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HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF THE DIOCESE OF COCHIN: ITS CONTENTS AND THE MAJOR POSSIBLE FIELDS OF RESEARCH

por

MARIA LURDES ROSA

To the memory of Bishop Joseph Kureethara, remembering the profoundly happy moments we all had in Bishop's House, during the project of organization of the HADC. May his dream of opening the archives for historical research, in order to write a scientific and trustable History of the Diocese of Cochin, be in some way helped by these modest lines.

The Historical Archives of the Diocese of Cochin shelter a large amount of historical records concerning the life of the diocese, from the late XVII century to 1950. The large majority of the documents concerns the functioning of the institution that has produced them: the diocesan Curia. Scattered among these, we can also find some personal papers of ecclesiastical officers, documents from parish confraternities, and documents from other diocesan circumscriptions, who pay testimony to the difficulties of the *Padroado* church in XIX century south India. The historical richness of the holdings is impressive, and its complete organization and description make it easy to consult it. In this article we seek to explain the structure of the archives, as well as to characterize its main divisions and to present the documents distributed among them.¹

¹ The present article is based on the inventory done during the project of reorganization and description of the HADC, in 1993-1995, sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon), in collaboration with the Diocese of Cochin and the Catholic University of Portugal (*Arquivo Histórico da Diocese de Cochim / Historical Archives of the Diocese of Cochin*, ed. Maria Lurdes ROSA *et al.*, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995 (hereafter referred to as *Inventory*). See also on this project-work and archives, Maria João AVILLES, *Portugal. As sete partidas para o mundo*, pp. 149-153, Lisbon, Temas & Debates, 2000.

1. The institutional framework

The documents were organized according to the norms of modern archival science that is, respecting the provenience of the material and the structure of the institution that has produced them; the original archivistic organization was also taken into account.

This imposed a first task: the study of the institutional history of the diocese, from the XVI to the XX century, including the drawing of lists of bishops and their substitutes. In fact, only with a research work of this kind could it be possible to know from where each documents came from, or by whom they were produced/received. This is a step indispensable to a correct organization of the holdings, in general cases, and even more in particularly disassembled archives, such as this.

The study of the diocese's institutional history was done following two major lines: the canon law norms for diocesan organization and administration; and the historical testimonies related to the diocesan institutional life, namely records of its real organization, documents related to the careers of its personnel, vestiges of its relationship to its two main legal superiors, that is, the king of Portugal (through the Padroado system) and the Catholic Church, in its different branches – the Archdiocese of Goa, the Roman curia and, from the XIX century onwards, the Congregation *Propaganda Fide*.

The first task was relatively easy, because the diocesan structure has been very stable from centuries, and there are several studies on it;² moreover, being a diocese of Modern and Contemporary Epochs, there were many institutional sources that allowed a based reconstruction the structure (such as letters, reports, annuaries, statistics). The reconstruction of the ecclesiastical personnel, by the contrary, was a difficult – and not yet finished – task. In fact, despite the existence of many list of Cochin bishops' in the bibliography, few were historically reliable and as such there were many doubts not only on the dates of each episcopate but also on the Bishops themselves. The absence of a strong tradition of studies in the field of ecclesiastical institutional history, in Portuguese historiography, caused that the data – difficult from the start, in result of the very history of the diocese – was never carefully analyzed. The problem was even more serious for the careers of the bishops' substitutes, who were very important on this diocese, since it had been ruled by them for decades, across the different centuries. In order to overcome the difficulties and to establish correct list of rulers, it was done a large research work, in Portuguese and Roman archives and libraries.

² Jean GAUDEMET, *Le gouvernement de l'Église à l'époque classique. II^e Partie – Le gouvernement local*, HDIEO – t. VIII, vol. 2, Paris, Cujas, 1979; id., "Charisme et droit. Le domaine de l'évêque", in *Droit de l'Église et vie sociale au Moyen Âge*, VIII, Northampton, Variorum Reprints, 1989.

