

# “BE MY WITNESSES”



Dr. Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (ed)

**“Be My Witnesses,” Studies on Mission**

(Biblical and Theological Foundations of Mission)

By

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# India and Apostle Thomas

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## 1. Introduction

Almost twenty centuries are over since India received Christian message and the first Christian converts in the Indian soil were made. Christian Gospel has been ever since kept alive in the country, though localized in some corners and regions of the vast country. The seeds of the Gospel were sown in the country by St Thomas one of the twelve apostles of Christ and he has ever been known as the apostle of India. He is truly the apostle of India since he is known to have preached the gospel at least in three known regions of the India of the first century AD and Christians known after his name existed in different parts of the country. If Thomas is the Apostle of India and if Christians known as Christians of St Thomas existed in different parts of the country, does not the present Syro-Malabar Church, heir to the traditions of Apostle Thomas have the right to spread itself across the country? This is a question which arises naturally and logically once Thomas is established as the apostle of India, of the whole of India.

## 2. India in the Apostolic Times

India in the first century AD, at the time when the Apostle is said to have made his voyage to the country, was well known in the Western world. Three important regions served as the main centres of the country: North India known as *Aryavarta*, The Deccan, known as the *Dakshinapada* and Kerala the *Cheranadu*. In these three regions of India there were cities which were internationally known trade centres.

### 2.1. Taxila

In North India, which included also the regions of present Pakistan and Afghanistan, the most important city was Taxila, the

great city of ancient Gandhara, situated at 33° 40' N and 72° 50' East. Today the remains of this great city are situated immediately to the East and North East of Sarai-Kala, a junction on the railway, twenty miles North West of Rawalpindi, in Pakistan<sup>2</sup>. The valley in which they lie is watered by Haro river. Within the valley and within five kilometres of each other are the remains of three distinct cities. The southern most and the oldest of these occupies an elevated plateau, known locally as the Bhir Mound. Others are known as Sirkap and Sirsukh<sup>3</sup>. The Pali form of the name was *Taksasila*. This term might mean the rock of the Thakkas. *Sila* in Sanskrit is rock. So the original meaning may be hewn or cut rocks. It may also mean the rock of Takshaka, the great Naga king. The classical writers are unanimous in their accounts of the size and wealth of Taxila. Arrian describes it as "a large and wealthy city, and the most populous between Indus and Hydapsus"<sup>4</sup>. Strabbo also declares it to be a large city, and adds that the neighbouring country was crowded with inhabitants, and very fertile. "Between Indus and Hydapsus is Taxila, a large city and governed by good laws. The surrounding country is thickly populated and extremely fertile as the mountains here begin to subside into plains"<sup>5</sup>. These accounts agree exactly with the position and size of the ancient city near Shah-Dheri, the ruins of which are spread over several square miles. Panini and Patanjali mention this city in the *Astadhyaya* (4.3.93) and in the *Mahabhasya* (1.3.1.4.3.93) respectively<sup>6</sup>. It occurs in the Kalinga rock edict I. Pliny calls it a famous city and states that it was situated on a level plain at the foot of the hills. It figures prominently in the Buddhist and Jain stories<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, "Excavations at Taxila", *ASI Annual Report 1912-13*, Calcutta, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> N.N. BHATTACHARYA, *The Geographical Dictionary; Ancient and Early Medieval India*, Delhi, Munshira Manoharlal, 1991, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> Arrian, quoted by CUNNINGHAM, *Geography of Ancient India*, London, 1872, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> J.W. McCRINDLE, *Ancient India as described in the Classical Literature*, Westminster, 1901, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> See B.C. LAW, *Historical Geography of India*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984, p. 129-130.

<sup>7</sup> See B.C. LAW, *Historical Geography of India*, p. 129 - 130.

After the break-up of Alexander's vast empire, a series of invaders had taken over the region around Taxila. About eighty years after his time, Taxila was taken by the great Asoka who made it his residence while he held the vice-royalty of Punjab. Mauryan emperors of India added the north-western territories to their empire in the third century B.C. Asoka (273- 232 B.C.) was the greatest of these emperors<sup>8</sup>. Indo-Greeks succeeded the Mauryans early in the second century B.C. They carried traces of the blood of Alexander's troops. Just before the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. the descendants of the Maurya kings seem to have come into contact with the Bactrian Greeks and in the early part of the following century Taxila must have formed part of the Indian dominions of Eukratides. Some of these veterans had settled in colonies farther to the northwest, mixed with local populations, and produced a people who retained vestiges of Hellenistic civilization. They built some cities on the usual Greek plan of a grid, minted coins with Greek inscriptions, kept their Greek names, and produced, in considerably debased form, artefacts on the Greek model.

Then it was wrested by the Indo-Scythians, of whom Gondophares was the greatest. Indo-Parthians—Gondophares' people—drove the Sakas further south in the first half of the first century A.D.. From the hands of Indo-scythians it passed over to the Kushans when they ultimately overthrew the last Indo-Greek kingdom of India<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.2. Bharuch (Broach)

In Deccan region the most important city was Bharuch or Broach, which was known in ancient Greek writings as Barygaza. Bharuch was at one time the centre of international trade from India and the

<sup>8</sup> It was the Maurayan empire who for the first time brought under one rule the whole region of India.

<sup>9</sup> The exact date of the Kushan invasion is not known. But it must have taken place sometime after the death of Gondophares (AD 51).

port of Bharuch was brimming with traders from all around the world till 50 AD. Barygaza was the first entrance to India when a traveller crosses over to India from Cane, coming from Alexandria. The accounts of the travels of those days affirm that the route to India of the time led the traveller to this Gujarat Coast. All commodities from the inland and even from as far as China were brought down via Mathura and Ujjain to Barygaza to be transported to the West. Thus it was the most important trade centre of India from 41 to 51 AD. This city was connected with the Indo-Parthian kingdom of North India.

The author of the *Periplus* has devoted a great length of his volume to describe the port city of Barygaza and its neighbouring places. From this we can gauge the importance this port held at his time and its popularity. The author seems to have gone there personally, because his description is so vivid and minute<sup>10</sup>. This city is identified today with the present Broach in Gujarat state in western India, north of Bombay. We read in the *Bombay Gazetteer* of 1877, "Broach, north lat. 21° 42', east long. 73° 2', ... is the fourth city of Gujarat, and the ninth of Bombay presidency exclusive of Sind. Covering with its suburb a strip of land about two and a half miles long and three quarters of a mile broad, Broach is, by its own inhabitants, commonly spoken of as *Jibh*, or tongue"<sup>11</sup>. The name Barygaza seems to have been derived from the Prakrit<sup>12</sup> *Bharukachha*, which was a corruption of the Sanskrit *Bhrugukshetra* or *Bhrugukachha*

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<sup>10</sup> "This is, if the boast may be allowed, the peculiar pre-eminence of the work : it belongs to this author alone, as far as I have discovered, to give the true direction of this western coast of the Peninsula and to state, in direct terms, its tendency to the South, while Ptolemy stretches out the whole angle to a straight line, and places the gulf of Cambay almost in the same latitude as the Cape of Comorin", W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and the Navigation of the Ancient in the Indian Ocean*, 2 vols, vol.2, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, New Delhi, Asia Educational Services, 1998 (London, 1807), p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay presidency prepared under the order of Government*, vol. III *Gujarat: Surat and Broach*, Bombay, 1877, p. 551.

<sup>12</sup> Prakrit was the earlier form of the Sanskrit.

which means "the plain of Bhrigu" who was a local hero<sup>13</sup>. According to the local legends the city was originally founded by this sage Bhrigu and so was called Bhragapor or Bhragu's city. "To their patron saint the people of the town owed a lasting gratitude, for, by the exercise of his power, he induced the waters of Narbada to leave their old bed about two miles to the south and come to flow close to the new settlement"<sup>14</sup>. McCrindle has this observation, "in the name Barugaza given to it by Ptolemy, we have a Greek corruption of *Bhrigukshetra* (territory of Bhrigu) or *Bhrigukachcha* (the tongue land of Bhrigu)"<sup>15</sup>.

