

GOAN INQUISITION – Hindus victims (1560-1820)

From my answer to the question on Quora:

[How many Hindus were killed by Christians in Goa during the Inquisition?](#)

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I thank [Yagnavalika Rishi](#) for having given, finally, a good reference: “A first hand account by french physician Charles Dellon recounts the horrors <http://goa.fflch.usp.br/sites/go...>”. Dellon was arrested on 24 August 1673 in Damao, entered the prison of the Inquisition (Santa Casa) in Goa on 16 January 1674, and was released on 12 January 1676 (having spent there almost exactly two years). Finally, he left Goa on 25 January 1676. As far as I understand, his book is the **only original report** by a person who was actually in the Inquisition prison in Goa. Apparently, Dellon’s book is quoted by all, and read by nobody. I have carefully read the book both in French (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/1214...>) and in English.

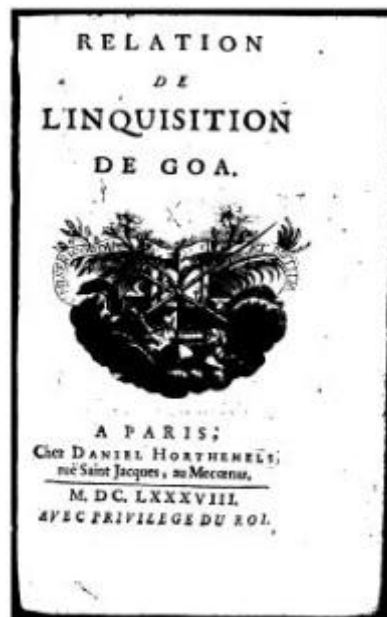


Fig.1
First page of Dellon’s book

1. Introduction

I am puzzled by the figures given by Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go...>, because it tells that “Between the Inquisition's beginning in 1561 and its temporary abolition in 1774, at least 16,202 persons were brought to trial by the Inquisition. Almost all of the Goa Inquisition's records were burnt by the Portuguese when the inquisition was abolished in 1820” (or 1812?). It also says: “The few records that have survived suggest that at least 57 were executed for their religious crime, and another 64 were burned in effigy because they had already died in jail before sentencing”. The figures reported above appear to be rather low, in the context of a dramatic account of the inquisition given in the same article, but acquire some credibility considering that the same source tells that there were 71 Autodafé and the last Autodafé in Goa was held on 7 February 1773. These last figures can hardly be disputed.

As we shall see, the book by Dellon gives us an indication (not a precise figure) of the “maximum possible number” of Hindus who were *killed* by the Catholic Inquisition in Goa. To reach these conclusions I will just report what Dellon says, without adding any extra information besides only one - I daresay obvious - hypothesis, that his report is representative of the Inquisition for the whole duration of its operations. If such hypothesis is not accepted, one should just present a better one.

2. The victims of the enforcement of Catholicism as a state religion in Goa.

There is a delicate point to be made here, and the reader of Dellon's book must read it accurately. Originally, the Inquisition was supposed to deal only with heretics, and therefore only with Christians. Its victims were Catholics accused of heresy, and therefore converted Jews, Protestants, converted Hindus (or converted believers in other religions), if under suspicion of being heretics, or practicing witchcraft, or being Catholics by name, who secretly continued to practice their religion. Only baptized Christians could be condemned to death by the Inquisition.

However, in Goa, apparently, the Inquisition also had the task of enforcing the State religion, i.e. Catholicism. It was a separate task, but *the possible penalties foreseen did not include death*. The idea of a State Religion was common in the past, and Dellon himself, in a portion of his book not appearing in the English version, mentions the Islamic State Religion in Surat. He states that no Hindu temples were allowed within the walls of the city, and those who would try to convert Islamic people to other religions would be punished with death. Dellon also tells that he saw a *sati* in the Surat territory (p.33-35 fr(ench); these pages are not included in the English edition). In general, although death was considered as a penalty, the enforcement of the state religion in Surat appears to have been blander than in Goa.