One final question, peculiar to this diocese, had to be solved in order to correctly organize the holdings – or, at least, formulated, since its thorough resolution demands a deeper research work. Can we consider the diocese of Cochin the same institution from its foundation, on the XVI century, to the present day? The question lies not on the political changes that the civil territory of Portuguese Cochin has gone through – subtracted from Portuguese administration since the Dutch conquest in 1663 – though the political situation, in a broad context, also had its part on the problem. The main issue was the peculiar juridical status of the *Padroado* dioceses, a set to each Cochin belonged³.

According to the privileges conceded by the Popes to the kings of Portugal (and to the Grand Master of the Order of Christ, a title which soon became property of the royal family), in the XV century, the *Padroado* bishops were designated by the Portuguese kings, and confirmed by the Pope. The late-Antique and medieval right of «patronage», of which *Padroado* was a late form, gave the patron large rights in the nomination of ecclesiastical personnel, since it was his the economic foundation and maintenance of the institution. From the XVII century onwards, both the problems inherent to the Portuguese kingdom and overseas Empire, and the changes in the political balance of European nations, made very difficult for Portugal to fulfill the obligations of the *Padroado* right, not to mention more down-to-earth but real problems (Cochin is a clear example), such as the difficulties of the Bishops to reach far and politically instable places in the Orient. The changing nature of the Papal institution has also contributed to this situation, since after the re-organization that followed the Counter-Reformation, Rome was more and more calling to herself the evangelization of extra-European territories; and it was also pressed by, and cooperating with, non-Iberian nations, namely France, that were trying to have its share on the overseas territories. The creation of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* in 1622 was a landmark of the process, and ever since the problems became more and more serious for the dioceses of *Padroado*, namely Cochin. When the Portuguese gradually lost political power in oriental territories, the situation could only become worse. The story is well known and studied, and therefore we need not to repeat it here.⁴

The institutional problem became acute in late XVIII and early XIX century when, due to political deep changes in Portugal, the Jesuit order was suppressed and, shortly after, on the context of the Liberal Revolution, all religious orders were abolished. Not only it was exceedingly difficult to send personnel to Oriental missions – almost all of it came from religious

³ On the subject see Marian Joseph Arackal, *The diocese of Cochin and the consequences of breve «Multa Praeclara»* (1883), Rome, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004 (with reference bibliography).

⁴ See previous note.

orders – but, also, the diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See were tense and even non existent, for several years. After a series of diplomatic threats, that began formally in 1832, the Holy See cut from Portuguese jurisdiction parts of several dioceses of India and Malacca, by the brief *Multa Praeclara* (1883). These were placed under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicarages that had been created in the previous years – Verapoly in the case of Cochin. The King of Portugal and, of course, his direct representative in India, the Archbishop of Goa, however, never accepted the terms of the Brief, and considered the *Padroado* jurisdiction to be in full exercise. The situation was gradually solved by diplomatic means, but it had deep and enduring effects on the life of the diocese.

How does this context affects the archivistic organization of the diocesan historical holdings? Should it be considered that the documents were to be divided in three separate record-groups, based on the different legal status of the institution that had produced them? In 1994, when the archives were organized, it was thus decided. There were defined the following record-groups: “Diocese of Cochin, 1557-1838”; “Cochin general Vicarage/ Cochin Diocese, 1838-1886”; “Cochin diocese 1886-1950”. The criteria was to acknowledge, in the organization of the documents, that there was a jurisdictional issue which caused problems on their production, but without fully cutting the original nature of the institution. Since there was no Bishop recognized by the Holy See, formally there was an abnormal situation in a roman Catholic diocese, and the difficulties were shortly after recognized in the treaties celebrated between Portugal and the Holy See, in 1857 and 1886 – by the patron and the Pope, the first accepting the authority of the second. The treaties and concordats changed greatly the length, dimension and constitution of the old diocese of Cochin, thus representing a formal acknowledgment that something had changed. If we can put it like this, not to recognize at least some institutional specificity to the documents produced in the interval 1838-1886, could be seen as a biased standpoint, which defended that there was no change or interruption at all from 1557 to the present days. But, as all scientific hypothesis and decisions, it remains open to discussion and change.