*Periplus* begins the description of this great port in these words: "Beyond the gulf of Baraca<sup>16</sup> is that of Barygaza and the coast of the country of Ariaca<sup>17</sup>, which is the beginning of the Kingdom of Nambanus and of all India"<sup>18</sup>. A little later *Periplus* tells again, "... the native fishermen in the king's service, stationed at the very entrance in well-mannered large boats called *trappaga* and *Colymba* go up the coast as far as Syrastrane, from which they pilot vessels to Barygaza"<sup>19</sup>. This particular sentence reveals how well developed the port management of this city was and accounts for the great amount of the foreign trade it enjoyed. Barygaza had been linked to a number of trade routes which connected it with the whole of India.

<sup>13</sup> SCHOFF, *Periplus*, p. 180. Bhrigu "in Hindu mythology, a divine seer, son of Brahma (or of Varuna, or of Indra, or of Prajapati), and eponymous ancestor of the Bhrigu or Bhargava clan". J. BOWKER, ed. *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, p. 552.

<sup>15</sup> MCCRINDLE, "Anonymi [Arriani ut Fertur] Periplus Maris Erytherai", *IA*, April 1879, p. 107-151.

<sup>16</sup> The Gulf of Baraca is the modern Gulf of Cutch. See SCHOFF, *The Periplus*, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> According to Schoff this word in the text is very uncertain. SCHOFF, *Periplus*, p. 174-175.

<sup>18</sup> *Periplus* 41,

<sup>19</sup> *Periplus*, p. 40. This reference to royal fishermen piloting incoming and outgoing ships sheds, according to Gokhale, interesting light on the administration of the port city of Broach. This reference is well in tune with the prescriptions of Kautilya in his *Arthasaasthra*, when he speaks about the port administration, where guidelines for the port administration are detailed. "Kautilya in his *Arthasastra* has an officer called the 'Commissioner of Ports' who was responsible for fixing regulations which had to be followed by another officer called 'Controller of Shipping'. The Controller of Shipping should look after activities concerning sea voyages and ferries at the mouth of rivers as

Six major market areas served Broach during the period under review. The first and the foremost was Central Asia-Taxila. Well-travelled caravan routes connected Taxila with the Central Asiatic trade marts from Kashagar to Kandahar. Taxila was connected to Mathura and Pataliputra by a grand route first noticed by Megasthenes, the Seleucid envoy to the court of Chandragupta Maurya<sup>20</sup>. It was constructed in eight stages: from Pushkalavati to Taxila, from Taxila across the Indus to Jhelum, from Jhelum to the Beas, from Beas to the Sutlej, from Sutlej to Jamuana and from Jamuna, via Delhi region to the Ganga. From the Ganga it went to Kanauj and then to Prayag and Pataliputra. A network of roads connected Pataliputra with cities such as Savatthi, Kosambi, Champa, Tamralipti, Varanasi, Mathura, and Vidhisha. A well-marked route connected Mathura with Ujjaini. From South came routes linking Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh with Paithan from where other routes passed through Central India to Mathura and beyond<sup>21</sup>.

To Barygaza was directed large quantities of Indian and Chinese products, some of which were sent from China and central Asia through Kabul Poclair, so as to join other supplies at the great centres Minnagara and Ozene<sup>22</sup>. Barygaza received by way of Tagara wares brought by an old Andhra route across India from the East Coast<sup>23</sup>.

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well as ferries over natural lakes, artificial lakes and rivers in the *Sthaniya* and other towns. The Controller of Shipping had to rescue boats that had gone out of their course or are tossed about by gale, like a father. .... And he should send these (boats) on, as commissioned, at times suitable, for voyage from the port. Finally the Controller of Shipping should keep in use big boats in charge of a captain, a pilot, a manipulator of the cutter and ropes and a bailer of water, on big rivers that have to be ferried on even in winter and summer; on small rivers following only in the rainy season". B.G.GOKHALE, "Bharukachha / Barygaza » in G. POLLET (ed.), *India and the ancient world*, OLA 25, Leuven, 1987, p.74. For more details see M. CHANDRA, *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> Chandra Gupta Maurayawas the founder of the Maurya Dynasty of which Asoka became the most important emperor.

<sup>21</sup> B.G. GOKHALE, "Barukachcha", p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> Ozene is the modern Ujjain.

<sup>23</sup> E.H. WARMINGTON, *The Commerce*, p.56. See also W. ROBERTSON, *An Historical Disquisition*, p.61-62.

Barygaza was, beyond doubt, the most important port of India in the first centuries before and after Christ. That this was historically very important is proved by the coins and drachms discovered from this port city<sup>24</sup>. At the time of *Periplus* Greek coins and drachms were in circulation in the city. *Periplus* speaks of the evidences for the campaign of Alexander in this part. But it should be of Meneander<sup>25</sup> the author speaks here. There had been sent from Barygaza a mission to the Roman Empire and it is said that the Sramana who burnt himself at Athens came from Barygaza.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3. Muziris

In South India the most important city was Muziris traditionally located at Cranganore (Kodungallur in the popular language of the place) which lies at the Malabar Coast in South West India, in the present state of Kerala. This present city was a famous emporium of

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<sup>24</sup> For details V.A. SMITH, *The coins of the Andhra Kings*,

<sup>25</sup> One of the most important Indo-Greek Kings of India. He is supposed to have led his military campaign up to Pataliputra.

<sup>26</sup> We read in Strabo about this interesting character. "Eight naked servants, with girdles round their waists, and fragrant with perfumes, presented the gifts which were brought. The presents were a Hermes, i.e. a man, born without arms, whom I have seen, large snakes, a serpent ten cubits in length, and a parrot larger than a vulture. They were accompanied by a person, it is said, who burnt himself to death at Athens. For as everything hitherto had succeeded with him, he thought it necessary to depart, lest some unexpected calamity should happen to him by continuing to live. With a smile, therefore, naked, anointed, and with a girdle round his waist, he leaped upon the pyre. On his tomb stone was this inscription: Zarmanochegas, an Indian, a native of Barogaza, having immolated himself according to the custom of the country, here lies". *Geography of Strabo*, literally translated with notes by H.C. HAMILTON and W. FALCONES, London, 1857, p. 119. Cicero describes his name as Callanus. "Callanus Indus, indoctus ac barbarus in radicibus caucasi natus, sua voluntate uiuus combustus est". Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, 2, 52 in J. ANDRÉ and J. FILLIOZAT, *L'Inde vue de Rome*, p. 74. This term Callanus might just mean happy man. « Son nom est moyen-Indien: Kallana < Skr. Kalyana, terme qui signifie "bonheur" et servait de formule de salut. L'orthographe de Kallanus est plus proche avec son double l de l'original que le *kalanos* ordinaire des manuscrits grecs. ... L'orthographe Callanus est la meilleure en latin, le terme original servant de nom étant *kallanam* en prakrit, qui signifie « bonheur ». J. ANDRÉ and J. FILLIOZAT, *L'Inde vue de Rome*, p. 339. Whether this term Kallana has got something to do with the ancient sea port on the west coast of India, Kalyan, a port close to Barygaza, we do not know much.

trade in the first century AD, when it was known as Muziris<sup>27</sup>. Muziris is mentioned in all the ancient writings. Pliny<sup>28</sup>, *Periplus*<sup>29</sup> etc speaks of it as a great city thriving in commerce of spices and cotton. There was even a temple dedicated to Augustus according to the Table of Peutingeria.<sup>30</sup> The ancient Tamil poem *Silappatikaram*<sup>31</sup> speaks of the large Yavana<sup>32</sup> ships laying anchored at the harbour of Muziris. Other Tamil works of Sangham Age, Akananuru and Purananuru speak about the ships coming to the port of Muziris and the thriving trade going on at Muziris.

