DOI: 10.6093/2532-2699/12734

Il canone architettonico dei Carmelitani Scalzi del XVII secolo in Asia

Keywords
Architectural canon, Carmelite, religious order, India, modules and dimensions

Abstract
This article examines the architectural practices of the Italian Discalced Carmelites during the 17th century, focusing on their missions in Persia and India. Drawing on archival plans, sections, and normative texts preserved in the Archivio Generale Ordine dei Carmelitani Scalzi in Rome and regional archives, the study analyses how Teresian ideals of poverty, enclosure, and contemplative life were translated into reproducible architectural forms through the *Constitutiones* and the *Ordinatio de Constructione Ecclesiarum et Conventuum* of 1614. These documents established a modular and proportional system based on the *palmo*, regulating typologies, spatial hierarchies, and functional distributions for convents and churches intended for missionary expansion.The article situates this normative framework within the broader historiographical debate on the existence of a Carmelite architectural canon, highlighting the Italian congregation's reliance on centrally approved typological models. Three Asian missions (Isfahan, Thatta, and Old Goa) are examined comparatively to assess the degree to which normative prescriptions were implemented, adapted, or transformed in response to local political, cultural, and material conditions.These case studies expose a productive tension between centralised regulation and contextual adaptation, with Goa's Our Lady of Mount Carmel serving as the most representative and fully developed example of this process in Asia. The article argues that the Carmelite canon should not be understood as a fixed stylistic repertoire, but rather as a portable and modular grammar of building that enabled the Order to maintain institutional identity while negotiating diverse geographies. In doing so, it reframes Carmelite missionary architecture as a significant experiment in the global translation of normative architectural systems. The analyses are based on a thorough examination and redrawing of the original documents found in the AGOCD archive.

Biography
Giuseppe Resta is an integrated researcher at CEAU (Centre for Studies in Architecture and Urbanism), Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto. He is senior researcher in the project ID-SCAPES (ERC/COG/101125057). He previously held teaching positions at Yeditepe University (Istanbul) and Bilkent University (Ankara) as an assistant professor, at Politecnico di Bari (Bari) as an adjunct professor, and at Polis University (Tirana) as a lecturer. Resta received his Ph.D. in architecture from Università Roma TRE. His most recent monographic work is "Rediscovered Visual Documents of the Portuguese Estado da Índia" (CES, 2024, co-authored). He was recently awarded the Edilia and François-Auguste de Montêquin Fellowship by SAH (2026).

Sidh Losa Mendiratta is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, and an Integrated Researcher at CEAU/FAUP. Since September 2024 he is the Coordinator of the research project "ID-SCAPES (ERC/COG/101125057) funded by a Consolidator Grant of the European Research Council (2024-2029). He holds a PhD in Architecture from the University of Coimbra (2012). In 2013 he was awarded the "Fernando Távora" prize by the Order of Architects of Portugal. He is author and/or coauthor of three books and over seventy-five papers, including five papers presented at the Society of Architectural Historians International Conference.

Tiago Trindade Cruz (1985) holds a PhD in Heritage Studies from FLUP (2022), a Master's in Virtual Heritage from the University of Alicante (2020), and an Integrated Master's in Architecture from FAUP (2010). He is senior researcher in the project ID-SCAPES (ERC/COG/101125057). From the 2021–22 academic year until 2024–25, he was a Visiting Assistant Professor at FLUP, where he taught History of Contemporary Architecture. He has been an integrated researcher at CITCEM/FLUP and a collaborator at CEAU/FAUP since 2023. Tiago is also part of the UNESCO Chair "Heritage, Cities and Landscapes" hosted by FAUP. He was recently awarded the Scott Opler Emerging Scholar Fellowship by SAH (2026).

Giuseppe Resta
University of Porto

Sidh Losa Mendiratta
University of Porto

Tiago Trindade Cruz
University of Porto

The Discalced Carmelite Architectural Canon of the 17th Century in Asia

Introduction

The Discalced Carmelite Order, known for its commitment to austere spirituality, features a rich architectural legacy that reflects its values and missionary endeavours[1]. This text highlights the evolution of Carmelite architecture in Asia during the 17th century, discussing the hypothesis of an architectural canon specific to the Italian congregation of Saint Elijah. Through a series of *ad hoc* deliberations, guidelines were established regarding modules, dimensions, proportions, and typologies, which facilitated the construction of Carmelite residences in Persia, India, and beyond. The architectural project descended from codified models consolidated through a normative process, designed to be adaptable to various geographies and scales. Documentation of this architecture is preserved in the plans and sections held at the Archivio Generale Ordine dei Carmelitani Scalzi in Rome (from now on AGOCD) and in regional archives in India. Individuals involved in the construction of churches and conventual structures frequently travelled between Rome and the missions of the Discalced Carmelites in Asia, forming a loose network of information that persisted despite the regional tensions between European powers and local rulers.

The study of Iberian Carmelite architecture has been extensively addressed by scholars like Juan José Martín González and Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez. In contrast, Italian missionary architecture has received less scholarly attention, with notable contributions by Saverio Sturm and Silvano Giordano. The architecture of Carmelite missions, particularly in Asia, remains underexplored, largely due to the ruin or disappearance of many of their churches[2].

Discalced Carmelites shared an idea of reform anchored in prayer and contemplation amidst the mitigated rule that characterised the Carmelite Order during the 16th century[3]. In 1562, Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda Dávila y Ahumada (1515-82), later known as Saint Teresa de Jesús, established the first reformed Carmelite house in Ávila, with a focus on poverty, contemplation, and seclusion. A first nucleus of five nuns moved to what would become a new monastic typology in a cloistered structure dedicated to Saint Joseph. The idea of isolation was inspired by the example of the hermits who lived in the caves of Mount Carmel, a site associated with the prophet Elijah. In the monasteries, the concept of the cave was spatially translated into austere cells. In 1580, there was a partial separation of the Teresian, or Reformed, Carmelites from the traditional Order, as recognised by a decree issued by Pope Gregory XIII, allowing them to establish an autonomous

[1] The research for this article was funded by the European Union (ERC Consolidator Grant, ID-SCAPES research project - https://doi.org/10.3030/101125057). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The project "ID-SCAPES. Building Identity: Religious Architecture and Sacral Landscapes of Christian Minorities in India and Bangladesh" is coordinated by Sidh Losa Mendiratta.

