

Buddhist complexes in the *Historia de Japam*¹

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Abstract

This paper intends to look at the religious Buddhist spaces which were described in the *Historia de Japam*, by Portuguese Jesuits who passed through the Japanese islands in the 16th century.

Of the five volumes that compose this work, only one contains descriptions and reflections on those spaces, in a total of four great complexes, which were written by the hands of Luís Fróis and Luís de Almeida. We will examine which elements gathered the attention of these two priests, for the production of the image of the Buddhist spaces of worship that was conveyed to early modern Europe.

Resumo

O presente artigo propõe um olhar sobre os espaços religiosos budistas que foram objecto de descrição, na Historia de Japam, por parte dos jesuítas portugueses que passaram pelas ilhas nipónicas ao longo do século XVI.

Dos cinco volumes que compõem esta obra, apenas um contém descrições e reflexões respeitantes a tais espaços, num total de quatro grandes complexos, que chegam até nós pela mão de Fróis e de Luís de Almeida. Debruçar-nos-emos sobre que aspectos mereceram a atenção destes dois religiosos, na imagem dos locais de culto budistas transmitida à Europa moderna.

要旨

本稿は、「日本史」（原語タイトル*Historia de Japam*）にて16世紀の日本列島を歩き回ったポルトガル人イエズス会士の言及の対象となった仏教の宗教信仰の場についての見方を提案している。

五部からなるこの書物であるが、仏教の宗教崇拝の地（四大教団）についての言及と回想がふくまれるのは、全五部のうち一部のみである。私たちが手にすることができるこの著書はフロイスとルイス・デ・アルメイダが書き綴ったものである。本稿では、近代ヨーロッパに伝えられた仏教礼拝の場についての省察において、この二人の宣教師が関心を寄せた特徴について調査する。

Keywords:

Religious Spaces; Buddhist Complexes; Image of Japan; *Historia de Japam*.

Espaços religiosos; Complexos budistas; Imagem do Japão; *Historia de Japam*.

宗教空間; 仏教教団; 日本のイメージ; 日本史。

1. Religious Spaces in the *Historia de Japam*

The work *Historia de Japam*, by Luís Fróis, published in five volumes by the National Library of Portugal between 1976 and 1984, consists of a compendium of several letters written by the priests of the Society of Jesus who incorporated the Mission of Japan. Spanning a chronology established between 1549 and 1593, the compilation of those texts sought to convey to Europe the missionaries' undertakings in the archipelago. However, throughout the several volumes, it is frequent for the reader to come across references to the evolution of the Japanese political panorama within the timeframe in question, as well as allusions to the cities the priests went through and, in that context, descriptions of Buddhist and Shinto religious spaces visited by some members of the Society.

The purpose of this paper is precisely to reveal which Buddhist complexes were mentioned in the *Historia de Japam*, and how they were described by their European visitors.

From the analysis of the texts, we verify that the descriptions that were made of those places of worship are only four. They are all included in the second volume of the *Historia* (1565-1578), two of the characterisations having been produced by Luís Fróis himself, and the other two by Luís de Almeida.²

2. Buddhist Complexes

2.1. Sanjūsangen-dō [三十三間堂]

The first complex mentioned and described in the *Historia de Japam*, by the hand of Luís Fróis, is named Sanjūsangen-dō.³

Located in the then imperial capital, Miyako (present-day Kyoto), and founded in 1164 by the emperor Go-Shirakawa, this constitutes the most important complex representative of the Tendai sect. The implementation in Japan of the conceptions characterising that sect

² Luís Fróis, S.J., *Historia de Japam*, vol. II (1565-1578), ed. José Wicki, S.J. (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1981).

³ Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 20-22.

marked, at the same time, the introduction of esoteric thought, unheard of before, in the archipelago. With it, inseparably, appeared the embodiment of a manifestation of Buddha distinct from the one known up until then: Amida.⁴

Fróis' description of the Sanjūsangen-dō begins with the quantification of its external dimension, remarking that the length was of "one hundred and forty *braças*" and that the building possessed only one entrance, of great proportions. Once inside, the presence of a statue of the Amida Buddha, "to whom the temple is dedicated,"⁵ sitting in a meditating position, is immediately singled out. This is the only image in which some of the physical characteristics of Buddha's representation are mentioned, such as the large, pierced ears, the frizzy hair, or the lack of beard; his portly size and his golden tonality were also pointed out, the Jesuit further adding that it was in nothing inferior to the statuary that was "gilded" in Europe. The representation of Amida stood surrounded by other figures, of lesser proportions, identified in the text as *fotoques*, and, furthermore, by thirty *kami*, all of them gilded.⁶

The several statues of the *kami* were displayed, according to the author, on a raised structure, and aligned as if participating in a solemn ceremony, and included interpretations of soldiers and demons, among them a deity associated to the wind⁷ (represented with a bag on his shoulders), and the deity who controlled the lightning⁸ (with a wheel on its back).

However, the most impressive mention is to the existence of seven/eight steps running through the full extension of the temple, all of them covered with gilded statues of Kannon (1033 in all, according to the Jesuit), "god of mercy, son of Amida,"⁹ each with thirty arms and with raised hands, two of the hands joined in front of the chest, turned upwards, and another pair, also joined, positioned in the contrary direction, by the waist.¹⁰ The multiplicity of arms symbolised the great number of virtues that the divinity possessed, a fact noticed and registered by Luís Fróis. Over each head, adorned with a halo of light, rested a crown with seven unidentified small busts. This sculptural set is known nowadays by the designation "the thousand-armed kannon."

4 Buddha of Compassion.

5 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 21.

6 Ibid., 21. *Fotoque* was the designation conferred to the representations of the manifestations of Buddha, particularly to the *bodhisattva*, while the term *kami* refers to the divinities of the Shinto pantheon.

7 Fujin.

8 Raijin.

9 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 22.

10 Ibid., 21-22.

2.2. Tōfuku-ji [東福寺]

Located in the city of Kyoto, the Tōfuku-ji¹¹ was founded by command of the imperial chancellor Kujō Michiie,¹² in the year of 1236. Its name is the result of a fusion between the denominations of the Tōdai-ji and the Kōfuku-ji, in Nara, and the complex constitutes one of the main places of worship of the Rinzaï sect.¹³

Following a reference to the exterior grounds of the compound, distinguished by vast woods, the description of the Tōfuku-ji made by Luís Fróis focuses upon three of the multiple temples it comprised.

In the first one, the existence of a great gilded figure of Shaka,¹⁴ the Historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), to whom the place was dedicated, is mentioned at once, seated on a lotus flower, and with a halo of light which Fróis describes as a “tin sheet,”¹⁵ to which small statuettes were attached, themselves also gilt. Beside the statue of the Historical Buddha, two other slightly smaller figures were found, which are not identified in the text, but which most likely represented the *bodhisattvas* Kannon and Sheishi,¹⁶ his protectors. Close to the central figure stood as well the representations of the Shitennō.¹⁷ These characters are described as displaying their insignias. Hence, the one holding a spear¹⁸ would be the protector of the South, Zōchōten; the one who brandished a sword¹⁹ and stood upon a demon represented the king responsible for the East, Jikokuten; the one possessing a writing quill, in turn, would be Kōmokuten, king of the West; the last one, holding a “rotolo,”²⁰ appears to have been the remaining divinity, Tamonten, guardian of the North.

Additionally, the second temple would function as the place of study of Japanese scholars, similarly to a university.²¹ The ceiling of that building was marked by a painting

11 Chapter 58: “Das cousas que havia para ver na cidade do Miaco e ao redor della”, in Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 22-25.

12 Lived between 1193 and 1252.

13 One of the sects of Zen Buddhism.

14 Called Shaka or Shakya, in a reference to the clan to which Siddhartha belonged, the Sakya. The original statue was destroyed along with great part of the complex in the fire that struck it in 1881.