*Periplus* describes this city in these words. "Muziris, of the same Kingdom, abounds in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia, and by the Greeks; it is located on a river, distant from Tyndia by river and sea five hundred stadia and up the river from the shore twenty stadia"<sup>33</sup>. Schoff writes, "the location of this port was fixed by Burnell, Caldwell and Yule as *Muyiri-kotta*, which as Kodungalur or Cranganore (10° 14' N., 76° 11' E.) was an important port in medieval times"<sup>34</sup>. And Smith writes that Cranganore represents Muziris, the port of the pepper trade, mentioned by Pliny and the author of the *Periplus* at the end of the first century AD. In Ramayana the city was called Murachipattanam. In Tamil works it is known as Muchiri. In the Jewish Copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi Varma it is called Muyirikode.

Though this city was traditionally identified with Kodungallur (Cranganore), present day researches which are still continuing tend

<sup>27</sup> This ancient city was known in different names. Kodungallur, Masulipattanam, Maliamkara, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* VI,

<sup>29</sup> *Periplus* 54.

<sup>30</sup> We have already given it in the first chapter P.

<sup>31</sup> *Silappatikaram* is part of a set of ancient Tamil literature known as literature of *Sanghakala*. We have used a Malayalam translation of this work. *Silappatikaram*, translated into Malayalam by S. RAMESAN NAIR, Kottayam, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> This word literally stands to mean Greek. But here the mention is to all foreign ships.

<sup>33</sup> *Periplus* 54. SCHOFF, *Periplus*, p.44. Here in the same Kingdom means the Kingdom of Cherbotra ie of the Chera Kingdom. The river mentioned is the Periyar.

<sup>34</sup> SCHOFF, *Periplus*, p.205.

to identify it with a small village called Pattanam near North Parur which itself is not far away from Kodungallur.

### 3. Apostle Thomas at Bharuch, Taxila and Muziris

There are strong traditions which could be historically verified on the mission of St Thomas at Bharuch, Taxila and Muziris. The communities established in these places by Thomas seem to have gone across other parts of the country and several places were later associated with the name of Thomas.

#### 3.1. Thomas at Bharuch

The first port in which apostle St Thomas disembarked in India was, it seems in the light of recent researches, Bharuch or Barygaza on Western Coast of India. The narratives in the *Acts of Thomas*, when put under scientific scanner, offer such a conclusion<sup>35</sup>. This port was called Sandruk Mahosa in Syriac and Andrapolis in Greek. Where was it situated? Nobody knew.

The *Acts of Thomas* does not furnish us much information which would help us to identify the port of disembarkation. But from the story we are able to infer the following elements concerning this first city.

- It was a great trade centre of India where ships from the West reached very often. This we assume from the fact that they had taken a ship to come to India and considering the nature of the voyage and the swiftness of the journey we infer that it must have been a well travelled-route.
- It was a royal city to which the name Andrapolis or Sandruk was some how attributed. We say it was attributed, because so far we have not discovered any place in India or outside which in any epoch of history ever had this name.

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed study of this topic see J. Kurikilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India*, Bangalore, 2005, p. 44-66.

- It had some kind of relation to the city of 'the king of India', Gondophares. This is inferred from the statement in the *Ath* that the people of Andrapolis got the message that the apostle was preaching in the city of India and they together with the king and the royal couple went and joined him.
- There was a Jewish presence in the city or at least Jewish girls were present in the royal palace. There was a Jewish flute girl at the banquet story of the *Ath*.

Our search for such a city in India or on the coasts of India takes us to Barygaza, the great port city described in *Periplus* as the most important trade port of India. Sandruck-Andrapolis of the *Ath* is Bharuch or Broach at the Western Coast of India called Barygaza in Greek and *Bharukaccha* in Sanskrit. Besides etymological similarities, there exist geographical, historical and linguistic evidences in favour of such an opinion. The reasons for postulating such an opinion derive from the following facts.

- Its strategic position at the West Coast of India as great port of trade to where commodities from the inland from even as far as China were brought down to be shipped to the Western world.
- The name Andrapolis in Greek which means city of Andhra, Barygaza being the royal city and port of the Andhra dynasty of the Satakarni Kings, whence may come the term Sandruck or Sandruck *mahosa* which means the city of Sandruk.
- Its relation with the Indo-Parthian dynasty of North West India. It had maintained trade relations with the regions of Indus and was dynastically subordinated to the kingdom of Indo-Parthians of whom Gondophares was the greatest.
- The presence of the Jewish flute girl at the banquet; Barygaza is the only place mentioned in *Periplus* where girls of Jewish origin were brought to India as gifts for the Kings.

After a careful reading of the Acts of Thomas and a study of the geography and history of Bharuch, one easily comes to the conclusion that the author of the *Ath* had a first hand knowledge of the place where he places the first landing of the apostle in India. He does not describe it in detail; he does not make mention of the surroundings of the royal palace; but he seems to be sure about the historical, geographical and political situations of the palace. Why is this vagueness? Because the real intention of the author was not to give any historical exactness, to instruct the readers in the Christian teachings, as he believed them to be. So, there was no place in his writings for historical and geographical accuracies.

Thus we come to the conclusion that, as the "Andhra Kingdom extended from the Telugu country proper right across India to Nazik and beyond, where Andhra Kings ruled as 'Lords of the West', one of whom was famous as Maecaenas<sup>36</sup> of ancient Maharashtra literature"<sup>37</sup>, Andrapolis and its description in the *Ath* fits perfectly such a place as Barygaza. Both internal and external evidences help us to reach the conclusion that the first city of India or the city of the first India where the apostle is said to have made his first Indian convert is the port city of Barygaza as mentioned in *Periplus* and Strabbo or the modern Broach on the West coast of India in the present state of Gujarat. But do we have additional evidences, namely, the presence of Christians in this city or around it?

### 3.2. Christians at Barygaza

If we probably hold that Bharuch (Barygaza) was the place where the Apostle first landed in India, It would be quite natural to ask if there was a Christian community at Barygaza who claimed Thomas as their apostle. Today there are Christians there, but they are all fruits of the modern missionary efforts. So we have to make an

<sup>36</sup> This Maceans was a well-known figure in the early Indian literature. See V.A. SMITH, *Early History*, 208.

inquiry in to the history to see if there were Christians here and if they at any time claimed to be the descendants of those converted by Thomas.

In 354 a certain Theophilus, the Indian is said to have visited these parts of India and he is said to have come across Christians who were really integrated in the culture of India. This Theophilus had been sent when very young as a hostage from Divaeans to the Romans, when Constantine was at the head of the empire. The island called Divus is a portion of their territory, and the inhabitants of it are called Indians. When Theophilus had dedicated the Churches, and adorned them with such decorations as he could, he crossed over to the island of Divus, which was his native island. From there he made his way to the other districts of India and corrected many disorders among the inhabitants. For, they listened to the Gospel in a sitting posture and had many other customs that were contrary to the law of God<sup>38</sup>.

In all probability the native land of Theophilus was Diu, a small island on the Gujarat coast of India. The suggestion that he crossed over to his native place indicates that the place was in India, if it had been to Yemen that he was sent as ambassador. In India he met with a Christian community that was having some practices which were against the Christian law. One of these practices mentioned is that they listen to the Gospel in a sitting posture. And we know that this is a true Indian style of listening to the reading. The practice of all Indian religions from the very early times was hearing the reading in a sitting posture. This custom is really Indian and it cannot come from other places. Theophilus was in India around 378 AD. The faithful by that time were already asked to stand up for the reading of the Gospel in the Church of Persia.

<sup>37</sup> ZACHARIAS, *The Churches of Sts Thomas and Bartholomew*, 148.