[2] This issue is highlighted in Eugenio Galdieri's work on Isfahan. Eugenio Galdieri, "Le residenze dei missionari cattolici presso la corte safavide: nuovi dati sulle case di Esfahan," in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, ed. Gherardo Gnoli and Lionello Lanciotti (Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1987), 459–76.

[3] Carmelite communities began to attract individuals with an aristocratic background who concentrated on developing the arts and crafts rather than following a traditional religious life. Saverio Sturm, *L'architettura dei Carmelitani Scalzi in età barocca. Principii, norme e tipologie in Europa e nel Nuovo Mondo* (Gangemi Editore, 2006), 25.

Spanish provincial chapter. However, the existence of a distinct, codified Carmelite architectural style remains a topic of debate.

In her writings, Saint Teresa envisioned Carmelite buildings as simple and austere, avoiding unnecessary elements. This approach was aligned with the values of other reformed orders that embraced a perspective of pauperism. As early as 1567, Saint Teresa received permission to establish new residences modelled after the one in Ávila. Consequently, a new set of norms, known as Constitutions (*Constitutiones*), was established to reflect the *propositum vitae* of the Order. The Constitutions drafted in Ávila that year provided general guidelines for future convents to be built:

> The house is never built with decorations, except for the church; nor is there anything curious. And let the wood be rough, the house be small and the rooms low; something that meets the need and is not superfluous. They should be as strong as they can, and the enclosure wall should be high, and there should be a field for hermitages, so that they may be set apart for prayer[4].

Saint Teresa presided over the establishment of sixteen female convents, but the convent of Saint Joseph in Malagón became the model that embodied her reformed ideals in architectural form. This convent was designed by the Toledo-based architect Marco Antonio Nicolás de Vergara el Mozo (1540-1606), following the guidelines provided by Saint Teresa. This approach contrasted with earlier residences, which were often adaptations of pre-existing buildings[5]. Saint Joseph in Malagón was erected as a plain, almost abstract volume, enclosing a porticoed square courtyard at its centre. In the following years, an aesthetic of functional spatial distributions and introspective layouts characterised the new constructions. This has led Spanish scholars to debate the existence of a distinct style, the *Estilo Carmelitano*, and of a specific typological approach associated with it. The art historian Martín González (1923-2009) was more sceptical about the existence of a distinct *Estilo Carmelitano*, arguing that Saint Teresa's writings emphasised the need for austere and simple structures rather than providing systematic guidelines. This position reflected common values shared among Jesuit, Dominican, and Franciscan buildings[6]. The most relevant architectural indications are found in the book *Camino de Perfección* (1566), the Ávila Constitutions (1567) mentioned above, and the revised Constitutions approved in Alcalá (1581) under the supervision of Saint Teresa[7].

By contrast, Muñoz Jiménez argued for Carmelite production as a more coherent corpus, highlighting a purposeful departure from contemporary Spanish Baroque and noting the influence of certain Carmelite *tracistas*[8], such as Alberto de la Madre de Dios (1575-1635)[9], in establishing an architectural canon. De Dios was involved in many Carmelite constructions and was considered a court architect and a disciple of Juan de Herrera (1530-1597), a position that placed him and his works within the *milieu* of 'classicist mannerism'[10]. Muñoz Jimenez grounded his hypothesis concerning a Carmelite architecture canon on four features: the fact that few religious orders defined a clear architectural canon up to the maximum measurements of its buildings, resembling the format of classical architectural treatises; the involvement of a large number of architects and *tracistas* contributing to the consolidation of a distinct

[4] Authors' translation from chapter IX of the Ávila Constitutions published in Tomás Álvarez Fernández et al., eds., *Constituciones de las Carmelitas Descalzas (1562-1607)*, (Teresianum, 1995), 35. The Spanish term "curiosamente" is translated as "without decorations" as is also suggested in Emmina De Negri, "Note sulle chiese carmelitane in Spagna e in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento: norma e prassi," in *Nicolò Doria: Itinerari economici, culturali, religiosi nel secoli XVI-XVII tra Spagna, Genova e l'Europa*, ed. Silvano Giordano and Claudio Paolocci (Associazione Amici della Biblioteca Franzoniana, 1996), 627–43.

[5] Marina Alvarez Alonso and José Miguel Barbero Sánchez, "La arquitectura del Carmen Descalzo," *Revista de espiritualidad*, no. 70 (2011): 193.

[6] Juan José Martín González, "El convento de Santa Teresa de Ávila y la arquitectura carmelitana," *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, no. 42 (1976): 317–18.

[7] Santa Teresa de Jesús, "Camino de Perfección," in *Obras completas*, ed. Santa Teresa de Jesús (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1967), 393–641; Fernández, *Constituciones de las Carmelitas Descalzas*, 25–99.

[8] In the Spanish context, construction practices were mainly carried out by in-house technicians (*tracistas*) and craftsmen. The role of the *tracista* was not to create designs from scratch but to assemble pre-established elements and solutions that had already been tested in previous situations, following a pragmatic approach. Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez, "El estilo carmelitano de arquitectura: las vías de formación de los artífices en la descalcez española," *Monte Carmelo*, no. 122 (2014): 341–61.

[9] His extensive œuvre and documented innovations have led scholars to reevaluate his role, establishing him as a central figure in the development of Baroque architecture in Castile and the attribution of around eighty documented works. A recent book discussed in depth the problems of attributions and authorship of constructions that might be linked to Fray Alberto, including his network of collaborations: José Luis García Martínez and José Miguel Muñoz Jiménez, *Fray Alberto arquitecto (1575-1635): los inicios del barroco en España y Portugal* (Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, 2022). Another comprehensive overview of his works was published in Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez, *Fray Alberto de la Madre de Dios, Arquitecto (1575-1635)* (Ediciones Tantín, 1990).