15 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 23.

16 Manifestations of Buddha symbolising, respectively, Mercy and Wisdom.

17 The “Four Heavenly Kings,” guardians of the cardinal points. Their Japanese denominations are: Tamonten/Bishamonten (North), Zōchōten (South), Jikokuten (East) and Kōmokuten (West). Juliet Piggot, *Biblioteca dos Grandes Mitos e Lendas Universais – Japão* (Lisbon: Verbo, 1987).

18 Referred to as ‘partezana.’ Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 23.

19 Fróis named it “traçado” (terçado), which corresponds to a type of sabre. *Ibid.*, vol. II, 23.

20 Possibly a roll of paper.

21 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 23.

of “a lizard of many colors,”²² in an allusion to the legend from the *Hokke-kyô*,²³ in which the daughter of the king Sāgara is saved by Shaka, giving him in appreciation a precious stone which enabled him to reach the state of *bodhisttava*.²⁴ That space contained three stairways, a central one and two lateral others, which led to a space where a table and a chair were found, along with standards and flags, a space which, according to Fróis, was reserved to the master of the temple and was also where the students received their graduation.²⁵

The third temple is described as being quite taller than the earlier ones, and distinguished by the multiple balconies running across it, hence possibly consisting of a pagoda.²⁶

The access to the temple was done by means of a rather high stairway, and immediately at the entrance stood a raised structure, aiming to represent the desert where Shaka had begun his preaching, along with his gilded image, surrounded by the statues of his five hundred disciples, designated by *Gohyaku rakan*. Around the temple were also displayed several sculptures of followers of the Historical Buddha, described as representing old men, with no hair or beard, some of them with glass eyes.²⁷

Although the perfection of the figures is praised in the text, their impressive realism being highlighted, the Jesuit felt some visual discomfort and stated that they conferred the sensation of a space dedicated to demoniacal, rather than divine, entities.²⁸

Besides these three temples belonging to the Tōfuku-ji complex, two structures of great length are indicated, which are said to be factories, and which had functioned, in times prior to the priest's visit to the place,²⁹ the first as a space of study, and the second, where several compartments could be seen which the Jesuit referred to as chapels, as the place where the *bonzo* superiors had gathered. These religious were sculpturally represented, in life size, wearing their vests and sitting on chairs, and Luís Fróis claimed that the monks

22 Ibid., vol. II, 23. It corresponds to a representation of Sāgara, one of the Dragon Kings of Japanese mythology.

23 The *Lotus Sutra*, one of the books that theorised on Buddhist beliefs in Japan.

24 Cf. Antariksa Antariksa, “Study on the History and Architecture of the Rinzai Zen Sect Buddhist Monasteries in Kyôto,” *DIMENSI TEKNIK ARSITEKTUR* 28, no. 1 (July 2000): 47. For a group of authors, this legend was the starting point to approach the matter of the attainment of enlightenment by female characters. The relation between the jewels and this phenomenon, tightly connected to that legend (and its variants), from which comes the interpretation of dragons as protectors of Buddha's relics and treasures, has been pointed out. On this subject, see Brian Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

25 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 23-24.

26 This typology, which garnered the most emblematic status in Buddhist architecture, was characterised, unlike other typologies of religious buildings, by a great height, due to its many storeys, which became increasingly narrower from the base to the top.

27 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 24.

28 Ibid., vol. II, 24.

29 In the text, the progressive abandonment to which these spaces became subject, due to the continual application of political reforms disfavouring the temples and depriving them from rents which permitted their conservation, is mentioned by Fróis. Ibid., vol. II, 24.

who lived in this complex paid worship to those images just as they did to the Buddhist divinities. Behind this building was a burial structure where the ashes of those superiors were found, deposited under stones bearing their names, ages, and period of their deaths.³⁰

2.3. Kōfuku-ji [興福寺]

Mentioned in the text as “Cóbucuji,” this is the third Buddhist compound described in the *Historia*, by the hand of Luís de Almeida.³¹