It is difficult to say anything absolutely safe about the number of people killed as a consequence of the activity of the Inquisition *in enforcing the state religion*. I believe that there has been a confusion here: non-Christians were limited in the practice of their religion, and punished if they practiced it publicly. However, Dellon explicitly writes: “*the Inquisition, which punishes apostate Christians with death, never sentences to that penalty those who have not been baptized, though they should relapse a hundred times into the same errors, but generally commutes it for banishment, corporal correction or the galleys*” (p.111 fr(ench), p.83 eng(lish); Chapter XXII). Thus, if the prisoners were baptized and condemned by the Inquisition as heretics, they could be burned at the stake, a practice, which Dellon rightly considers an obstacle to conversion. If we take Dellon’s words at their face value, conversion was not forced upon anybody. On the basis of Dellon’s book, *as a first approximation one should count as zero the number of non-baptized people* (be they unconverted Hindus or Moslems or others) killed by the Inquisition, because all the natives killed had to be baptized.

3. Who was in charge of the Inquisition. Its organization.

It seems appropriate to give here an information which Dellon gives later about the **organisation of the Goan Inquisition** (Chapters XVII and XXIII). “*There are two Inquisitors : the Grand Inquisitor is always a secular priest, the second a religious of the order of Saint Dominic*” (p.60, eng). While Dellon mentions three orders, the Dominicans (to which the Inquisition was entrusted), the Franciscans and the Augustins, as taking part in his Autodafé, he *never mentions the Jesuits*, who, apparently, at the time of his imprisonment, had no say in the Inquisition (they had had already two major clashes with the Dominicans and the Inquisition, especially in Spain, at the end of the XVI century).



Fig.2
Ruins of the “Santa Casa” (public domain)
Extrait de "L'Homme et la Terre", di Eliseo Reclus

4. The prison and the treatment of the prisoners.

The prison. In Chapter XV of his book, Dellon describes the "*Santa Casa*" (Holy House), headquarters and *only* permanent prison of the Inquisition. It was divided in blocks, and "dormitories" of about seven cells each. He counted about 200 cells, (p.72 fr; p. 49 eng: "clean and bright" cells), 3 meters x 3 meters square, high, vaulted, whitewashed, with one high window, which was never closed. Double door. One "dormitory" had 7(?) cells smaller and darker for punishment purposes. The prisoners were alone, as part of their punishment. However Dellon, in a fit of depression, tried a few times to kill himself, and in two occurrences, for five months and two months respectively, was given a companion, a native, partly to keep him company, partly to stop him for hurting himself. There is now an important point: apparently the House would be completely emptied as soon as it was completely full, and an Autodafé of 200 people and more would take place. Such Autodafés were repeated every two years or every three years. One should note that the number of cells and the number of persons participating in the Autodafé tally.

The treatment of prisoners. Prisoners were provided with a large pot of water to wash themselves, and a smaller pot (with a cup) to drink reasonably fresh water. They were given a broom and a vase with cover for refuse (which was changed every four days). The prisoners had three meals per day (at 6 AM, 10AM and 4 PM). For the "Blacks" (=natives) it was invariably *cange* (watery cooked rice) plus fish ad rice. For the whites, in the mornings there were a "soft roll", fried fish and fruits. On Sundays and occasionally on Thursday, sausage. Occasionally meat, o rice with ragout, rice with water and salt. At supper: bread, fried fish, rice, ragout of fish and eggs; no flesh (?) for economy and possibly to avoid diseases. The sick received "every attention with the greatest care". Once in two months the prisoners were visited by the Inquisitor (who was accompanied by an interpreter and a secretary) and asked whether they had any requests or complaints (p.63 eng; p.89 fr), but seldom the complaints had any results. The prisoners were given a mat, and a checked counterpane serving as a mattress, or protection against mosquitos. Mosquitos were a real plague.

5. Torture

Torture. Dellon was never tortured, and the accounts he gives of the stories of five or so companions he talked to once he was released do not indicate that any of them were tortured. I note that they were all white men. However, he says that depositions of supposed accomplices were extracted through torture (p. 67 eng). Although he was not submitted to torture or to "question", "= interrogation", during which the "strappado" was commonly used in a number of countries, he tells us that in the mornings of November and December (1675) he could hear "*the cries of those to whom the torture was administered, and which was inflicted so severely, that I have seen many persons of both sexes who have been crippled by it, and, amongst others, the first companion allotted to me in prison*" (p.110

eng). No distinction was made of rank, age or sex, and when tortured they were all almost naked, if the Inquisition required it.