[10] Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez, "Diccionario de artífices del Carmelo Descalzo. Arquitectos y maestros de obras," *Monte Carmelo*, no. 100 (1992): 52–55. According to García Martínez and Muñoz Jiménez, Fray Alberto's technical instructions from archival documents effectively constitute an unrealised treatise on construction, likely influential on later works such as Fray Lorenzo de San Nicolás's *Arte y uso de Arquitectura* (1639). See the last chapter of García Martínez, *Fray Alberto arquitecto*, 325–56.

aesthetic; an internal debate within the Order defending simplified Classicism against the stylistic innovations of the Baroque; and the influence exerted by Carmelite architecture on other Discalced Orders[11]. At any rate, an attempt to describe a distinct Carmelite architectural canon within the Spanish chapter emerged as early as 1948, in a special issue of the Order's journal, *El Monte Carmelo*[12]. Entitled "Arte y artistas del Carmelo Español," it opened with a contribution by Friar Félix Mateo of San José – *Canon arquitectónico en la legislación Carmelitana* – which represented the first attempt to assess the coherence of spatial modules and design rules derived from the Constitutions. Félix Mateo also noted that, despite significant similarities between the Italian and Spanish Constitutions, the architectural approaches to building design differed. All convents "had to be built in accordance with pre-established plans, specific and exclusive to each province; one for the larger convents, another for the smaller ones. It was up to the provincial Definitory to determine whether the convents were to be built according to the first or second plan"[13]. The following sections examine how this organisational model proved particularly effective across the network of missions in Asia.

The missionary activities

The Italian Discalced Carmelites branched off from the Spanish congregation in 1597, thereby gaining an independent position from Madrid under the supervision of the Holy See. While the Spanish congregation was responsible for residences in the New World and was briefly engaged in missionary efforts in Africa, their Italian counterpart managed European residences and missions to the East[14]. The Italian Congregation of Elijah of the Discalced Carmelites grew from four convents in Italy in the early 17th century to a total of 152 residences by the end of the 1650s. Of these, 96 residences were located in other parts of Europe and Asia. The activities of the missionaries in Asia were complicated by the institution of the *Padroado*, which allowed Portuguese kings to control the selection of clergymen and the definition of dioceses. Around the same time that the Italian Carmelites settled in Goa, the Holy See founded the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* to gain jurisdiction over missionary work.

Italian Discalced Carmelite missions began in 1604 during the papacy of Clement VIII (in office 1592-1605), with Persia identified as an ideal region for establishing new missions outside Portuguese control. The Carmelites found an ally in Abbas I, sharing an interest in opposing the Ottomans. Clement VIII, and later Paul V (in office 1605-1621), assigned Pedro de la Madre de Dios (1565-1608) to supervise the missions. A chapel dedicated to Jesus and Mary was first inaugurated in Isfahan, the seat of the Safavid shah, in 1608. The Italian missionaries subsequently spread to Hormuz, where a residence was established in 1612, although it lasted only ten years. In 1618, they built a church dedicated to Jesus and the Mother of God in Thatta, then under the control of the Mughal Empire, along with a residence.

In 1620, Friar Próspero del Espíritu Santo was sent to Persia to serve as prior of Isfahan. From there, in 1623, he entrusted the Portuguese Friar Basilio de San Francisco with settling in Basrah, and Friar Juan-Tadeo de San Elíseo with doing the same in Shiraz, where he founded the church of Saints

[11] Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez, *La arquitectura carmelitana, 1562-1800. Arquitectura de los Carmelitas Descalzos en España, México y Portugal durante los siglos XVI a XVIII* (Institución Gran Duque de Alba, 1990), 23.

[12] The first issue of *El Monte Carmelo* was published in 1900 in Burgos, Spain. The journal is still published today under the direction of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites.

[13] Félix Mateo of San José, "Canon arquitectónico en la legislación Carmelitana," *El Monte Carmelo*, no. 52 (1948): 120.

[14] Regarding the Discalced Carmelite missionary activity in northwestern Angola (1584-87), see Florencio Niño Jesus, *La misión del Congo y los Carmelitas y la Propaganda Fide: dos asuntos primitivos entre los misionales de carmelitas descalzos* (Rámon Bengaray, 1929); Nuno Fernando de Pinho e Silva de Almeida Falcão, "As Chaves e a Espada: a missão do Carmo Descalço nas relações diplomáticas entre o reino do Congo e a Santa Sé (1582-1608)," in *A Reforma Teresiana em Portugal, Congresso Internacional* (Edições Carmelo, 2017), 373–88.

12.1
Old Goa, Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, built 1630-1640 ca., view of the west end, ca. 1880. Photograph by Souza and Paul Studio. London, British Library, Photo 2/2(85). © British Library Board.

Simon and Jude in the same year. Two years later, a hospice was opened in Muscat. On his journey back to Rome in 1624, Próspero del Espíritu Santo stopped in Aleppo to lay the foundations for the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which was inaugurated in 1627. This marked a significant step toward reoccupying Mount Carmel, a mountain range located 400 km to the south and regarded as the place of origin of the Order.

However, the missions in Persia were economically unsustainable and relied heavily on funding from Rome, leading the Carmelites to redirect their attention to Goa, India, where Christian communities facilitated their integration into local society and provided a recruitment pool for the clergy[15]. Nevertheless, the Discalced Carmelites faced significant challenges in establishing a mission in the capital of the *Estado da Índia*. Led by the Spanish Friar Leandro de la Anunciación (1580-1630), the missionaries celebrated their first Mass in a makeshift oratory on 25 April 1620, obtaining permission to build a church from the Archbishop of Goa only two years later. This first Carmelite church in Old Goa, dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, was relatively small, with an exo-narthex, a single nave, and a transept with two altars "facing each other" – a novelty in Goa[16].

In 1630, with the arrival of the visitor-general Friar Epiphanio de São João Baptista (1580–1650), the Discalced Carmelites began constructing a much larger church and convent in Old Goa on the same site as the pre-existing one. The chancel and nave were completed by 1634, but the façade and other areas were only finished around 1640[17]. The church body included an upper choir and three intercommunicating side chapels on each side of the single nave. According to Paulo Varela Gomes (1952-2016), this was the "first purely Italian building in Goa," featuring "the most strikingly Roman-type façade Goa has ever had"[18]. Adjoining the church on its north-eastern side was an extensive three-storied convent with a large cloister[19]. A large, monumental staircase, likely the first of its kind built in Goa, led up to the church. Gomes has suggested that this staircase may have served as a *Via Crucis*, with crosses symbolising the Passion of Christ placed on the landings[20]. Like other religious orders in Old Goa, the Discalced Carmelites also developed a rural property for the recreation and convalescence of their brethren. This farmhouse was located near the Carambolim lagoon on the city's eastern edge. During the 1640s, the missionaries began constructing a new college on this property, but the Viceroy João da Silva Telo de Meneses ordered the friars to cease this endeavour[21].