<sup>38</sup> This summary of this story is taken from A.M. MUNDANDAN, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, 118.

Theophilus was in India and his native place was Diu or some other place in this part of India. Then the Christians he found must have been near his native place, which had later become a Christian centre under the Portuguese who had made it a bastion of their colonial power. Interestingly, Barygaza comes geographically very close to Diu. This Diu had been of great importance in the long trade route between Barygaza and the West and Barygaza and the Indus delta. So it was the Christian community of Barygaza that Theophilus had visited. This Christian community was deeply rooted in the local tradition and culture. It was not an outfit of the Persian Church nor was it influenced by that Church. It was clearly indigenous and carried indigenous customs and traditions.

The story of Jordanus of Severac also takes us to the Christians at Barygaza who had great reverence for the apostle Thomas<sup>39</sup>. When Jordanus and his confreres were at Thana, near Bombay, in 1321, they were received by a Nestorian Christian family into their house. There were some fifteen Nestorian Christian families at this time at Thana. These people told Jordanus that at Broach there are some Christians but they are Christians only by name. The description of the story follows thus:

Four minor brothers with Brother Jourdain....went up on a vessel to gain Columbo (Coulam) but dragged by winds and the storm and also, thanks to the desire of sailors that wanted to visit the church of St Thomas, they were, against their attempts and their will, drawn toward the city of Thana that is three months of road of Tauriz. There were there fifteen families of Christians, but Nestorians. A family of good heart received the

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<sup>39</sup>Jordanus of Severac was a Dominican missionary who together with four other companions set out to India to preach Christianity. He was later made the first Latin Bishop of India. The book written by him, the *Mirabilia Descripta*, remains a source book today. The book is translated into English by H. Yule.

brothers in their home. They were at Thana since eight days when the Nestorians advised them to send one of them, to the city of Paroth (Baroach), where there were a lot of Christians, but Christians rather by name than of a real faith, who missing of capable masters to teach them, were unaware of what they had to believe. Fathers would be able, they said, to instruct them and to baptize them. Jordan, who knew the language of the country better than his friends, decided to go there. He took with him two Nestorian Christians, of which one, who perfectly knew the language of the Hindus, offered to serve him as interpreter. Having embarked at Thana, they arrived at Supera where Thomas had preached, and constructed a church that pagans destroyed, but the Christians later rebuilt<sup>40</sup>.

There is no reason to believe that these people of Broach mentioned here are Nestorians. If they had been Nestorians, those of Thana would have really looked after them. More over the Nestorians of Thana were themselves sorry for those people who were without capable teachers and they were only happy that Jordanus and his companions could do that. There is also a mention that their language was that of the Hindus. It is said that among the Nestorians there was one who could perfectly speak the language of the Indians. This gives an indication that these Nestorians of Thana were not originally Indians and they spoke some language other than those of the Indians. But the Christians of Broach they spoke about were Indians. All these make it clear that those said to be Christians of Broach were local Christians. They should have been the remnants of an ancient Christianity who lost all Christian

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<sup>40</sup> F. BALME, "Un missionnaire dominicain en Orient au quatorzième siècle. Le B. Jourdain de Séverac, évêque de Coulam sur la côte de Malabar, aux Indes orientales, 1318-36", *L'Anne Dominicaine* (1886), 18-19. The translation is made by the present writer.

connection. It is of these people that Jordanus himself speaks of as those who consider 'Thomas the great as Christ'.

"In this India there is a scattered people, one here, another there, who call themselves Christians, but are not so, nor have they baptism, nor do they know anything about faith. Nay, they believe St Thomas the great to be Christ"<sup>41</sup>.

So can we not assume that they may be the descendents of the converts of Thomas? If they had been the fruits of the Nestorian proselytising efforts of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD they should have carried some elements that would be distinguishable to the Nestorians of Thana. This statement of the missionary speaks volumes of the characteristics of the so-called Christians. They were a scattered people and called themselves Christians. But as Jordanus says they were not Christians because they had no baptism. They called themselves Christians and believed Thomas to be Christ. This really takes them back to the Apostle Thomas. We quote another passage from *Mirabilia*:

"In this India the greater part of the people worship idols, although a great share of the sovereignty is in the hand of the Turkish Saracens, who came forth from Multan, and conquered and usurped dominions to themselves not long since, and destroyed an infinity of idol temples, and likewise many Churches, of which they made mosques for Mahomet, taking possession of their endowments and property. 'It's is grief to hear, it is woe to see"<sup>42</sup>.

Yule the translator of the work comments, "The allusion would seem to be to the conquest of the Carnatic and Malabar by the Generals of the Khilji sovereigns of Delhi, Ala-ud-Din und Mubarik (A.D. 1310-1319). The Khiljis were Turks by descent. Multan was at

<sup>41</sup> JORDANUS, *Mirabilia Descripta*, H. YULE (tr.), London, 1893, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Mirabilia Descripta*, 23.<sup>43</sup> *Mirabilia Descripta*, 23.

this time subject to Delhi. But perhaps, the “not long since” has a deeper import, and refers to the conquests and iconoclasm of the great Mahmud of Gazni, 300 years before. Indeed he is speaking here of the Lesser India, i.e. of Sind, Gujarat and the Konkan, the scene of Mahmud’s most memorable expeditions. Mahmud coming from Ghazni would come through Multan and indeed he took that city several times”<sup>43</sup>.

Thus it is almost sure that there were Christians in Bharuch long before the Portuguese came to India and these Christians had a Thomas tradition. This tradition must have been original and must have come from the descendants of the original converts of Thomas during his short sojourn at Bharuch en route to Taxila.

### 3.3. Thomas at Taxila

The *Acts of Thomas* always associated Apostle Thomas with Gondophares, the King of India. History knew nothing of this king in India, but for the *Ath*, till recent times. He was spoken of only in connection with the apostle Thomas. But he should have been a historical person. Otherwise the author of the *Ath* writing in the first half of the third century A.D., basing himself on the Indian subcontinent of the first century A.D., would not have thought of this name. Now we know that this king is a historical person as numismatic, epigraphic and archaeological studies have brought forth immense amount of evidence for the existence of this king in the North Western province of India. But till the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the name remained a mystery, perpetuated only by the mention in the *Ath*. Gondophares was the most important King of the Indo-Parthian dynasty. He came to the throne most probably in 20 AD and died in 50 AD. Taxila was the capital of Kingdom. As his kingdom was extensive he had also two more capital: Kabul and Peshwar.

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<sup>43</sup> *Mirabilia Descripta*, 23.

In the latter half of that century hoards of coins bearing his name began to be unearthed from the regions now known as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Punjab. An inscription also was discovered from a place called Takth-I-Bahi near Peshwar in 1872. The inscription read like this. "In the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the great King Gondophares, in the samvat year three and one hundred....". The samvat mentioned here is the Vikrama era which began in 57 BC. So Samvat 103 is 46 AD (103-57=46). 46 AD was the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the rule of Gondophares. Thus Gondophares is proved to be a historical person and it was to the court of this King that St Thomas was sent. Historical remains of Taxila were unearthed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today they are scattered twenty miles away from Rawalpindi.

### 3.4. St. Thomas and Gondophares

The decipherment of the coins and the takt-i-bahi inscriptions prove that Gondophares was a really historical person, a great king who had begun to rule in 20 AD and had still been reigning in 46 AD. Hence the most important question. Is he the same king mentioned in the *Ath* as the king of India? He was the king of India in the sense that he had ruled over the large area of land beyond the Indus to which the Syrian and Persian writers very often gave the name India or Hindu. So when the author of the *Ath* wrote of the King of India, he must have normally meant the king that ruled over these parts of India. The actual king on the throne at the time under consideration was Gondophares, known as *maharaja rajadhiraja*, the great king, and the king who is lord over the kings. And when the story was composed, the Kushans were ruling these parts of India as Lords of India<sup>44</sup>. The fact that, in spite of it the author got the name correctly shows that Gondophares was a well-known name even after more than 200 years in a region where all the glories of his kingdom were destroyed by the very same people who were ruling the country now, namely the Kushans.