Dellon does not complain about the treatment he was subjected to physically, and the description he gave, indeed, presents the Inquisition prison as an almost ideal one. His main complaints were of a psychological nature: he could not bear being alone, in absolute silence, without books and religious comfort (no Mass, no Sermon etc.) and in complete obscurity about the charges against him or his future. At a point he was told that, unless he confessed (he did not know what) he would be burned at the stake. He was young, intelligent, cultured, with a lively intellect, a faithful Christian: one can understand that the intellectual deprivation and fear of the unknown must have been unbearable to him, while perhaps other people might have taken it more lightly.

6. The numbers of victims.

The numbers regarding the Autodafé he took part in, on Sunday, 12 January 1676, are as follows: the men who took part in the procession from the Santa Casa to the Franciscan Church, where the Autodafé took place, were almost two hundred. *It is not clear whether the women are counted in this figure.* About a dozen were whites, the others were natives ("blacks"). Two persons (one man and one woman, both natives) were condemned to death for Sorcery. Four life-size statues were there: these were the statues of four men who had died before the Autodafé, two accused of "Judaizing", two accused of sorcery. They were supposed to be burned in effigy. About those who were burned in effigy Dellon (p.125 eng) tells that they belonged to four categories: *"The proceedings against whom had been conducted either before or after their deaths, or prior to or pending their imprisonment"*. He also comments on a specific case: one of them had died in his house many years earlier and had been buried in the cemetery of his parish. The Inquisition managed to exhume him, subject him to trial, and condemn him to be burned. According to Dellon this was done mainly to confiscate his possession (p.126 eng).

Dellon was informed that eventually the two persons who were supposed to be burned were garroted before being burned. According to Dellon somebody was burned alive only in one Autodafé out of four.

Now we can put the figures together: as they are extrapolations, *they are almost certainly wrong, but there are constraints which make the order of magnitude almost inescapable.* I repeat in italic the figures given by Wikipedia, and I stress here that according to Wikipedia they are probably lower than the actual figures, because of the burning of the records of the Inquisition in 1812/1820.

1) There were 71 Autodafés in all, most probably involving about two-hundred people each (as we have seen, this was the capacity of the Santa Casa), which means that approximately 14200 people had been jailed in the Santa Casa until 1773 (*Wikipedia gives*

the figure of 16802, or 16172 elsewhere in the same article). Counting that 2 per Autodafé might have died in prison, there might have been 142 more prisoners. Of the prisoners, 6% were white (a total of about 850).

2) In the 71 autodafés, about 142 people were killed (2 per Autodafé; *Wikipedia quotes a total of 57*). 9 of them were white, 133 converted from other religions (mostly from Hinduism, I presume). 284 might have been burned in effigy (*Wikipedia says 64*). Of the 142, possibly about 18 were actually burned alive, one being white.

My results are lower for the number of people jailed (1), and much higher for the number of victims. But it is clear that the results are of the same order and reasonably well constrained.

In conclusion, here is my answer: **I feel that it is unlikely that more than 150 Hindus (all baptized) were killed by the Goan Inquisition.** *The number might be about doubled by adding one half of those who were burned in effigy, as having died in jail. These I would count as "indirect victims".*

Such figures are based on the only account we have of a prisoner of the Inquisition, as indicated by another respondent to the present question, and nothing else: the only hypothesis I made is the only possible one, that of keeping the same proportions as indicated by Dellon. If there are better data or better hypotheses, I am ready to accept them, provided they are indeed better. I am just interested in finding the correct figures.

NOTE:

(1) Dellon mentions women only at the Autodafé. The impression is that they were added to the 200 men. Thus, while the number of people killed is not affected, the total number of prisoners might have to be corrected upwards, to account for the women. How many were they? For this we have no choice but to resort to other sources. According to Wikipedia they were one in seven of the 121 victims burned, and one in four of the 4046 people who received other punishments. I think that the latter number, being larger, is more indicative, and I would suggest that the women were perhaps 25–35 % of the men. In this case, the total number of prisoners from 1561 to 1774 could have been about $14200 + (3550 \text{ to } 4700)$, i.e. 18000 to 19000.