12.1, 12.2

[15] The Italian Congregation faced significant challenges in establishing missions in Persia. Missionaries such as Juan Tadeo were tasked not only with preaching and converting individuals, but also with negotiating with local authorities and dialoguing with diverse ethnic and religious populations. Although mission manuals offered guidance, the resistance from Muslim populations often frustrated theoretical expectations. Pamela M. Jones, *Celebrating Teresa of Avila: The Discalced Carmelites in Italy and Their Mission to Persia and the East Indies* (Brill, 2023), 163–82. For a better understanding of the complex geography of Goa in the 17th century, see the maps from the Filippe Nery Xavier Collection published by the authors in Sidh Losa Mendiratta, Giuseppe Resta, and Antonieta Reis Leite, *Rediscovered Visual Documents of the Portuguese Estado da Índia: The Filippe Nery Xavier Collection* (Universidade de Coimbra. Centro de Estudos Sociais, 2024), 16–39.

[16] Florencio del Niño Jesús, *La misión carmelitana de Goa, 1619-1630* (San Sebastian, 1988), 46.

[17] Del Niño Jesús, *La misión carmelitana de Goa*, 67.

[18] Paulo Varela Gomes, *Whitewash, Red Stone. A History of Church Architecture in Goa* (Yoda Press, 2011), 86.

[19] AGOCD, "India Orientalis, Goa. Delieamenta Seminarii Missionum 1630," *M. Gerarchia Carmelitana: Cardinali, Arcivescovi, Vescovi, Vicari Apostolic*, 261/b.

[20] Gomes, *Whitewash, Red Stone*, 88–89.

[21] Panduronga Pissurlencar, ed., *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, vol. 2 (Tipografia Rangel, 1954), 363, 364, 413, 414.

12.2
Old Goa, Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, built 1630-1640 ca., nave and chancel, ca. 1880. Photograph by Souza and Paul Studio. London, British Library, Photo 2/2(87). © British Library Board.

By the 1630s, the Italian Discalced Carmelites were working to establish a missionary outpost on the Indian mainland, having led an embassy to the city of Bijapur in 1632[22]. Earlier, in 1628, the missionaries had founded a mission in the port city of Diu, where they built a church dedicated to Saint Joseph. During the early 1650s, they also began a mission along the coast near Kochi[23]. The missions among the so-called Saint Thomas Christians became entangled with the Dutch-Portuguese rivalry in the region, as the Italian friars started to take over churches previously entrusted to the Jesuits. Ultimately, the Discalced Carmelites were expelled from their motherhouse in Goa in 1707 after they refused to pledge allegiance to the Portuguese king as head of the *Padroado* system. Two years later, the convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was transferred to the Oratorians of Saint Philip Neri, a religious congregation made up of indigenous Goan priests.

The Discalced Carmelite architectural canon

As mentioned earlier in the text, Saint Teresa's writings envisioned simple and austere buildings that aligned with the values of the reformed Order. Following a 1580 decree by Pope Gregory XIII, the Teresian Carmelites established a framework for convent construction, emphasising minimal decoration and functional designs. This approach was exemplified by humble spaces, such as cells no larger than twelve square feet. The Spanish Congregation was responsible for residences in the New World, while the Italian counterpart managed European residences and missions. This division at the turn of the century influenced architectural styles, resulting in distinct normative directions and aesthetic outcomes between the two congregations. One major difference between the architectural production of the two congregations was the design process for new residences. In Spain, construction relied on in-house technicians (*tracistas*) and craftsmen, reflecting a belief in total self-sufficiency. The role of the *tracista* was not to create designs from scratch but to assemble pre-established elements and solutions that had already been tested in previous situations, following a pragmatic approach. In 1604, the Spanish congregation mandated that any new residence had to be based on a technical drawing approved by the Order's technicians. This led to a prototypical design known as *traza moderada*, characterised by a single-nave church with simple side chapels, a transept with short arms, pillars instead of columns, an upper choir, and a vaulted

[22] Del Niño Jesús, *La misión carmelitana de Goa*, 85, 191.
[23] Conselho de Estado de 25 de Agosto de 1642, doc. 129, published in *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, vol. 3 (Tipografia Rangel,1953), 363–64.

12.3
Salomon Saury, *Topographia de la Villa de Madrid descripta por Don Pedro Texeira, Año de 1656* (detail), 1656 (reprinted in 1881). Dirección General del Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, ES-MaIGN, C00001488c. CC-BY 4.0. This is probably the only visual document representing the primitive configuration of the convent of Saint Hermenegildo in Madrid.

ceiling with a dome at the intersection[24]. Saint Hermenegildo in Madrid, completed in 1605 under the supervision of Alberto de la Madre de Dios, was the first building to follow this model[25]. 12.3

In contrast, the Italian system relied more on established norms rendered in visual forms, thus reducing the need for advanced technical skills. A specific typology would first be chosen by a provincial *Definitorio* and later approved or rejected by the general *Definitorio*. In this process, quantitative criteria were prioritised over qualitative aspects[26]. Therefore, it became essential to regulate spaces using universal modules and proportions. Typologies and dimensions were initially addressed in the first *Constitutiones* of 1599 and were subsequently expanded in the 1605 edition to accommodate differences in scale for smaller residences. These guidelines were consistently revised with more detailed specifications in the *Constitutiones* of 1608 and reinforced in the edition adopted in 1611[27]. The process culminated in a fundamental document approved in 1614, the *Ordinatio de Constructione Ecclesiarum et Conventuum*, which encapsulated in fourteen articles a synthesis of recommendations for the building of churches and convents. The spatial implications of this *Ordinatio* are analysed below, visualised through abstract forms, and compared with three plans of Carmelite missions preserved in the AGOCD archive. 12.4

The incipit of the *Ordinatio* clarified that the Carmelites should remain aware of the transitory nature of their stay, avoiding a longing for a "civitatem permanentem," both concretely and metaphorically, so that they should live (or build) as if they were about to leave immediately[28]. This notion was further explained in the third article, which suggested that residences should be constructed at low cost and with minimal craftsmanship. To reduce arbitrariness in the interpretation of measurements given in the *Ordinatio*, projects had to receive approval from the provincial *Definitorio* or the superior general. The adopted spatial module for linear and volumetric measurements was the *palmo*,