2. The documents and their historical value

2.1. General principles of organization of the holdings

As said before, the remaining holdings are the documentary production of a specific organization, a roman Catholic diocesan curia, generally stable in its long history. The fact of being a *Padroado* diocese didn't affect the overall structure of the institution. It merely add some specific series, namely the correspondence with the Portuguese civil authorities. The time process didn't also produced too many changes, since even after the Pio-benedictine

canon law code, all continued to turn around the Bishop; some parts of the diocesan general administration became more complex, and this had reflects on the type and quantity of the documents produced, but not on the nature and functioning of the institution. The classification scheme adopted was, in consequence, a typical diocesan classification scheme, composed by the main organisms of an Episcopal curia⁵:

1. the main effective sections of the Curia,
 Bishop/ General vicar
 Chancery
 Tribunal
 Procurator,
 Diocesan secret archives

followed by

2. the documents produced and received by the Curia in connection to its administration of, or other kind of relationship with,
 Seminaries and ecclesiastical colleges
 Religious orders and institutes
 Educational institutions
 Associations

and

3. the documents resulting of episcopal jurisdiction over the territorial divisions of his diocese:
 districts
 parishes
 shrines

Finally, there were some “personal papers”, considered apart from the Curia, since they represented the different bishops’ and ecclesiastical officials private documentary production.⁶

Besides the record groups of the diocese of Cochin, it was found, organized and described (following the same classification scheme) an autonomous record-group, from the Diocese “ad honorem” of Cranganor (1838-1886).⁷ Unlike these, the documents from the Ceylon vicarage (1856) were considered within a section of the record group “Cochin general vicarage/Diocese of Cochin (1838-1856)”, since the first one depended from the second at that particular time.⁸

⁵ Gino BADINI, *Archivi e chiesa. Lineamenti di archivistica ecclesiastica e religiosa*, 2.^a ed., Bolonha, Patrón, 1989; Eutimio SASTRE SANTOS, *Manual de archivos. El sistema archivístico diocesano: archivos de la curia y archivos parroquiales*, Madrid, ANABAD, 1999.

⁶ *Inventory*, pp. 22 and 37-38.

⁷ *Inventory*, p. 39.

⁸ *Inventory*, p. 22.

2.2. Types of documents that can be found in the archives; possible fields of research

Throughout the centuries from which there's documentary accumulation in the archives, we have quite similar documentary series.

To begin with the series produced by the Bishop's direct activity, we'll find the ones related to the exercise of sacramental power (ordinations, confession faculties, matrimonial dispensations); to the exercise of the administration (ordinances and similar; pastoral visits; clergy register); and the large amount of official correspondence with the authorities/institutions outside the diocese (ecclesiastical and civil, in a considerable variety). Of course, all the other parts of the archives also reflect the action of the Bishop, since the structure of the dioceses is highly polarized; however, in the main set described above we find the core of the episcopal activity, the one that comes from his nature of spiritual father and leader.

The historical subjects which can be studied from these documents are many and different. From the start, there are the bishops themselves: persons, strategies, conceptions, pastoral, administrative and diplomatic actions.⁹ Then, there's the clergy, in the filial and disciplinary relationship with him – who they were, how many, how their life-long religious and devotional formation was encouraged and supervised by the bishop, how the ecclesiastical discipline was exercised and felt. And finally there's all the subjects that we're dealt with through the official correspondence, and that largely testify how the bishop (more or less helped by his staff) managed the relationship of the diocese with the exterior. From instance, in the last record-group ("Diocese of Cochin, 1886-1950"), we see that the Bishops were progressively forced to contact and to work with more and more different authorities, and in a quite different way that the previous simple relationship with the *Padroado* authorities – the British India and then Indian civil authorities, the Episcopal Conference of India, the Apostolic Delegation of Eastern India, exterior missions, various roman authorities, the Portuguese State (central government, Ministry of the Colonies). The Bishop had to change: he was no longer the high dignitary, representative of a foreign king, ruling his diocese in an Ancient Régime way. The post 1886-concordate forced the diocese of Cochin to enter in the global world that was then starting to exist, and the extraordinary augment of volume of the documentation is a clear proof of it (even if we discount, for earlier times, the effects of historical problems). This outside demands seem to have been – so far we can tell from the increase and diversification of the holdings – perfectly answered by the persons appointed for the office – the Bishops from 1886 onwards were