The conception and construction of the Kōfuku-ji represent a clear example of the ever-tightening relationship that had developed in Japan between religion and politics. The compound’s existence is associated to the Fujiwara clan, and the course leading to its finalisation mirrors the parallel social ascension of that family, during the Heian Period.³²

Founded for the first time around the year of 669 in the Yamashiro province,³³ it was later transferred to the north of Asuka, and rebuilt at last in the city of Nara, already in the 8th century, around 710.³⁴

The complex which forms the Kōfuku-ji (“Temple of the Renewal of Good Luck”) belongs to one of the “Six Schools of Nara,” the Hōso sect, and pays homage to the Historical Buddha, Sākyamuni (Shaka).

The constant use of adjectives in the description of the temple seems to indicate that it was the religious complex Almeida appreciated the most. Let us see which characteristics were pointed out regarding this place of worship.

In the first reference, Luís de Almeida established a parallel between the surrounding fence of the complex and that of Belém, in Lisbon, an instance in which the occasional resorting to comparisons with European architectural canons can be verified. That boundary is described as being quite resistant (‘very strong’), made of limestone, with a protruding structure of stone every 8 palms, extending to the outside and to the inside, each supporting a roof of 14 feet (approximately 4,30 m) in width.³⁵

By the entrance of the religious complex stood, on each side of the entry portico (40 feet high and 5 wide), two figures of great size (whose dimensions are not given), possibly representing

30 Ibid., vol. II, 24-25.

31 Chapter 60: “De como o Irmão Luiz de Almeida foi visitar os christaons daquelas partes do Goquinai antes de se tornar para o Ximo e das couzas que vio”, in Fróis, *Historia de Japan*, vol. II, 44-52.

32 On this subject, vide William H. McCullough, “The Heian court, 794-1070,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2, *Heian Japan* (Cambridge Histories Online/Cambridge University Press, 2008), 45-80.

33 Present-day Kyoto.

34 J. Edward Kidder, Jr., *Japanese Temples. Sculptures, Paintings, Gardens and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), 29.

35 Note that, of the features of Japanese architecture, the roof is the one that proves most admirable for its proportions and decorative richness.

the Ni-ô, manifestations of the *bodhisattva* Vajrapāni.³⁶ They are mentioned in Buddhist mythology as the two protectors of Shaka, and symbolise the birth and the death of all things.

Going through the main entrance, a covered patio was found, of quadrangular shape with 120 feet (a little more than 36,5 m of side length).³⁷ Crossing this atrium there was a second door and, behind it, a second vestibule, after which the visitor happened upon a third portico. On each side, the visitor faced two leonine figures, of approximately the same size of the sculptures mentioned above, presumably representing the Komainu, protectors of the temple.³⁸ Behind this last door another cloistered patio appeared like the earlier two, and in it was found the main door of the whole temple, behind a stone railing.

Both the great-sized entrance and the remaining space of the compound were paved with quadrangular stones.³⁹ The columns, as crucial elements of support of the temple, were registered in this case in great quantity (around seventy), being made entirely of cedar wood (used for its resistance) and decorated with paintings. Mentioned as well is the value of each of those columns, approximately five thousand *cruzados*, according to what was registered in the temple's account books.⁴⁰

In the main room the statue of the Historical Buda was found, flanked by those of the *bodhisattva* Kannon and Seishi, identified as being sons of Shaka,⁴¹ the three figures, with a height of 7 *braças* (approximately 12,80 m) and in sitting positions.

In one other reference to the roof, the Jesuit remarked that it surpassed the walls of the temple in 4 *braças*, was made of wood and fairly decorated, being held up by a few exterior columns.⁴²

In one of the complex's far ends, there was an area destined to the meals, 12 *braças* wide and 40 long, as well as a dormitory for the *bonzo*, composed of two rooms roughly 65 *braças* long (119 m of side length), with a total of 180 beds.

