

Portuguese Observations of India

Ludovico Verthema, a Portuguese merchant and traveler, from his book about his travels in Southwest Asia and India, 1503 CE

The king and people of Calicut [India] are idolaters, and worshippers of the devil, though they acknowledge one supreme God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the first chief cause of all things. But they allege that God could have no pleasure in his government, if he were to take it upon himself, and hath therefore given it in charge to the devil, who was sent as they say from heaven, to rule over and judge the world, rendering good or evil to men according to their deserts. The great God they call Tamerani, and this devil or subordinate deity Deumo. The king has a chapel in his palace, where this Deumo is worshipped. This chapel has an open vault or arch on all the four sides, about two paces in breadth, and it is about three paces high. The entrance is by a wooden gate, ornamented with carved work of monstrous forms or shapes of devils. In the midst of the chapel is a royal seat or throne of copper, on which sits the figure or image of the devil, likewise of copper. On the head of this image is a crown like that worn by the pope, but having the addition of four horns, besides which he is represented with a great gaping mouth, having four monstrous teeth. The nose is horribly deformed, with grim lowering eyes, a threatening look, and crooked hands, or talons like flesh-hooks, and feet somewhat like those of a cock; forming on the whole, a monster terrible to look at. In every corner of the chapel there are other figures of devils of shining copper, as if flames of fire devouring miserable souls. These souls are about the size of half a finger, some of them larger, and each figure puts one of these souls into his mouth with the right hand, while the left is on the ground lifting up another. Every morning the priests, who are called Brahmins, wash the idol with rose water, and perfume him with sweet savors, after which they pray to him prostrate on the earth.

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