⁹ This task can be completed with historical sources from other archives (Portuguese and Roman), reproduced and placed in personal files of each bishop in the HACD (cf. this book, pp. ??-??).

“modern” for their times, in synchrony with Rome’s program of cooperating in the contemporary world, of which Leo XIII was the great responsible – not for chance, the main Cochin diocesan high school, then founded, was called after this Pope’s name (and there are several documents in the HADC from this institution¹⁰). And one last word should be said to the materials of the HADC which throw some light into the relationships between different religious creeds: Roman Catholics, Syro-malabar Christians, Protestants (Dutch and English), Hindus, Muslims– to be found mainly in Bishop’s correspondence but also, in general, in many other parts of the holdings, reflecting as such one of the major features of Cochin and Kerala culture and society.

The study of the last Bishops’ direct activity, in special diplomatic and political, should be completed with the materials from a different part of the archives, the “diocesan secret archives”.¹¹ Strictly speaking, this “section” could be integrated in the “Bishop’s” section, with no major problem. It was kept apart, nevertheless, due to the specification of the canon law code, and also to the express demand of Bishop Joseph Kureethara, under whose episcopate the re-organization of the archives was done. In here it will be found series such as “confidential correspondence”, “procurations to bank purposes”, and “property documents” (which again could be have been placed in the “Procurator” section). Among these last ones, it should be stressed, there are some of the older documents of the archives, since the documentation relating to property generally integrates property documents older than its integration in the last institutional owner of the goods. The documentation related to the estate left to the diocese by the widow of Manuel Bernardes Almeida, or by a Mr. A. A. Pitter, are clear examples, since it includes property documents from the late XVIII century.¹²

Only for the period 1886 onward do we have documentary evidence for the administrative and judicial organisms of the Curia; they surely existed before, though probably not in the same form, but it remains a matter for further research to reconstruct their activity from the series that survived, mainly the Bishops’ (or his substitutes’) documental production.¹³ From the Chancery, there survived a great deal of administrative documentation, such as “dispatch books”, “quinquennial reports”, diocesan statistics, “inventory books”, some of these in quite sequential sets.¹⁴ The activity of the Tribunal, on the contrary, remains scarcely testified, with only a few matrimonial cases for a late period (1945-1949)¹⁵.

To get to know the economic basis of the diocese, as well as the management of its wealth, are most important the documents of the “Procurator”

¹⁰ *Inventory*, p. 28.

¹¹ *Inventory*, pp. 38-39.

¹² *Inventory*, p. 38.

¹³ *Inventory*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁴ *Inventory*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵ *Inventory*, p. 25.

section (1886 onwards), where it will be found some of the most complete series of the HADC¹⁶. Thus, there are several series of different expenses registry (such as “journals”, “annual account books”, “monthly account books”, “bank account books”, “registry of mass stipends”), as well as documents from the diocesan administration of legacies, or documents from the diocesan activity in planning and building different equipments. It is surely an indispensable documentation to understand how the last *Padroado* Bishops managed their different resources in order to fulfill the program of modernization of the diocese that was set from the beginning of this last period. For previous times, the research has much less material, and the scarce evidence is to be found in the “Bishop” section, in series such as “missionaries’ service record” or “parishes and institutions accounts revision”.¹⁷