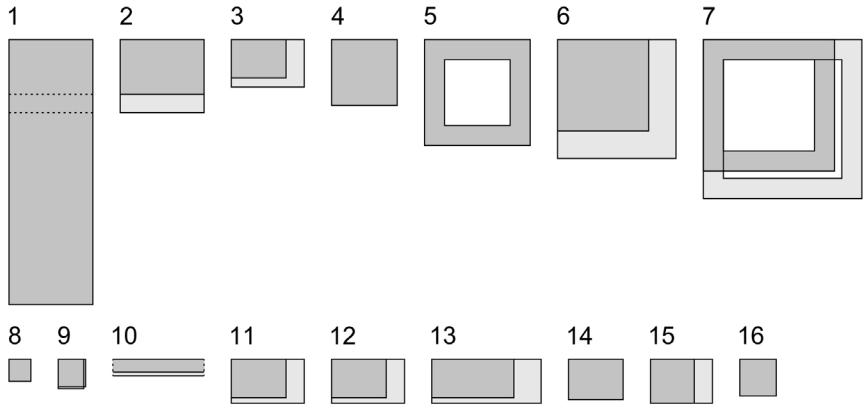
[24] De Negri, "Note sulle chiese carmelitane in Spagna e in Italia", 629. See also: Leticia Verdú Berganza, "La arquitectura carmelitana y sus principales ejemplos en Madrid (siglo XVII)", (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1996), 260–62.

[25] It is worth noting that Alberto de la Madre de Dios was a prolific, cross-regional architect, involved in the early stages of his career in construction works in Portugal, such as in Cascais, Alter do Chao, Figueiró dos Vinhos, and Évora between 1594 and 1606. Jose Miguel Muñoz Jimenez, "Cuarta adenda al Diccionario de Artífices del Carmelo Descalzo Hispánico," *Monte Carmelo* 133 (2025): 14–16.

[26] Saverio Sturm, "'Il più povero, il più religioso, il più sano'. Modelli architettonici dei Carmelitani Scalzi tra '500 e '600," in *Il Carmelo e l'arte*, ed. Aldino Cazzago (Edizioni E/O, 2009), 79–124.

[27] Sturm, "'Il più povero, il più religioso, il più sano'," 96.

[28] The document is held at the AGOCD (Actis Def. Gen. Vol. I, ff. 28v–29r) and published in Antonio Fortes, *Acta Definitorii Generalis O.C.D. Congregationis S. Eliae (1605-1658)*, (Institutum Historicum Teresianum, 1985), 674–75. For an analysis of the evolution of the dimensions of the elements of the monasteries across the different Constitutiones see Nicolò De Mari, "L'architettura dei Carmelitani Scalzi e i complessi genovesi di S. Anna, S. Maria della Sanità e S. Carlo," in *Nicolò Doria: Itinerari economici, culturali, religiosi nel secoli XVI-XVII tra Spagna, Genova e l'Europa*, ed. Silvano Giordano and Claudio Paolocci (Associazione Amici della Biblioteca Franzonniana, 1996), 357–88.



12.4
Graphic visualization of the dimensions prescribed in *Ordinatio de Constructione Ecclesiarum et Conventuum*, elaborated by the authors. Numbers indicate: 1. church; 2. choir; 3. sacristy; 4. minor cloister; 5. circulation around minor cloister; 6. main cloister; 7. circulation around main cloister; 8. cell; 9. infirmary cell; 10. dormitory corridor; 11. oratory; 12. chapter house; 13. refectory; 14. kitchen; 15. library; 16. recreation room.

equivalent to a length of 24.9 cm, as noted in the margin of the document – a detail indicating that the *Ordinatio* had a clear intent towards standardisation. Furthermore, this unit of measurement closely resembled the Genoese palm used during that period, with Genoa being the site of the first Discalced Carmelite foundation outside Spain[29].

Overall, the articles envisioned the simplest form of a two-cloister residence. The church was required to have a cross-shaped plan, measuring 46 *palmos* wide and 145 *palmos* long, or a proportional variant thereof. Each side of the nave was to contain two or three chapels. Again, in this fourth article, the constrained dimensions reflected a "desire for poverty". The choir was to be positioned behind the main altar, separated by a partition wall, and measured between 30 and 40 *palmos* in length. The sacristy was specified to measure between 30 to 40 by 21 to 26 *palmos* (articles 5 and 6).

Each monastery was to include two square cloisters, with the smaller one closest to the entrance, measuring 36 *palmos* on each side. The porticoed circulation, where the workshops were to be located, was to be 11 *palmos* wide and c ould rise to 20 or 22 *palmos* in height to the ceiling. A second, private cloister was to be positioned at the core of the construction, ideally square-shaped, with a side length of 50 to 65 *palmos*. Its circulation was to share the same measurements as the minor cloister (articles 7 and 8). According to the ninth article, cells were expected to be 40, with a cubic shape of 12 *palmos* on each side. An exception to the ceiling height was to be allowed in areas with more challenging geographical locations. Additionally, seven extra cells could be designated for the sick, occupying either a square room of 14 or 15 *palmos* on each side, or a rectangular room not exceeding 16 *palmos* in length and 14 *palmos* in width (article 10). The dormitory corridor was to be 7 to 9 *palmos* wide.

The oratory and the chapter house were to measure 40 by 24 *palmos*, or, in another proportion, 30 by 21 *palmos*. Finally, the refectory was to have dimensions of 60 by 24 *palmos* or 45 by 21. These indications were elaborated upon in articles 11, 12, and 13 of the *Ordinatio*. In the *Constitutiones* that preceded this document (those approved in 1599, 1606, and 1608), some of the most relevant functional spaces were also specified: a kitchen measuring 30 by 22 *palmos* in the 1608 constitution; a library of 24 by 24 *palmos* (in the 1599 version) or 34 by 24 to 28 *palmos* (in the 1605 version); and a recreation room, with a heating system, measuring 20 by 20 *palmos* as indicated in the first two *Constitutiones*. Additional details pertained to the intended presence and location of technical equipment, including stores, cisterns, and barns[30].