Mention is still made to a reading room, held by twenty four columns, one and a half *braças* thick (c. 2,8 m in diameter), the great number of books therein having astounded the Portuguese Jesuit, much like the great number of lavatories and of different workshops.⁴³

36 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 47. Vajrapāni is one of the first *bodhisattvas* to appear in Mahayana Buddhism, representing the power of Buddha.

37 Equivalent to the cloister in European architecture.

38 The term *Komainu* means, literally, "Korean dogs." Kotera Yoshiaki, "Komainu. The Birth and 'Habitat Distribution' of Shrine Guardian Lions," *Japanese Religions* 34, no. 1 (January 2009): 7-23.

39 Frequent reference to this geometrical shape evinces its importance in Japanese architecture, particularly in the religious one, since its use aimed at symbolising the equilibrium among the four cardinal points, origin of the Four Noble Truths of Siddhartha Gautama. Cf. Sofia Diniz, "A Arquitectura da Companhia de Jesus no Japão. A Criação de um Espaço Religioso Cristão no Japão dos Séculos XVI e XVII" (master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2007), 64.

40 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 47.

41 *Ibid.*, vol. II, 47.

42 *Ibid.*, vol. II, 48.

43 *Ibid.*, vol. II, 48.

It seems rather important to highlight the reference to the cleanliness of the Japanese buildings, a fact considerably appreciated by Luís de Almeida, who identified it as one of the most poignant cultural aspects of the Japanese civilisation. Here, a clear contrast with European standards, according to which the hygiene of the spaces (much like that of the body) did not occupy a position of significance, can be inferred – and that confrontation had, perhaps, brought about the admiration of the Portuguese priest.

2.4. Tōdai-ji [東大寺]

Known across the world for its Daibutsu (“Great Buddha” or “Great Fotoque”), the Tōdai-ji is situated in the city of Nara, belongs to the Kegon sect and is dedicated to Vairocana, manifestation of the Historical Buddha signifying good fortune (embodiment of the concept of “Emptiness”). Its construction, done between the years of 745 and 752, and ordered by the emperor Shōmu,⁴⁴ was exclusively held with treasury resources, as part of the new system implemented in 741 of construction of religious compounds throughout Japan, under the responsibility of the governmental authorities, since the edification of temples and statuary representative of the divinities enabled the protection of the populations and the fight against the misery of the poorer layers.⁴⁵

Constituting the first material example of the Japanese imperial patronage conferred to Buddhism, the Tōdai-ji was considered the most magnificent temple of the whole “golden period” of the city of Nara as Japan’s political centre⁴⁶. The description of this space of worship appears in the *Historia de Japam* integrated in the reproduction of Luís de Almeida’s letters⁴⁷.

The access to the temple was done by means of a patio which, together with a cloister (in the back area), had a measurement of 60 *braças* (roughly 109,74 m). In its centre was the main temple, which housed the “Great Buddha,” with 40 *braças* in length and 30 *braças* in width, and the whole pavement of the complex, as well as the stairways, was covered with large square stones. The main entrance found itself under the protection of two figures of great bulk, called Ni-ō (higher guards), which were flanked by the statues of Tamonten and Bishamonten, with 10 *braças* (18,29 m) of height, identified by Almeida as being two heavenly protectors – although the two names he set down refer both to the same character, the most powerful of the four Shitennō,⁴⁸ the guardian of the North. Their representations are described as horrendous, surely because of their fierce and grotesque expressions, stepping on a demon.

44 R. 724-749.

45 See Pierre-François Souyri, *Novelle Histoire du Japon* (Paris: Perrin, 2010), 150.

46 Between 710 and 784.

47 Chapter 61: “Do que mais vio o Irmão Luiz de Almeida e do que passou athé tornar ao Sacai,” in Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 53-56.

