

Martyrdom and *mirabilia*. Trecento Images of the Franciscan Deaths at Thane

Abstract

This essay focuses on trecento representations of the 1321 martyrdom of four Franciscan missionaries in the Indian city of Thane, near modern Mumbai. The deaths were best known through the account of another friar, Odoric of Pordenone, who dictated it at Padua in 1330. It is proposed that the images of the Thane martyrs were an important aspect of the Franciscan Order's self-presentation in trecento Italy. They were also the record of a new European intercultural encounter with peoples and places in south and eastern Asia, a region long associated with marvels. To examine how artists and patrons sought to make the Thane events immediate and intelligible for local viewers, analysis focuses on three examples: a private vernacular manuscript of Odoric's text (BAV, Urb. Lat. 1013), and large public cycles in San Fermo Maggiore, Verona and San Francesco, Siena. The manuscript embraces an emphasis on the strange and marvellous that is a strong part of Odoric's text. Conversely, the wall paintings downplay the evocation of "other people" and "other places," instead positioning the Thane events in relation to pre-existing narratives within the Franciscan Order, especially the 1220 deaths of the so-called Protomartyrs in Morocco.