<sup>44</sup> Kushan empire was established in India by Kadphises I in about 50 A.D.

The inscription of Takht – i - Bahi dated 46 AD makes Gondophares a real contemporary of St Thomas<sup>45</sup>. And the readings of the coins would ascribe his death in 51 A.D. or even later. The visit of the apostle might have taken place in all probability in the same period. The Malabar tradition about the apostle makes him land at Cranganore at the Malabar Coast in 52 A.D. So both the traditions do not contradict themselves as far as the date of the arrival of the apostle in the proper region concerned. Again, the visit should have taken place before the Kushan invasion that laid to dust the wealthy city of Taxila just after the death of Gondophares most probably around 51 A.D.<sup>46</sup>. The crucifixion and the death of Jesus might have taken place in 29-30 A.D. Thomas must have laboured in and around Jerusalem and Alexandria and in Persia also for a considerable period of time before embarking for India. The whole journey to India from Alexandria might take, in the normal circumstances, six months<sup>47</sup>. His stay at Barygaza and the voyage from there also must have taken one year. From all these we may calculate that the visit might have taken place sometime around 44 – 45 A.D.

In the collection of legends, the so-called *Legenda Aurea* or *Historia Lombardica*, arranged in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Genoese bishop

<sup>45</sup> "An inquiry of considerable interest has been raised with reference to the name preserved on the coins, so long veiled from European intelligence, in virtue of the almost literal identity it bears to the designation of the king mentioned, in certain old Church legends, as the ruling Potentate of India at the period of the mission of St Thomas the apostle. The coincidence in the appellations is certainly remarkable, though there is a defect in the primary authority for the statement, a difficulty in regard to the correspondence of the site of the kingdom, and a doubt as to the needful accordance of the epochs of the legendary and the numismatically certified monarchs, the latter of whom seems to belong to a date prior to our era; but, for the reconciliation of this last obstacle, there is a fairly open margin afforded by the successional coins, which in themselves suggest the question as to whether the name of Gondophares was not posthumously elevated into the rank of a dynastic title. The following heads of sentences will indicate the leading combinations deposited to by the *Legenda Aurea*, p. 33 - "*Thomas apostolum cum esset apud Caesaream, apparuit et dominus dicens : rex Indiae Gundoferus, etc* : p. 35 - *post haec autem apostolus et Abbanes ad regem Indiae pervenerunt.... Gad frater regise etc* ; p. 37 - *post hoc autem in Superiorem Indiam abit*", E. THOMAS, *Essays*, p. 214.

<sup>46</sup> The Kushan invasion is said to have dealt with the vital blow to the nascent Christianity at Taxila. We will speak of it later in the third chapter of our dissertation.

<sup>47</sup> Warmington calculates the possible duration of sea voyage in the first century AD, from Alexandria to the Indian coasts in the following way.

Jacobus a Voragine, mentions the Indian mission of apostle Thomas as follows, "*Thomas apostolus cum esset apud Caesaream apparuit ei Dominus dicens : rex Indiae Gundoferus misit praepositum Abbanem quarere hominem architectoria arte eraditum*". Von Sallett says that this medieval collection of legends gives facts, credibly and faithfully culled by him (the collector of legends) from ancient sources in his possession, not so much events as the diplomatically correct mention of the name of the King, who, as the coins at any rate appear certainly to imply, reigned during the time of the apostles, consequently in the first century A.D. during many years, demonstrating, or at least making very probable, a remarkable connection of this Indian king with the first propagators of Christianity. How else could the name of an Indian king, who was so remote and beyond the pale of all civilization, have become so correctly known to the first legend writers?<sup>48</sup>

There should have been some kind of relation between the first Christian missionaries in India and this said king. If the author in the third century, in a time when people still possibly spoke about the apostle or of the people who might have seen and spoken with the apostle, decided to make an Indian king the hero of his story and made him the contemporary of the apostle Thomas, it should have been with sufficient reason. Because, at Edessa, as we believe that the author hailed from this city, the traditions about their apostle should have been quite prominent<sup>49</sup>, a hypothesis which is all the more strengthened by the tradition that the body of the apostle

Alexandria – Coptos (up Nile by boat with wind) ..... 12 days

Coptos – Berenice (by camel) .....12 days

Berenice (mid-summer) - Ocelis or Cane (evidently with delay) ...30 days

Ocelis – Muziris with monsoon (perhaps with delays) ..... 40 days. Here the time is calculated to the voyage to Muziris. Voyage from Cane to Barygaza would also be the same or even shorter duration.

<sup>48</sup> A. VON SALLET, "Die Nachfolger Alexander der Grossen in Bactrien und Indien", *IA*, 1880, p. 261.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas is considered their apostle by the Christians of Edessa as it is he who sent Thaddeus to them.

Thomas was kept in the Church at Edessa after being brought from India to which Ephrem gives his testimony<sup>50</sup>. Under this circumstance the author of the *Ath* could not simply invent his story and his heroes. So we believe that he should have had facts before him and he based himself on these facts. The king Gunduphara of the *Ath*, then, could be none other than the Gondophares of the Indian coins, which most probably were still to be seen in the regions at the time of composing the story. If the historians today make use of the coins and inscriptions to write the history of this king, we can equally hold that the same coins and inscriptions were available to the scrutiny of the writers, and in better conditions, in the first half of the third century or even before. And they should have been more legible and comprehensible at that time. There should have been at his disposal so many other documents other than the coins to base his story around the said king. So we think that there is nothing legendary or mythical in the story of the *Ath* as far as the name of the king is concerned.

But even if we accept that Gondophares of Taxila is the king of the *Ath*, what should have been the reason for the author to make him the hero of his story. Had there been any Christian presence in this region at the time of composing the story that prompted the author to justify its origin? We may think, in answer to this question, of the remark of Bardaisan of the Christians in Parthia<sup>51</sup>. There had been Christians in these regions of India, as well as at Baryagaza and the adjoining regions in the first centuries of the Christian era. This presence of the Christians must have been a reason for the author to connect these places with the story of Thomas. That the apostle was well received by the king is clear from the very fact that he was allowed to stay in the city for such a long time. On the contrary, we

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<sup>50</sup> From Ephrem we hear for the first time that the relics of the apostle Thomas are brought to Edessa from India. See EPHREM, *Caramina Nisibana*, The French pilgrim Egeria also bears testimony to the presence of the relics at Edessa. See chapter one, foot note no.

<sup>51</sup> We will come back to it later in our next chapter.

read in the story of Apollonius that he and his companion had been granted initially permission to stay only for three days and later when the king was pleased with his guests they received an extended permission. From the story of Apollonius we understand that foreigners were not allowed to stay longer in the city or at the least inside the city walls, according to the law of the country<sup>52</sup>. But Thomas had been allowed to stay long and preach his religion and it shows the religious tolerance the city enjoyed from the king. The fact that Taxila was a meeting place of different religions makes our belief still stronger. There had been temples of Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Hindus at Taxila. So under this circumstance it would not have been difficult for the apostle to find a welcoming friend in Gondophares in the city and to receive freedom of travel and speech.

There is still another point to be considered. The brother of Gondophares, called Gad in the *Ath*, is also a historical person and coins bearing his name had been unearthed<sup>53</sup>. In the coins his name is Abadgases<sup>54</sup>. The Kharoshti legends on the coins read like this:

*Maharajasa avadagasasa tradatasa.*

*Gandaphara bhrat putrasa maharajasa tradatasa Avadagasasa.*

Let us quote Herzfeld:

"In the Saka empire, not the own son, but the son of the sister, was the successor, an institution indicating female inheritance and queer forms of marriage, as in the ancient Elam. The highest dignity

<sup>52</sup> J. CHARPENTIER, *The Indian Voyages of Apollonius of Tyana*, Uppasala, 1934, p. 50. He makes the following observation about this particular custom. "Personally I am at a loss to find out any Hindu authority for such a statement. Still, there may of course, have existed, some sort of time-restriction as strangers were apparently kept under close control, though they were provided in other ways".

