What Trento is stressing in this book is that Beschi wasn't the first to write in Tamil European genres, but that "with him, Tamil Catholics acquired their first poet-scholar (*pulavar*) and their first poems" (3).

The third part contains a deeper analysis of the *Tēmpāvāṇi* and its structure. Through examples taken from the text, the author points out Beschi's ability to use different literary materials, mixing Tamil, Latin, Italian sources written following Tamil poetic rules and genres, all blended with Christian influences. The book's structure itself, a *peruṅkāppiyam* (long poem) usually focused on the life of a hero, follows the life of Saint Joseph. Even more interesting is the choice of Beschi to base his narrative on the description of the saint given by the Spanish mystic María de Jesús de Ágreda (1602–65), when both her works and her figure were under investigation by the Inquisition.

Trento recontextualizes in a broader historical and social context the microhistory presented through the work of catechists and missionaries, while also underlining links with the global context, as in the case of the Malabar rites controversy. The serious and detailed scientific research behind this work, and the rich bibliography that accompanies it, are in themselves sufficient reasons to read this text. It is recommended for all scholars dealing with the question of rites, the history of Christian missions, and Catholic literary practices.

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