The life of dioceses, however, is not only the Bishops’ and their close assistants activity. It looms large from it. In the HADC, the proof of this statement are the large amounts of documents that testify the vitality of the diocesan life, in what concerns all levels of education, assistance, presence of religious orders, existence of lay associations. This is true mainly for the period of 1886 onwards,¹⁸ but there also some very interesting examples for previous times: several confraternities of the parish of Our Lady of Hope in Vypeen island, for the period 1761-1827;¹⁹ and the seminary of Allepey for the “double jurisdiction” period,²⁰ in which it was founded, as a mean of fighting the *Propaganda Fide* influence and criticism.²¹ The confraternity material, though not abundant, is immensely interesting, throwing light on many forgotten aspects of the Cochin previous to Dutch conquest, and on the continuities despite the changes. For instance, it is a local tradition, on present days, that the “Quiroz St.”, near Bishop’s House, in Fort Cochin, takes its name from a Dutch proprietary. Or, among the documents of the confraternities, we find several testimonies of a certain Carlos Marques de Queiroz, rich landowner and a Vypeen parishioner, member of one of the parish confraternities...

Though the HADC doesn’t have these institutions own documentary production, – which is either lost or, hopefully, kept in their precincts –, there will be found all the documents produced in the relationship between these institutions and the Curia.²² Among these are generally fundamental series, in the planning, executing and economical fields of those institutions’ lives. On a more broad scope, the simple listing of all the religious orders, lay asso-

¹⁶ *Inventory*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ *Inventory*, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Inventory*, pp. 26-29.

¹⁹ *Inventory*, p. 21.

²⁰ *Inventory*, p. 22.

²¹ Casimiro Cristóvão da NAZARETH, *Mitras Lusitanas no Oriente*, p. 143, Lisboa/Nova Goa, 1913/1924.

²² *Inventory*, pp. 26-29.

ciations, schools of different levels, orphanages, etc, present in the HADC, provides a first and impressive idea how the reconstruction of the diocese was deep and rapidly done, specially in the last 80 years of the *Padroado* existence.

Finally, there is an enormous amount of documents from the diocesan circumscriptions – districts and parishes.²³ The wealth of the information is considerable. Again, a large part of the documentation is on the relationship between the Bishops and these entities – correspondence, reports of sacramental and economical activity. The inward documentary output of the parishes will not be found here, and for many is probably lost. But the series existent in the archives also allow to reconstruct, if not only partially, the parishes' own life. And this is certainly true for a fundamental part of it, the administration of sacraments (baptism, marriage and extreme-unction), since the HADC shelters hundreds of parish registers, which were sent periodically to the Curia. Through this kinds of documents, a large and different amount of research can be done – in the life of church and lay people, to be sure, but also in the demography of the local populations, on parental systems, on toponimy and onomastic, etc. Parish active life seems to have been a major characteristic of Cochin's Diocese, even in the many and long periods that it remained deficient in its major ecclesiastical authorities. This explains, probably, how it survived, and how each top-organized reconstruction seems to have been quickly successful, but not easy. In fact, the older documents of the HACH refer to the parish of Our Lady of Hope, in Vypeen, in a period where Portuguese civil authority had disappeared (1676); the local confraternities survived throughout the XVII and XVIII centuries, without Portuguese (nor Catholic) authority, and some of their documents are kept. The correspondence from parishioners is huge, whenever a new bishop arrived, or major reforms were undertaken. Let us finish with a remarkable exemple of this. In the late XIX century and shortly after the formal reinstallation of *Padroado*, the Bishops attempted to create inter-caste schools, and to promote inter-caste marriages. The issue provoked enormous outbursts of letters to the Bishop, or even to the Pope, pro or against, but in either case asserting the vitality of religious and civic life of Cochin diocese – and this can be discovered from the holdings of the HADC.²⁴

²³ *Inventory*, pp. 21, 22, 29ss.

²⁴ *Inventory*, p. 23.