<sup>53</sup> This discovery of the coins of Gad was published in the *Examiner*, vol. LVII, no. 30, July 28, Bombay, 1906. Cunningham gives a few specimens of the coins of Gad in A. CUNNINGHAM, *Coins of the Indo-Scythians, Sakas and Kushanas*, London, 1888, p. 62-63.

<sup>54</sup> We have already seen one specimen of the coin in page . The name Abadgades is said to be the genitive form of Gad. See *ASIAR*, quoted also in *Examiner* vol. LVIII.

after the king had the title 'the king's brother', that is, brother-in-Law, consort of the king's sister, and father of the heir to the throne. He had the right to coinage. In the *Ath* the first to be evangelised is the king's brother, Gad, Guda of the coins"<sup>55</sup>.

In the light of this assertion we understand better why the brother of the king is an important character in the story of the *Ath*. This heir to the throne appears in another apocryphal book closely connected to the *Ath*, the *Transitu Mariae*<sup>56</sup>. Here the name given is Abdanes, a short form of Abdagases as it appears on the coins. This apocryphal book reports briefly an episode surprisingly full of exactitudes. St Thomas while in India was informed of the demise of the mother of Jesus and was taken miraculously by the angels to Jerusalem. There he describes to the other apostles about his mission to the king of India,

"I went about the country of India and by the grace of Christ, proclaimed the gospel; the son of the sister of the king, called Abdanes, was about to be converted when the Spirit of the Lord spoke to me...."<sup>57</sup>

This apocryphal book clearly states that Abdanes was the son of the sister of the king. And we have seen that in the Saka Empire the son of the sister was the heir to the throne and he was called brother of the king. He was about to be baptised by the apostle. In the story of the *Ath* we see that the king and his brother were converted and baptised by the apostle. But, historically speaking, though we have

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<sup>55</sup> E.E. HERZFELD, *Archaeological History of Iran, London, 1935, p. 64.*

<sup>56</sup> *Transitu Mariae* is an apocryphal book dealing with the dormition of Mary and Thomas is depicted in the same way as in the episode (which accords him the title 'doubting Thomas') in the Gospel of John. As the story goes, the Holy Spirit informs the apostles, each in their proper mission fields, of the immanent departure of Mary, mother of Jesus, from this earth and bids them to come to her. After their arrival the apostles narrate their experiences in various countries of the world. The document belong to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Cf. "La dormizione della santa Madre di Dio, libro di S. Giovanni, il teologo" and "Transito in Syriaco", in ERBETTA, (ed.), *Gli Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, Casali, 1981.

<sup>57</sup> See the Italian translation of the text: "Poi rispose Tommaso: - Anch'io, avevo attraversato il paese degli Indi e per grazia di Cristo, la predicazione si era affermata, tanto che

proofs to show that the apostle was in Taxila we have nothing to prove that Gondophares became Christian, as it is said in the *Ath*. Because we have so far discovered no Christian symbols except some cross symbols, of which we are not sure of the Christian origin, from Taxila and around<sup>58</sup>.

Thus we conclude with Charpentier: " A Christian missionary belonging to the disciples of our Lord himself and called by the tradition St Thomas may have found his way, in the company of a merchant from the Punjab or from Kabul, to the realm of Gondophernes, a ruler of Iranian origin who between 19 and 45 A.D. was the overlord of North Western India and Afghanistan. .... That he converted Gondophernes and his house is, of course, a pious legend; but judging from the religious tolerance of that time, witnessed by the coins of the Kushanas and the ruins of Taxila, Gondophernes may well have tolerated and even encouraged his missionary zeal<sup>59</sup>.

Therefore we can, with sufficient reasons, say that the king mentioned in the *Ath* is the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares and it was to his capital at Taxila that St Thomas the apostle came, as we read in the *Ath*.

#### 4. Thomas at Muziris

The mission of Thomas in South India was an almost acclaimed fact. That Thomas reached Kodungallur in 52 AD was accepted

anche il figlio della sorella del re, di nome Labdano, stava per ricevere da me la confermazione nel suo palazzo, quando improvvisamente lo Spirito Santo mi disse: ..." *I Vangeli apocrifi*, a cura di Macello Crateri, con un saggio di Geno Pampaloni, . In another version of the same story words of Thomas is described in the following way, "allora il beato Tommaso si mise a raccontare loro che egli stava cantando messa in India (infatti era ancora rivestito degli abiti sacerdotali) quando, senza sapere che era volontà di Dio, venne trasportato sui monti degli Ulivi e vide ascendere in cielo il santissimo corpo della beata Maria e la pregò di dargli la sua benedizione, ed essa esaudì la sua preghiera e gli gettò la fascia, da cui era cinta".

<sup>58</sup> For example there is a Christian relic discovered at Taxila which is now called the Taxila cross. J. ROONEY, *Shadows in the Dark*, p. 42- 44.

<sup>59</sup> J. CHARPENTIER, "St Thomas the Apostle and India", p. 42.

tradition everywhere in Kerala. The *Acts of Thomas* describes that from the country of Gondophares Thomas went to another part of India. The name of the King of the new region is Mizdeus. We do not yet know who the king is. It could be a description of the mission of the apostle in South India.

Tradition holds that the apostle reached Maliankara near Kodungallur in 52 AD. Kodungallur (Cranganore) was the most important port of the Malabar Coast for many centuries. It was known as the port of Chozhaperumal. Cranganore thrived in commerce with the Western world especially with the Romans and the Greeks. Ancient literature of South India speaks of the Yavana ships that were anchored at this port of Chozhaperumal.

As we have already seen, the apostle reached Taxila around 45-46 AD. He might have left the region with the onslaught of the Kushan invasion which began in 50 AD. There is a tradition that Thomas visited Jerusalem during this time. He was taken to the death bed of Mary the mother of Christ. He could also have been present in the Jerusalem council. The apostle after the council might have taken a new journey to India via Socotra and reached Cranganore in 52 AD. There is an Armenian document that speaks about such a second voyage of the apostle to India.

There seems to be a document that clarifies 52 AD as the date of the arrival of Thomas at Cranganore. It is found at a Nambudhiry family who migrated from Palayur. This document called Grandhavariola is kept in the Kalathur mana. It is written, "Kali year 3153 (52AD), the foreigner Thomas sanyasi came to our village and preached causing thereby pollution. We therefore came away from that village".

## **5. Further evidence for the mission of Thomas in Malabar Coast**

The tradition about the mission of Thomas existed in Malabar from time immemorial. Any amount of pressure from any quarter

could not wipe away this tradition. To vindicate it there is a Christian community who is steadfast in its claim of its apostolic origin.

### **5.1. Seven Churches built by the apostle**

Tradition is very strong in claiming that the apostle built seven and a half churches in Malabar. They are Kodungallur, Kollam, Chayal (Nilckal), Niranam, Kokkamangalam, Kottakavu and Palayur.

### **5.2. Families baptized by Thomas**

Sankarapuri, Pakalomattam, Kalli, Kalikavu, Koyikara, Madapuru, Nedumpally etc.

### **5.3. Feast of Dukhrana**

July 3<sup>rd</sup> is celebrated as dukhrana. The feast must have begun in Malabar even before the arrival of the Persian Christians. The Persians had only one day for celebrating this feast. The Malabar Christians had an eight day vigil for the feast.

### **5.4. Ancient Songs**

Thomas Christians hold as precious some of the traditional songs that have come down to them about the apostolate of St. Thomas the apostle.

