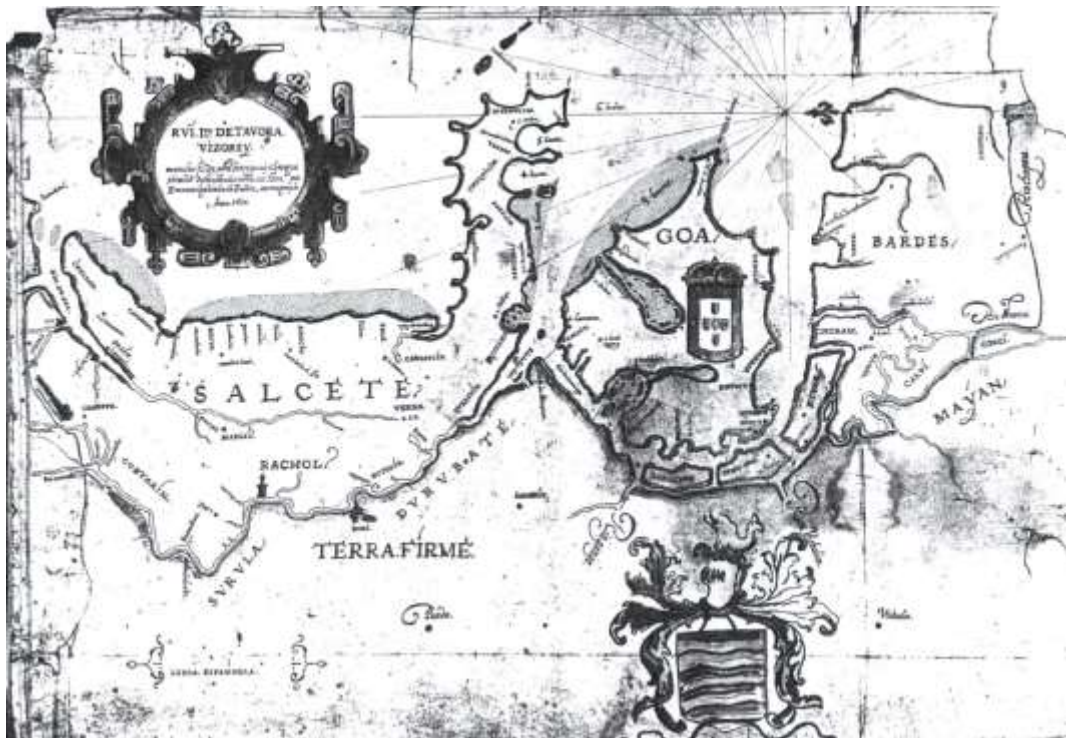


The Chapel of St. Lawrence, Arossim

When Fr. Nuno Rodrigues, the Jesuit Provincial (1597-1602), ordered that many chapels be built in remote villages¹, Fr. Gonsalo Carvalho S.J. then Parish Priest (1594-1600) at the newly built St. Thomas Church, at Cansaulim, took up the challenge of building three chapels in his parish - St. Lawrence at Arossim, Reis Magos (Three Kings) on the hill at Cuelim and St. Estevão at Pale, Velsão. Although the exact dates could not be ascertained, it is estimated that these were founded between 1598 and 1600. So the Chapel of St, Lawrence ranks among the oldest places of worship in Salcete.

It was envisioned by the Provincial that the chapels would provide places for children to meet and learn catechism, sing religious songs and for the passersby to rest and pray. The construction of the new chapels all over Salcete was considered to be noteworthy, that Fr. Thomas Stephens, S.J. then Rector and Minister to the Professed House of Goa, wrote about it to his Superior Fr. Claudio Aquaviva in Rome, in a letter from Margão dated 6th of December 1601.¹

The Chapel of St. Lawrence is also depicted as Ermida de S. L^{co}, in Arocim, on the map of the Old Conquests, by Emanuel Godinho de Eredia in his Atlas of 1610, shown below.



1. G. Schurhammer, S.J., *Orientalia*, Centro de Estudos Historicos Ultramarinos, Lisboa, 1963, pp. 386-388.

AROCIM, was given prominence with capital letters in the map, (see above the letter “C” of SALCETE). This may be indicative that the Jesuits were already living in the village at that time and the village was used as a base by Godinho de Eredia.

This map of Old Conquests, (Salcete, Bardez and Goa (now Tiswadi) is of special significance since it is oldest and the first one drawn on the 100th anniversary of the conquest of Goa in 1510. It also depicts most of the villages in the three provinces.

The original Chapel, then known as Hermitage of St. Lawrence was most likely built of mud walls and thatched roof in an isolated area. The present Chapel was most likely re-built on the same site in 1784, in accordance with the provision by Archbishop Manuel de Santa Catarina, dated 11-7-1783.

The location of the Chapel is of significance since it aligns with the megalith located in the fields, due east and with the convergence of the tributaries (*Triveni Sangam*) of the River Sal (also seen in the Map of 1610). This must have been of great significance to the earliest settlers in selecting the site for their *maand*, so that the people could meet to pray and celebrate and for the elders to debate and resolve their problems. Later settlers, having displaced the original residents, replaced the *maand* with their own temples and places of worship. Besides, it is centrally located in the middle of the rice fields on a higher flat ground with many bundhs converging towards this sacred space. The topography has remained the same to this date, as can be seen in fig.3. About 30 Chaplains have served as resident priests since from 1897.

The feast of St. Lawrence is celebrated on August 10th annually by the *gaunkars* only, as their rights to having contributed towards the re-construction of the present Chapel. Besides the solemn procession, the blessing and cutting of the first sheaves of paddy is also an annual ritual.



Fig.1.The Chapel of St. Lawrence as it appeared in 1964.



Fig.2.Solemn Procession on the Feast of St. Lawrence – August 10th 1964.
(The priest to the far right, Fr. Camilo Antão was the celebrant.)



Fig.3. Blessing by the priest and cutting of the paddy sheaves (*Novem*) on the feast day by a member of the Nunes family, as an inherited right, and then solemnly taken inside the Chapel before the High Mass.

(Note that in the background, the neat trail along the bundh leading to the Chapel and the surrounding rice fields. To the far right, the merchants are seen selling balloons, grams and sweets. Also an age old tradition seen at the feast.)

From the available records, 1854 is the earliest date of the celebration of the feast and nearly one hundred individuals are listed as celebrants, drawn in rotation, from the eight *vangads*, with the cycle repeating every eight years. Because of the high cost involved to the individual celebrants, the feast is now celebrated jointly by all the members of each *vangad*.

Themistocles D'Silva, 2023.