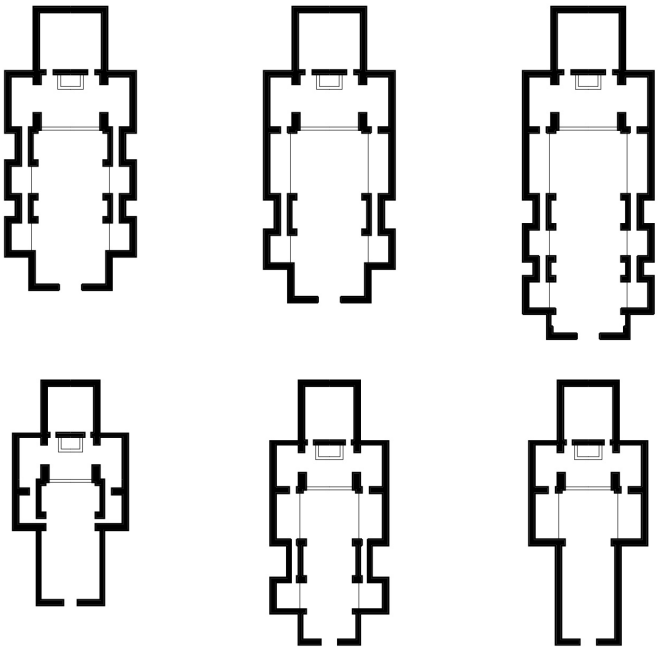
This framework was designed to reflect a high degree of standardisation, simplifying communication and construction while adhering to Saint Teresa's indications for "small and modest" convents. All the necessary spaces for an ideal Carmelite residence were conceived as modular elements, dimensioned according to recommendations, and later assembled. For this reason, Sturm referred to these complexes as "Carmelite machines," highlighting their logic of assemblage as a rule-based combinatory system: one liturgical block was to comprise the church, choir, sacristy, and oratory; one service block included semi-public spaces around the minor cloister; and one seclusion block was to feature a dining hall and kitchen around the main cloister. The upper floor was intended for dormitories, shared spaces, and offices[31].

[29] Regarding the Genoese palm see Pietro Rocca, *Pesi e misure antiche di Genova e del genovesato* (Municipio di Genova, 1871). The episode of the foundation of the convent of Sant'Anna in Genoa is linked to the merchant Nicolò Doria, who was familiar with the Spanish royal court and, in 1577, decided to become a Teresian Carmelite. On Sant'Anna and Nicolò Doria see Anastasio Roggero, *Genova e gli inizi della Riforma teresiana in Italia (1584-1597)* (Sagep, 1984).

[30] De Mari, "L'architettura dei Carmelitani Scalzi," 363.

[31] Sturm, "'Il più povero, il più religioso, il più sano'," 108–09.

12.5
Typological plans approved by the *Definitorio Generale*, elaborated by the authors based on the document *Disegni di chiese sei approvate dal Deff. Gen.*, held at the Archivio Provinciale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, Genoa. The first row shows variations of the "large church" model, and the second row shows variations of the "small church" model.



In some cases, a cloister-and-garden layout, as in Old Goa, replaced the more traditional double cloister typology. A critical element was the passage from the church to the convent, typically mediated by the sacristy. In certain instances, separate pathways were established for visitors and religious men. The church plan thus evolved from a modest single-nave hall to one featuring connected side chapels. This passage is exemplified in a document that De Mari found in the *Archivio Provinciale dei Carmelitani* in Genoa[32]. The general *Definitorio* drafted six model plans, to scale, divided into two groups: one for "large cities" and the other for "small ones". This confirms 12.5
that the application of the canon was adapted depending on context, as also seen in the *Constitutiones* of 1605. Each drawing exhibits minimal variations, primarily in the proportion and number of chapels, demonstrating the strict control the Carmelites intended to maintain over construction compared with other Orders. These exceptional drawings also reflect a preference for the pseudo-aisle connecting the side chapels.

A final distinctive aspect of the Carmelite complexes is the selection of sites in panoramic locations. The scenic quality was crucial for visitors approaching the building from a distance, and for residents looking out from their windows, as Vincenzo Maria di Santa Caterina da Siena noted during his stay in Goa in 1659[33]. Teresa insisted on the importance of choosing a healthy setting that was neither too close to the city nor too remote. In line with a broader post-Counter-Reformation "theology of the garden," shared by several reformed orders, gardens, paths, water systems and cultivated landscapes functioned as pedagogical devices for spiritual ascent[34]. Within this framework, the shaping of territory and greenery acquired a dense symbolic meaning tied to contemplative ascetism and the Baroque naturalisation of architecture. In fact, there was an allegorical connection to Mount Carmel, located on elevated terrain and often associated with a single water source, reflecting biblical landscapes across different geographies[35]. Goa's situation was exceptionally fortunate in this regard, as the convent became one of the most recognisable landmarks in the cityscape. The convent grounds featured extensive gardens and orchards, as well as the notable fountain of Elijah. 12.6

Research conducted at the AGOCD archive in Rome has revealed three architectural designs related to Carmelite missions in Asia. To date, only the mission in Isfahan has been published, owing to the survey and study conducted by Eugenio Galdieri (1925-2010). Figure 7 presents a comparative 12.7

[32] De Mari, "L'architettura dei Carmelitani Scalzi", 366. The circumstances of this drawing are still unclear and necessitate further research in the Roman archive, as De Mari suggests.
[33] Vincenzo Maria di Santa Caterina da Siena, *Il viaggio all'Indie orientali del padre F. Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina da Siena: con le osservationi e successi nel medesimo, i costumi e riti di varie nationi* (Giacomo Zattoni, 1678), 456.
[34] Marcello Fagiolo, "I giardini della teologia: dai gesuiti ai filippini," in *Lo specchio del Paradiso: Il giardino e il sacro dall'Antico all'Ottocento*, ed. Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Adriana Giusti (Silvana Editoriale, 1998), 120–37.
[35] Sturm, "'Il più povero, il più religioso, il più sano'," 83–84.

analysis of the plans of the Carmelite missions in Isfahan (left), Thatta (centre), and Goa (right), focusing on their scale, spatial articulation, and their relationship to the prescriptions set out in the 1614 *Ordinatio* and earlier Constitutions.