48 Mentioned in the text as “four Xiten soldiers.” Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 54.

The description states that in the centre of this space, was the figure of Shaka, constituting the greatest sculpture of the whole complex, with 14 *braças* of height, made of clay on the inside, copper on the outside and with a golden coating. Shaka was seated on a lotus flower⁴⁹ measuring 6 *braças* of diameter.⁵⁰

Accompanying it were the figures of Kannon and Seishi, representing, respectively, Mercy and Wisdom, made of wood, and equally with a golden coating.⁵¹ The Jesuit also mentions the presence of rays (corresponding to halos of light) emanating from the “splendorous figures”, a characteristic element of their *bodhisattva* condition. Behind this triad, two more of the four heavenly kings were found, but their names were not revealed in the text.

In view of the references made by Luís de Almeida to the statues found inside the temple, it appears that either the totality of Shitennō divinities was not there, or one of the names indicated above was incorrect, and all four guardians of the cardinal points were present. The explicit mention to the existence, in the interior space, of a wooden chair, placed upon a stand, must be pointed out. In its description, the comparison of that stand with a pulpit, a characteristic structure of Christian churches from which the reading of the Holy Scriptures is done, is clear. It is also mentioned that the columns of the temple, another of the architectural features always present in Japanese buildings, were worn, and their bases showed stone sidings. The final element referred to in the description of the Tōdai-ji complex is its bell, which was suspended from the top of a wooden structure supported by 30 columns, and possessed “a soft tow and is heard from afar.”⁵² On the grounds outside the religious complex, deer and doves in significant number were found, the priest Luís de Almeida pointing out that they could not be injured or removed from the area (under penalty of death), in invocation to ancestral times, when the place this complex stood upon had been dedicated to those animals, and in a clear reference to the space’s Shinto past.⁵³

49 Called a “roza de golfão” by Almeida. Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 54.

50 It was conceived in the palace de Shōmu, in Shigaraki, but its construction took place in Nara between 745 and 749; the possibility of its elaboration having been achieved with the help of foreign craftsmen has been raised. It was partially destroyed twice by earthquakes (in 800 and 1567) and melted in a fire (in 1180). Due to the successive reconstructions, the one that can be visited nowadays is mostly from the 17th century, and of the original structure only a few leaves of the lotus flower on which Buddha is sitting and parts of the pedestal subsist. Cf. Kidder, *Japanese Temples*, 120-122.

51 Kannon is positioned to the left of the Buddha, while Seishi is positioned to his right. They are usually represented as Amida’s protectors and this group constitutes the so-called “Amida Triad.”

52 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 56.

53 According to the legend, the *kami* Takemikazuchi (god of thunder) arrived at the city of Nara on a white deer to search for shelter. He thus became the city’s protector, while the deer was from then on worshiped as messenger of the divinities.

2.5. Other Buddhist temples

Throughout the second volume of the *Historia de Japam*, several other names of Buddhist temples appear, mainly of the region of Miyako.

Even if they are not described in the same manner as the earlier exemplars, I will here make a reference to the places mentioned and, if such is the case, to the few characteristics identified.

Fróis refers the existence of a temple near the Tōfuku-ji, named Kiyomizu-dera⁵⁴ [清水寺], in Miyako's eastern area. This temple, dedicated to Kannon, was founded by the *bonzo* Enchin in 778 within the Hossō sect. In the text it is only said that this place saw a great affluence of pilgrims and that "some fountains of excellent water" could be found on its grounds.⁵⁵

In the same city, inside the compound of the imperial palace itself, in the northern area, stood a temple dedicated to the Amida Buddha, by the name of Hyakumanben Chionji [知恩寺], pointed out by the Jesuit as being the most visited one of the whole city.⁵⁶ Also mentioned is one other temple dedicated to Emma-ō,⁵⁷ supreme deity of the underworld, its name not being indicated in the text.⁵⁸ Some features of that place of worship, however, are referred, namely the grotesque attributes of the deity statue, holding a scepter in one hand. Emma-ō was flanked by two great demons, each of them holding a writing quill with which they registered the accusations against the sinners, and a table from which they read them.⁵⁹ Finally, it is indicated that the walls of the temple were covered with paintings illustrative of the underworld and of the torments which the demons there inflicted upon the condemned.

