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New Advent

Damão

DIOCESE OF DAMÃO (DAMAU, DAMAUN)

The city of Damão, on the Arabian Sea, at the mouth of the Damão River, about 100 miles north of Bombay, formerly belonged to the Mohammedan State of Guzerat. It first came to the notice of the Portuguese in 1523, when Diogo de Mello, overtaken by a storm on his way to Ormuz, took refuge in the harbor. In 1529 an expedition sent by Dom Nuno da Cunha, the Portugese viceroy, sacked and burned the city, and in 1541 da Cunha himself, on his way to the conquest of Diu disembarked his whole army at Damão and caused Mass to be celebrated there for the first time.

The territory of the diocese extends along the shores of the Arabian Sea from the Narbada River, on the north, to Ratnagiri, on the south, and is bounded on the east by the Western Ghats. There are 71,000 Catholics in the diocese, 51 churches, 21 affiliated chapels, and about 85 priests. The stipends of the clergy are for the most part paid by the Portugese Government.

The territory is divided into districts as follows:

Damão, 4 churches, 5 affiliated chapels,

Diu, 2 churches, 3 chapels;

Thana (Vicariate), 25 churches, 6 chapels;

Konkan, 2 churches, 1 chapel;

Bassein, 12 churches, 1 chapel;

Bombay, 6 churches, 5 chapels.

To each of the churches of this diocese a parish school is attached, where instruction is given in Catholic doctrine, music, English, and Portugese, as well as, in some instances, Guzerati and Mahratti. Some of these schools receive subsidies from both the Portugese and the British-Indian governments. The spiritual work of the diocese is very largely helped by means of confraternities, of which there are at least 42 in the Vicariate of Thana alone. Among the churches in the city of Damão the cathedral of Bom Jesus is worthy of note as having been built, in 1559. At Damão Pequeno (Little Damão) the

church of Nossa Senhora do Mar, founded in 1701, in the old fortress, is still used by local Catholics.

Another fortress church is that of the Conceição at Diu, which was originally built in 1610 as part of the now extinct convent of São Paulo. The vicariate of Thana includes the island of Salsette, of which Thana itself was formerly the capital.

Here, before the mogul invasion of 1318, a community of Nestorians existed. The conquering Mohammedans converted both the Nestorian churches and the Hindu temples into mosques for their own worship.

It was also at Thana that the Franciscan missionaries Thomas of Tolentino and Giacomo of Padua, with the lay brothers Demetrius and Peter, were martyred early in the fourteenth century. Fra Jordanus, a Dominican, who buried the bodies of these martyrs, was himself also martyred by the Mohammedans, but the Hindus of the vicinity so highly venerated his memory as to set up a bronze statue of him among the gods in one of their temples; this temple was afterwards destroyed, and in the sixteenth century some workmen who were digging on the spot found among the ruins this pagan tribute to a Christian martyr. Thana was also the field of the fruitful labours of Father Gonçalo Rodrigues, one of the companions of St. Francis Xavier, who founded in the neighbourhood a Christian village. This village was destroyed by the Mahrattas, but the ruins of its church, college, and orphanage are still distinguishable. The church of Nossa Senhora do Carmo at Chaul, in the Konkan district, dates from the year 1580. Bassein, first acquired by Portugal in 1534, is memorable for the martyrdom of five religious burned alive in the orphanage by the Mohammedan invaders in 1540, as well as for the apostolic visits of St. Francis Xavier. Lastly, in the Mazagon suburb of Bombay is the church of Nossa Senhora da Gloria, long regarded locally as the Portugese cathedral; here also is the Bombay residence of the Bishop of Damão, Titular Archbishop of Cranganor.