The three projects were developed under markedly different contextual constraints and with slightly different timelines. Moreover, not all drawings display the same level of detail: the plans for Isfahan and Goa include architectural information (i.e., the thickness of the walls), whereas Thatta's plan is more schematic, although it does include a graphic scale and construction indications. In Isfahan, where the Safavid court resided, the Carmelites relocated to a house owned by the ruler and began their regular life on 24 June 1609. The complex was eventually completed with a novitiate and a convent. The residence remained in use until 1722, albeit with difficulties[36]. Among the properties offered by Abbas I to the Carmelites, they selected one featuring a central building surrounded by a spacious garden with a fresh water source. This layout was organised as a series of independent rooms arranged around a large hall. An annex, initially planned as a stable, was also used for their apostolic project. The conversion into a Teresian monastery included transforming the hall into a chapel and erecting an enclosure wall[37]. The plan illustrated in Fig. 7 shows three walled blocks: one accommodating spaces for hosting visitors, one containing a simple church, and one comprising the residence proper. As the church adapted a pre-existing civil building, it followed the typical design of a Safavid pavilion, characterised by two symmetrical porticoed atria flanking a central space that later became the nave of the church[38]. Given that this residence resulted from the adaptation of a pre-existing building, it could not fully conform to the guidelines outlined in the Constitutions. Nevertheless, the overall layout, the presence of a double cloister, and the functional scheme of the 'Carmelite machine' are all evident in Isfahan. Most importantly, the dimensions of the cells – 12 by 10 *palmos* – correspond precisely to the specifications set out in the *Constitutiones* of 1599 and 1605.

Located west of the mouth of the Indus River, Thatta was a trading hub frequented by the Portuguese. Father Luis Francisco de la Madre de Dios (?-1622), travelling from Hormuz, stopped in Thatta to inaugurate the mission in 1613. According to his own account of the construction works, the church featured "a single nave, not very wide, [...] with its graceful dome; so much so, that it attracted attention in those lands of the slender domes". The structure was made of bricks and "cornices, pilasters and architraves of doors and windows [...] made of stone, 'of a very curious white stone', as well as some motifs or figures in low relief"[39]. It also featured "a graceful portico at the entrance with its slender columns, and along its walls, there are inlaid majolica and multi-coloured arabesques, [...] together with mosaics of sacred symbols"[40]. The residence was a compact, introverted construction with two cloisters, measuring a total of 140 by 70 *palmos*. Over time, the church was subjected to repeated raids by the local Muslim population, leading to the displacement of the friars and damage to the structure[41]. According to the design held at the AGOCD, this block contained all the essential elements for a minor Carmelite outpost: two small cloisters with a single-nave church, and a semi-public space in between. The cloister measured 35 by 35 *palmos*, and the cells 10 by 12 *palmos*, similar to those of Isfahan. By contrast, the structure in

12.6
Fountain slab from the convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Old Goa, realised in 1649, now kept near the church of Saint Francis of Assisi, Old Goa, 2013. Photograph by the authors.

[36] AGOCD, "Communicationes N.º 220. 28/7/2013," *OCD Communicationes*, 2013, 4–5.

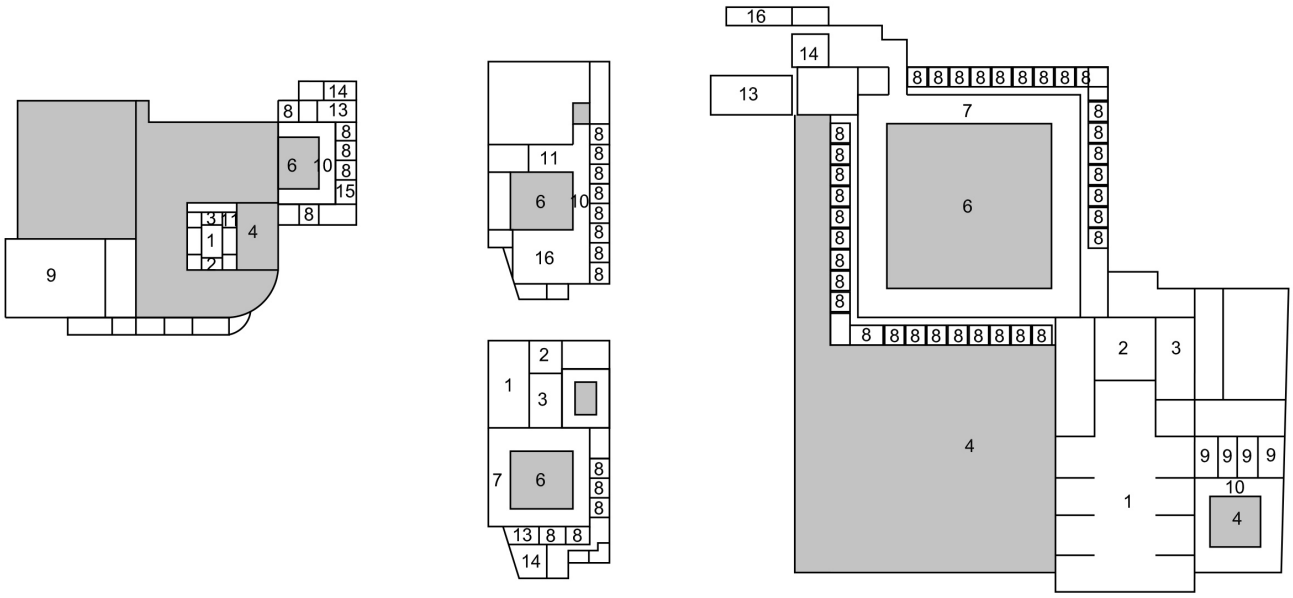
[37] Florencio del Niño Jesús, *En Persia (1608-1624): su fundación, sus embajadas, su apostolado* (La Obra Máxima Editora, 1930), 67–68. The inauguration was attended by European and indigenous Christians, as well as by representatives of the Safavid court.

[38] Eugenio Galdieri, "Una inedita pianta del Convento Carmelitano di Esfahan (XVII secolo)," in *Studi e restauri di Architettura Italia-Iran*, ed. Giuseppe Tucci (Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1980), 39–56.