Fróis also summarily describes the Rokuon-ji [鹿苑寺] ("Temple of the Deer Garden"), better known as Kinkaku-ji [金閣寺], the "Temple of the Golden Pavilion." Built by will of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, in 1397, this two-story temple edified over a pond is dedicated to Kannon and belongs to the Rinzai sect. According to the description made in the text, a few (unspecified) Buddhist divinities were represented on the pavilion's first floor, while the second floor served only the purpose of offering a panoramic view over the exterior.⁶⁰

Lastly, a mention is made to the temple Tō-ji [東寺], in Miyako's southern area, founded in 796 by the emperor Kammu, dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai, Buddha of Medicine. It is

54 "Quiominzzu," in the text. Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 25.

55 Ibid., vol. II, 25. It is still possible today for visitors to drink from the waterfalls of the compound of the temple, the water being considered holy.

56 Ibid., vol. II, 26.

57 Yama, in Sanskrit. Responsible for the judgment of the dead, sentencing sinners to a burning hell. However, if they had made a pilgrimage to each of Kannon's thirty three temples, they would be acquitted from their sins.

58 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 29.

59 Ibid., vol. II, 29.

60 Ibid., vol. II, 29-30.

frequently associated with Kūkai,⁶¹ responsible for the introduction of the Shingon sect in Japan, to which the temple belongs. The text highlights that this temple was solely inhabited by *bonzo* belonging to the highest social strata, and mentions the existence of a pagoda of great stature. That pagoda, described as a “round extremely high tower that is called Tó,” had five storeys and, at the top, were round maps engraved in copper, with several campanulas.⁶²

Closing Thoughts

A first aspect I consider pertinent to look into concerns the matter of the multiple sects in which Buddhism is divided, particularly in the Japanese case. Indeed, it is possible to identify several currents of thought, and, for matters of simplification of ideas, to categorise them in five groups: one, known as “The Six Sects of Nara,” in which we find the Ritsu, Jojitsu, Kusha, Sanron, Hosso and Kegon schools; another as the group of the esoteric sects, encompassing the Tendai and Shongon schools; a third composed of the Amidist schools, Jodo Shu, Jodo Shinhu, Ji Shu and Yudsunenbutsu Shu; the Zen schools, Rinzai, Obaku e Fuke; and finally the Nichiren spirituality. The temples that are mentioned in the *Historia de Japam* are related with the first four groups, excluding spaces of worship associated to the Nichiren sect, which were not even mentioned. The location of the four religious complexes described also seems to be relevant. All of them were situated in two cities only, Nara and Kyoto. The political and cultural significance of either city accounts for the great number of Buddhist buildings each possessed, as these enabled the cities’ development as religious centres. Nara, Japan’s first permanent political centre, between 710 and 784, had a great deal of influence in the consolidation of Buddhism in the Japanese islands, and one of the most famous temples dedicated to that religion, the Tōdai-ji, is found there. This edification proved to be determinant to the conception of the city of Nara as the first Japanese Buddhist centre, namely because all of its construction was supported by the State’s treasury. Nonetheless, the growing influence garnered by Buddhist monks over the elements of the government during the 8th century led to the latter moving away, along with the imperial court, to another city, Kyoto. Known in Europe by Miaco⁶³ (and referred as such in the texts under analysis), it was the capital of Japan between 794, year of the establishment of the court there, and 1868, in which its transference to Edo (later Tokyo) occurred. The Heian Period (its beginning being

61 Born in 774 in the Sanuki province, with the name Saeki no Mao. During his studies, he had the first contact with Chinese esoteric Buddhism, namely via the Mantra of Akashagarba, which made him abandon the university and begin an ascetic life. His interest for this new spirituality led him to China to study the teachings of the *Chen Yan* (*Shingon*, in Japanese) school. Vide Kōyū Sonoda, “Kūkai (774-835),” in *Shapers of Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1994), 39-51.

62 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. II, 33.