#### **5.4.1. Song of Thomas Ramban**

Song of Thomas Ramban<sup>60</sup> or *Rambanpattu* is one of the Indian versions of the story of Thomas. It is claimed to have been composed by a disciple of St Thomas or by a follower of the disciple, a certain Thomas Maliekal. The text we now possess is a shortened redaction of the original one in modern language by the Thomas Ramban

<sup>60</sup> The original Malayalam manuscript is published by Bernard THOMAS in *Marthomakristianikal*, Mannanam, 1921-1926. For an English translation see, HOSTEN, *The Song of Thomas Ramban*, Cochin, 1931. We have given a translation in the appendix.

Maliekal, the 48<sup>th</sup> priest of this family whose compound at Niranam can be seen even today. Various dates are given at the end of different manuscripts of later redactions of this song<sup>61</sup>. It describes the arrival of St Thomas at Cranganore, his missionary journeys in Malabar, the establishment of seven Churches/communities there, the number of people converted, the miracles he performed, ordinations of priests and bishops, his journey to Mylapore, his martyrdom, his appearance and blessings. There is even a mention that the Apostle had gone to China. But it is difficult to establish the historical value of this document.

#### 5.4.2. Margamkalipattu

*Margamkalipattu*<sup>62</sup> is another Indian version of the Thomas story. It differs slightly from the *Rambanpattu*, but agrees in many respects with the Syriac Acts. We do not know when it was written, but the antiquity of it is attested by the Portuguese missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>63</sup>. It was usually sung by the Christians of Malabar during important festivals and during marriage. Even today it is very popular among the Christians of Malabar especially among the *knayanists*<sup>64</sup> of Thomas Christians. The *Margamkali pattu* describes the introduction of Christian way of worship in Kerala. Its theme is St Thomas- his arrival in India, his missionary work, the miracles he performed, the hostility and friendship of the people among whom he worked, the persecution he suffered, and his martyrdom. It is composed to the accompaniment of a sacred dance.

<sup>61</sup> The date also is disputed. 1061 and 1160 are also suggested.

<sup>62</sup> The Malayalam version can be read in P.U. LUKAS, *Purathanapattukal* (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1910.

<sup>63</sup> It is said to have been sung and played by the Thomas Christians in front of Arch Bishop Menezes in 1599 during his visit of the parishes of the Thomas Christians.

<sup>64</sup> Knayanites belong to an indigenous group among the Thomas Christians of Kerala. They are considered to be the descendants of the Persian migrants who reached Malabar in A.D. 345 fleeing the persecution of Sapor II in Persia. They were led by a certain Thomas of Knaya. So they are called Knaya Christians. The best study so far published about them is J. KOLLAPARAMPIL, *The Babylonian origin of the Sudists among the St Thomas Christians*, Rome, 1994.

### 5.5. Malabar Office for the feast of St Thomas on July 3

Now we have a document in Malabar that seems to be independent of all other Thomas documents. It is the Office of July 3. July 3 is the dukrana<sup>65</sup> of St Thomas. It seems to be composed with utter disregard for the *Acts of Thomas* (in syriac and greek versions). The question even arises whether it is even anterior to these Acts? It suppresses or ignores many objectionable features of these two works. The *Passio* may have borrowed from it some of its particularities. We need speak about *De Miraculis*, which contains little that is not borrowed from the Syriac and Greek Acts and from the *Passio*. The following points of the Office are without parallel in Greek Acts which is closely related to the Syriac.

St Thomas was pierced with a lance.<sup>66</sup>

- At the marriage banquet the bride and the bridegroom praised the miracle of the punishment meted out to the servant who struck the saint, and the king believed.
- The youth with withered hand, who had killed a woman, offered gifts with overflowing charity to his preacher, when the woman was raised to life.
- St Thomas overthrew the image of the sun<sup>67</sup>.
- He sent into wilderness Satan whom he cast out of the image of the sun.
- St. Thomas was cast into a furnace and returned unhurt.<sup>68</sup> In

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<sup>65</sup> Dukrana is the syriac word which means remembrance. It is the day on which the Christians of St Thomas remember the martyrdom of St Thomas. This word is still in use in Malabar and it indicates the Syrian relation of Malabar.

<sup>66</sup> There are different traditions about the way in which the apostle was killed. The Malabar tradition speaks about a single lance and a single executor. But the Acts have many executors. Marco Polo speaks about another tradition in and around Mylapore according to which the Apostle was killed by an arrow. In this particular sentence of the Office there may be an attempt to liken the apostle with Christ who was pierced by a lance.

<sup>67</sup> According to Indian tradition this was the immediate reason for the execution of the

the likeness of his master St Thomas sold himself and freed slaves.

- He gave his portion to his comrades.
- St Thomas preached to the Sinaye and the Kusaye<sup>69</sup>.
- Through St Thomas glorious churches and altars were erected in the whole of India in which prayers are offered together with praises to Christ the king.
- He baptised Indians equally in name of the trinity.

There is an indication in the prayers of the Office to conclude that they may be composed by the Indian clergy of the early centuries. The events related therein refer chiefly to the labours of the Apostle in India. This Office is quite different from the one in use in Nestorian and Chaldean Church for the feast of July 3, while on the whole the rest of the Divine Office of the Malabar Church is same as that of the Chaldean Church. The Portuguese bishops who governed the Malabar Church after the synod of Diamper did not compose it nor order it to be composed. It is possible that this Office owed its existence to the Indian clergy ordained by St Thomas and that it had reached its full development by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>70</sup>. Whatever be the time when a translation of the relics of the Apostle Thomas took place the Office is silent about such a translation. It supposes the body of the apostle to be in India, at a place near the sea. So we might argue that the composer did not know of translation of the relics to Edessa, or that the Office was

apostle. But according to *Ath* the reason for the execution was the preaching of the apostle on celibacy and continence.

<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps the only source that speaks about this incident.

<sup>69</sup> There is a tradition in Malabar that Thomas went to China from Malabar. This Sinaye and Kusaye may be the Chinese and the Kushans. Kushan Empire, the greatest of whom was emperor Kanishka, was the strong dynasty that ruled over North India in the first three centuries of our era. We think it is an evidence that the Malabar tradition knew about the North Indian mission of the apostle.

<sup>70</sup> BERNARD of St Thomas, *Marthomakristianikal*, p. 65.

composed before; the latest date for the alleged translation being the reign of Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-235)<sup>71</sup>. The *Passio* has details, which we find in no other sources than in the office. We are therefore led to consider the Office as earlier than *Passio*, the date of which must be A.D. 450- 550 at the latest<sup>72</sup>. It represents the church of India as extremely flourishing, so flourishing that it may be doubted whether the Church in India ever reached greater prosperity in the first millennium<sup>73</sup>.

### 5.6. Tomb of Thomas at Mylapore

The tomb of Thomas at Mylapore, near Madras was and is still a place of pilgrimage. There is an unbroken tradition about the tomb of Thomas in India from the first centuries onwards.

## 6. Other places associated with Thomas Tradition

There are many other places in India which are connected with Apostle Thomas by tradition. In ancient India, in present Pakistan in Sind region at Tatta Nagar there was said to be a group of Fakirs who claimed to be the descendants of the first converts of Apostle Thomas<sup>74</sup>. At Taxila was discovered a cross presumably of the second century AD<sup>75</sup>. Near Taxila there is a village called Gar Toma which has a tradition about the apostle. It was in this village that the apostle resided<sup>76</sup>. In an earthquake that devastated the whole region this village was spared as it was the home of the apostle. There where Christians known as Christians of St Thomas in the North Western region of India even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Goa also was once home to

<sup>71</sup> This date is calculated from the mention of the name of the king in the *Passio*.

<sup>72</sup> This opinion is of Hosten sj. See Collected works of Hosten, vol. 19, p. 140.

<sup>73</sup> These information was taken from the collection of Hosten kept in Library of Vidya Jyothi, Delhi.