[39] Manuscript dated 1620 in which Father Luis Francisco de la Madre de Dios provides details on the materials and techniques used in constructing the Thatta residence (AGOCD 268/m/2). This would also explain his direct involvement in the development of the building. Additional information on Father Luis Francisco de la Madre de Dios and a copy of his letters was published by Father Eusebio di Tutti i Santi (1670-1738) in his "Storia delle missioni de' PP. Carmelitani Scalzi della Congregazione di S. Elia" (AGOCD 285/b and c, 286/a, b and c).

[40] Florencio del Niño Jesús, *En Ormuz y en el Mogol*, vol. 4 (La Obra Máxima Editora, 1930), Del Niño Jesús, *En Ormuz y en el Mogol*, vol. 4, 133.

[41] Herbert Chick, ed., *A chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 1219.



12.7
Comparative scaled plans of the Carmelite missions in Isfahan (ground floor, left), Thatta (ground and upper floors, centre), and Goa (ground floor and hypothesized cell subdivision on the upper floor, right), elaborated by the authors based on documents held at the AGOCD Archive, Rome. Numbers indicate: 1. church; 2. choir; 3. sacristy; 4. minor cloister; 5. circulation around minor cloister; 6. main cloister; 7. circulation around main cloister; 8. cell; 9. infirmary cell; 10. dormitory corridor; 11. oratory; 12. chapter house; 13. refectory; 14. kitchen; 15. library; 16. recreation room.

Goa, the only one still visible on site today, closely resembles the Carmelite model described in the text. Compared to other Asian missions, the one in Goa possessed a distinctive monumental character, thanks to its dominant location that allowed it to stand out within the cityscape. The overall composition of the building and its walled formal garden recalls architectural ideas being explored in Italy at the time[42]. The earlier structure on this site, known only from plans drawn in a document preserved at the AGOCD, was smaller in size and included an adjacent civil building that accommodated an educational institution and novitiate, founded in 1622. The current church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the second structure built on this site, designed to meet new practical and programmatic needs. Internally, the layout consists of a single nave, flanked by three interconnected chapels on each side. Photographs from the late 19th century show that the church was covered with a barrel vault with lunettes. Its dimensions conformed to the first typological model depicted in Figure 5 – the one intended for major cities, Goa being one of them. The church extended 46 by 145 *palmos*, with the choir spanning 46 by 40 *palmos*, as indicated by the *Ordinatio*. The chapels measured 13 by 17 *palmos*, in accordance with the models in Figure 5. The sacristy diverged from the model, being integrated into the church structure along the side of the choir. In the lower-right corner, the infirmary cell conformed to 14 by 16 *palmos* and the corridor was 9 *palmos* wide, as prescribed in the *Ordinatio*. The main cloister was exceptionally large, 100 by 100 *palmos*. Although the subdivisions of the workshop rooms and individual cells are not depicted in the document, it is plausible however – based on the structural layout and the indications in the key – that this residence included a cell of 12 by 12 *palmos*, sufficient to accommodate the 40 units specified in the *Ordinatio*. The refectory measured 40 by 50 *palmos* instead of the 40 by 60 prescribed, the kitchen 22 by 22 instead of 22 by 30, and the recreational room had a different proportion from that indicated in the *Ordinatio*. These alterations in the upper-left corner may also have been related to the sloped terrain in that part of the plot, which required the construction of buttresses to support the building.

12.8

12.2

Conclusions

By analysing the visual and written documents held at the AGOCD related to the missions in Asia, this study compares Carmelite architecture with the normative structures outlined in the *Constitutiones*, examining how modules and scales were applied in these constructions. The potential of the Italian Discalced Carmelites' *Ordinatio de Constructione Ecclesiarum et Conventuum* to adapt religious buildings to diverse geographical, urban, and topographical contexts relied on

[42] See the design of an ideal convent found at the AGOCD (Plut. 74, d) and the landscape design of the convent of Sant'Anna, Genoa, discussed in De Mari, "L'architettura dei Carmelitani Scalzi," 372–76.

12.8
Old Goa, Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, built 1630-1640 ca., view of the west end, 2019. Photograph by the authors.

its systems of proportions and modular design. Although projects required central approval from the *Defintorio*, the remote missions in Persia and India likely commenced construction either before receiving formal approval or shortly thereafter. Do the observed variations and consistencies suggest the existence of a coherent Carmelite architectural canon?

The sources preserved in the AGOCD and regional archives indicate that the Discalced Carmelites developed a remarkably coherent set of architectural principles during the 17th century. In this context, the *Ordinatio* functioned as a prescriptive canon: an attempt to impose order, regularity, and spiritual meaning through architectural form. Its use of the *palmo* as a modular unit, its articulated typologies, and its emphasis on austerity translate the ideals of the Order into a spatial language that could, in principle, be reproduced anywhere. Such uniformity was especially necessary when building in locations far from Rome. Yet the materialisation of this framework in Asia also reveals the limits of prescriptive norms. The missions in Isfahan, Thatta, and Goa exhibit varying degrees of adherence to the canon, conditioned by local resources, political constraints, and cultural interactions. While Goa's monumental complex closely mirrored the *Ordinatio* in both scale and spatial composition, the residences in Persia and Sindh demonstrate a more flexible adaptation, often resulting from the use of pre-existing structures or accommodation of local construction techniques. These variations underscore a tension between centralised regulation and contextual adjustment, suggesting that the canon functioned less as a rigid template than as a flexible system of guiding principles.

The question of whether these prescriptions constitute an architectural canon in the strict sense remains open to debate. Unlike the theoretical treatises of contemporary architects, Carmelite documents functioned primarily as normative and practical tools for the dissemination of the Order's ideals. What emerges, therefore, is not a canon in the sense of a fixed stylistic repertoire, but rather a portable architecture of mission: a codified grammar of dimensions and forms that could be assembled, adjusted, and reinterpreted across different geographies. It functioned as a mechanism of identity, providing a recognisable architectural language, while simultaneously allowing for flexibility and contextual adjustment. This hybridity – between prescription and adaptation, universality and locality – ultimately defines the Discalced Carmelites' contribution to the history of religious architecture.

The Carmelites thus illustrate a paradox at the core of architectural canons: conceived as universal, they endure through variation; asserting immutability, they operate through negotiation. Recognising this paradox the Carmelite experience to be understood not as a marginal footnote in missionary architecture, but as a significant experiment in how architecture can function simultaneously as regulation, identity, and adaptation within a global religious network.