63 Myako in Japanese, “the capital.”

signalled, precisely, in 794) marked a break with the previous one, especially due to the fall of Buddhist predominance, giving place to a “revival” of Confucianism, as part of the cultural models imported from China, under the Tang dynasty’s government. Since the two cities held the significance indicated – a fact that made trips to each of them crucial to the missionaries –, it seems natural that the buildings described by Fróis and Almeida belong today to the Japanese national heritage.

Another relevant aspect concerns the matter of the identification of the divinities to which each temple is dedicated. Moving along the places visited, the Portuguese priests distinguish two characters, Shaka and Amida, almost always accompanied by the *bodhisattvas* Kannon and Sheishi. Those two manifestations of Buddha corresponding, respectively, to his historical and compassionate facets, were the most popular ones of Japanese Buddhist spirituality, being therefore the most represented ones in the spaces ascribed to it. That recognition of the representation of one or another figure is quite important to establish the connection with the group of sects to which each complex belonged. However, in spite of this factor, neither Luís Fróis nor Luís de Almeida provide identification of those sects in their descriptions, except in the case of the brief mention to the Chion-in monastery, such information being made available on several occasions only by the compiler of the work in question, José Wicki. We may wonder, then, whether the missionaries could not identify the school of thought to which each temple was associated, with the exception of the sects “*dos jexus*” (Zen sects) – which is plausible, considering the complexity and the particularities of the Buddhist doctrine in Japan –, if they had not received that information, or whether they simply did not find that aspect relevant to their descriptions. Considering the number of cases under analysis, it can be observed that half of the religious complexes described (two) were located in Nara (Tōdai-ji and Kofuku-ji), the remaining ones being situated in the city of Kyoto (Sanjūsangendō and Tōfuku-ji). The divinities to which each one of them is dedicated, however, are not homogeneously distributed. In fact, only the Sanjūsangendō temple is presented as a place of veneration of the Amida Buddha, whereas all the others elect as main figure of worship the image of Shaka, the Historical Buda. This reality might raise an interrogation about the motive for producing only one sole description relative to Amidist temples, considering that the spiritual practices associated to it are, of the different Buddhist sects, those which are closer to Christianity. In effect, the cult of Amida is the only one conceived around an ideal of Paradise and of a rebirth of the souls in a dimension to which was given the designation of Pure Land (for this reason, the Amidist sects are part of the Pure Land school). It seems curious then, since the figure of Amida appears several times in the course of the priests’ letters, that a vaster number of temples dedicated to this divinity are not dealt with in the *Historia de Japam*, which would allow a more consolidated analysis of the interpretation given to the beliefs that are connected to it.

As to the vocabulary employed in the architectural description of the spaces, there is a frequent use of different adjectives, seeking to qualify not merely the structure of the compounds, but their decorative elements as well. Thus, recurring expressions like ‘*fermoza*’ (graceful), ‘*espantosa*’ (astounding), ‘*mui fortes*’ (very strong), ‘*mui grande*’ (very

large) or *'mui bem proporcionados'* (very well-proportioned) concerning the building's dimensions, their architectural features (roofs, stairways, etc), and the pieces of statuary ornamenting them, demonstrate the sensorial impressions provoked upon the priests. The many gardens of the city of Kyoto were another appreciated element, a clear enjoyment of those spaces being demonstrated. It seems that, in spite of occasional comparisons with European examples, the Buddhist places of worship visited caused the priests to be rather positively admired, and the absence of pejorative value judgments in their characterisations is remarkable. Another aspect of Luís Fróis' and Luís de Almeida's words worth pointing out concerns the matter of cleanliness, as a common characteristic of the Japanese. Indeed, the hygiene of the spaces, not merely the religious ones, but the civil as well, presented itself as a Japanese cultural distinctive worthy of praise, in counter position to European standards, in whose societies matters of public and personal neatness played a secondary role. Hence, the Portuguese priests must have been impressed with the perceivable difference between the two matrixes of civilisation.

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