<sup>74</sup> This group is known as Tatta Nagar Fakirs and they are said to have books with them to prove their claims. See H. D'SOUZA, *In the Footsteps of St Thomas*, Madras, 1972, 15, where it is written, "it was at Thatta on the Indus river in Sindh, where he (Thomas) is still venerated as 'Thum Bhagat', that, according to tradition, St Thomas the Apostle worked for some time. These devotees still seem to practise some Christian rites and possess a book which might be the Gospel of St Mathew".

<sup>75</sup> The cross is of black stone and about one and half inches in size. The upper arm of the

Christians known as St Thomas Christians. Francis Xavier himself had acknowledged the presence of the Thomas Christians at Goa. At Vasai near Bombay Thomas tradition is very strong. Christians they have various stories to narrate about Thomas their apostle.<sup>77</sup> In Madhya Pradesh in the diocese of Sagar at Udayapur village there is a temple with inscriptions which narrate the visit of Apostle Thomas to that region. This temple once was supposed to be a church and later turned into a temple<sup>78</sup>.

Cosmas Indicopleustes who visited in India 520-525 AD in his *Christian Topography* mentions several places in India where Christians were found in large numbers. After speaking about the Christians of Sri Lanka, Malabar and Kalyan he tells that there were Christians in the rest of India also. These Christians really belonged to times much earlier than the Nestorian mission to India. There are lot of references to the Christians in different parts of India in several ancient writings. Thus it seems that there were more Christians in ancient India than in India at present.

## 7. Conclusion

India really belonged to St Thomas. If according to the apocryphal stories India was assigned to Thomas after the ascension

cross is pierced; it was probably worn like a medal around the neck. The local zamindar gave it to Mrs C. King who then presented it to the Cathedral at Lahore. Cf "The Christians here will tell you that St Thomas – the doubting apostle of Jesus who famously refused to believe in the resurrection "until I have placed my hands to the holes left by the nails and wound left by the spear" – came to India from Palestine after the resurrection, and that he baptised their ancestors. Recently, archaeologists have also found a second-century cross at Taxila. The cross is now in the Anglican cathedral at Lahore ». *The Guardian*, Tuesday, October, 2001. We have consulted the internet edition and hence cannot give the page number.

<sup>76</sup> For a somewhat detailed study of it see J. Kurikilamktt, *The First Voyage of Apostle Thomas to India*, Bangalore, 2005, p.116-18.

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed study of these Christians see F. CORREA, *Samavedi Christi Samaj* (Marathi), Mumbai, 1998. He explains them as descendants of the choir group or singing people. These people were originally from the banks of the Ganges. Afterwards they came down to the Narmada valley whence they later migrated further South to Godavari region. From there they reached Vasai and settled along the river *Vaitarani* which is as sacred as the Ganges for the local people.

<sup>78</sup> G. Nedungattu has made extensive studies about these inscriptions. See G. Nedungattu, *The Quest for Thomas*, Bangalore, 2010.

of Jesus, it was not just to the North or just to the South, but it was to the whole of India that he was to be the Apostle. Though India did not exist as a political unit in the first century of our era, it surely existed as a coherent geographical unit which included the present Afghanistan and Pakistan also. It was to this larger India that Thomas was sent as the herald of the Good News preached and brought in to the world by Jesus Christ.

Thomas is proved to have evangelized all the three most important regions of India of his times and vestiges of his missionary efforts are still visible in all these places. Thomasian tradition is kept alive for centuries in different parts of India and even after the communities died because of the lack of proper care and shepherding, the traditions survived and Thomas is still revered as the founder of Christianity even in places where there are no descendants of those original Christians.

Thus Thomas is the Apostle of India. He is the founder of the Church in India. But is it not a pity that the Churches who are the direct inheritors of his legacy and the real depositaries of his apostolic heritage find it very difficult to extend itself beyond the restricted lines in the country? The head of the Thomas Christians was once the Gate of all India. This title was conferred on him taking into account historical actualities. Among all the Christian communities established in India by Thomas the apostle of India the only surviving, and surviving in a thriving manner, is the Syro-Malabar Church and as such it is the right of this Church to be real salt of India, taking the Good News to the different corners of the country and thus gain the country once again to the Thomasian Christ experience.



# THE SYRO-MALABAR MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA

MOUNT ST THOMAS, KAKKANAD, KERALA



## THE SYRO-MALABAR MISSION OFFICE

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

## THE COMMISSION FOR CATECHISM

ORGANIZES

### MISSION QUEST

AN ONLINE QUIZ  
PROGRAMME TO DEEPEN OUR  
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE  
CHURCH AND THE MISSION

ON

**30** OCTOBER  
SUNDAY, 2022

06:00 PM

### FOR THE WINNERS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

Separate Prizes for Catechism Students and Adults

**1<sup>ST</sup>**  
**PRIZE**

₹ **10,000**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

**2<sup>ND</sup>**  
**PRIZE**

₹ **5,000**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

**3<sup>RD</sup>**  
**PRIZE**

₹ **3,000**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

### WINNERS AT THE ARCH/EPARCHIAL LEVEL

Separate Prizes for Catechism Students and Adults

**1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE**

₹ **1,000**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

**2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE**

₹ **750**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

**3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE**

₹ **500**

AND A CERTIFICATE  
OF APPRECIATION

# MISSION QUEST

## INSTRUCTIONS & SYLLABUS

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Mission Quest is an on-line mission quiz programme separately conducted for catechism students and adults, using Google Forms
- This mission quiz for catechism students and adults in all 35 eparchies of the Syro-Malabar Church will have separate Google Form links for each eparchy and category
- Links to those Google Forms will be made available on the website of the Syro-Malabar Mission office: [www.syromalabarmission.com](http://www.syromalabarmission.com)
- The Google Forms will be active for 40 minutes on Sunday, October 30, 2022, from 06.00 PM IST
- The schedules for the eparchies outside India are different and they will be available from the Catechism Directors of the respective eparchies and the website of the Syro-Malabar Mission Office
- No pre-registration is required to participate in the Mission Quest. However, name, parish, eparchy, mobile phone number and email are mandatory at the time of the competition
- Select the correct answer from the given choices
- There are no study guides or sample questions made available for the section from the Holy Bible. Sample questions for other categories will be on the website [www.syromalabarmission.com](http://www.syromalabarmission.com) before October 05, 2022
- Use the email: [missionquest2022@gmail.com](mailto:missionquest2022@gmail.com) to clarify any related queries
- The decisions of the Syro-Malabar Mission Office regarding the Mission Quest will be final

### SYLLABUS

	Catechism Students	Adults	Weightage	Source
1.	Gospel of Mathew	Gospel of Mathew and Letter to Romans	40%	POC Bible/ NRSV
2.	India and the Apostle Saint Thomas	India and the Apostle Saint Thomas	20%	For the content and sample questions: <a href="http://www.syromalabarmission.com">www.syromalabarmission.com</a>
3.	St Lazarus Devasahayam: The first layman saint of India	St Lazarus Devasahayam: The first layman saint of India	10%	For the sample questions: <a href="http://www.syromalabarmission.com">www.syromalabarmission.com</a>
4.	General <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Syro-Malabar Church, its history &amp; hierarchy</li><li>• Saints, Blesseds and Venerables of the Syro-Malabar Church</li><li>• Syro-Malabar Missions &amp; Mission Eparchies</li><li>• Mission frontiers like Mission League, Jesus Youth, Fiat...</li></ul>	General <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Syro-Malabar Church, its history &amp; hierarchy</li><li>• Saints, Blesseds and Venerables of the Syro-Malabar Church</li><li>• Syro-Malabar Missions &amp; Mission Eparchies</li><li>• Mission frontiers like Mission League, Jesus Youth, Fiat...</li></ul>	30%	For the sample questions: <a href="http://www.syromalabarmission.com">www.syromalabarmission.com</a>