

ARRIVAL OF ST. THOMAS IN INDIA AND HIS MISSIONS: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

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A cursory glance at the enormous mass of literature dealing with Church history in general and that of India in particular makes one wonder if the bias of colonial historians besides the allurements of foreign largesse avidly sought by the missionaries both foreign and indigenous, has a devastating sway over the scholars dealing with the apostolate of St Thomas. Colonial historians of India regardless of any reasonable bounds would like to expatiate on the 'civilizing mission' (*missio civilatrix*) of the colonial masters and to elucidate the 'white man's burden' which entailed in the "development of underdevelopment" of the colonies. They are not prone to concede the fact that India received Catholic faith from the preaching of an apostle of Christ before they themselves were brought to the Catholic faith. If anything good is found in India, it should have its origin from the colonial masters, they may hold.

Nationalist historians may start from a vantage point totally different from that of the former, either giving emphasis on solid historical sources or just adhering to traditions without looking for evidences

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acceptable to scientific investigations. The present paper per se does not address itself to the historical fact of the arrival of St. Thomas in India nor is it intended to discuss the details of his missions in India. It is indeed an attempt to bring to light the different views of scholars regarding the Indian mission/s of St. Thomas with a view to reminding ourselves that there are divergent schools of thought either confirming the arrival of St. Thomas in India or denying it stating peremptorily that India mentioned in the documents of the early centuries of Christian era was different from the geographical segment known as India in the modern period. The former strand of thought goes to the extent of proving, in the light of numismatic, epigraphic and literary evidences, that there were two different missions in India, one in north western India and the other in south India. A few of them subscribe to the view that St. Thomas preached only in south India.

I. St. Thomas Apostolate in North West India

Apostolate of St. Thomas in North India was brought to the notice of the public in 1905 by Adolf E. Medlycott, the Anglo-Indian Bishop of Trichur (1887-1896) who derived his conclusion from the apocryphal work, *Acts of Judas Thomas* and the coins of Gundaphar discovered from Kabul, Kandahar, Seistan and Western and Southern Punjab since 1834.¹ This opinion was shared by Joseph Dahlmann.² J.N. Farquhar in the light of the historical evidences found in the *Acts of Judas Thomas* and the data collected from the excavations conducted in ancient Taxila under the supervision of Sir John Marshall affirmed in 1926 that there is some reason to believe that the Apostle Thomas sailed from Alexandria with Habban, the merchant of king Gudnaphar to the Indus and reached the king's Indian capital, Taxila probably

¹Adolf E. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, London: David Nutt, 1905. Medlycott supports the South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas. Inscriptions were found in Greek on one side and in *Karoshiti* on the other side of the coins. *Karoshiti* was the form of writing in the North West India. This could be Prakrit, the ancient form of Sanskrit or something having its origin from Aramaic. The coins are preserved in different museums and libraries like British Museum, Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris, Berlin Museum, Lahore Museum and National Museum, Kolkata. Some of these coins bear the names of his family members too. The scientific analysis made reveals that these coins were minted in the first half of the first Century A.D. Those who oppose the conclusions of Medlycott say that he has not done a critical study of his sources of information.

²Joseph Dahlmann, *Die Thomaslegende und die ältesten historischen Beziehungen des Christentums zum fernen Osten im Lichte der indischen Altertumskunde*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1912. Richard Garbe of Tübingen rejected the thesis of Dahlmann in his work relegating it to mythology, Richard Garbe, *Indien und das Christentum, Eine Untersuchung der Religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1914.

about 48 or 49 A.D.³ There are a few scholars like A.C. Perumalil who, despite being informed of the discoveries of the coins and Takht-i-Bahi inscription⁴ related to Gundaphar, do not accept the opinion regarding the North Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas.⁵ Perumalil does not seem to have made scientific analysis of the numismatic and epigraphic evidences against the general history of ancient India. But recently scholarly investigation has been conducted in the history of the arrival of St. Thomas in Northwest India making use of the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, the coins bearing the legend of Gundaphar, and the lithic inscription discovered in Takht-i-Bahi against the backdrop of the history of ancient India.

James Kurikilamkatt, did a serious research on the subject leading to his doctorate in the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome and he published in 2002 the excerpt of the thesis under the title "The Apostle Thomas at Taxila: Historical Investigation of the Mission of Thomas to North India with special reference to the Acts of Thomas." Subsequently the findings of his research in this field were brought out in 2005.⁶ He defends the North Indian Mission of St. Thomas primarily based on the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, the historical nature of which is proved through numismatic and epigraphic evidences. He further makes use of the Udaipur inscription to prove that St. Thomas preached in that area too.

Acts of Judas Thomas

The vast majority of western scholars consider *AJT* as historically unreliable fiction. They go to the extent of holding the patristic texts related to the mission of St. Thomas in India as totally unreliable as they are deemed to be dependent on *AJT* ultimately. Even the worth of the work of Adolf Medycott on the mission of St. Thomas was

³J.N. Farquhar, "The Apostle Thomas in North India," *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library* 10 (1926) 80-111; J.N. Farquhar & G. Garitte, *The Apostle Thomas in India according to the Acts of Thomas*, ed., Jacob Vellian, Kottayam, 1972, 40.

⁴This inscription was discovered at a place called Takhti-i-Bahi, north east of Peshawar in 1872 by a certain Dr. Bellow. Dr. Cunningham, studied carefully the inscription which, according to him, gives the name of the great king Guduphara and his regnal year as 26th corresponding to A.D 46 and *Samvat* 103.

⁵"... this conclusion is without any real foundation; it rests on imaginary assumptions; because, the scholars have neither proved on the basis of any solid evidence the presence of Thomas in Punjab, nor established the regnal period of the Gondaphares of the coins. There is no connecting link between Thomas and Gondaphares. Thomas was not in Punjab." A.C. Perumalil, *The Apostles in India*, Patna, 1971 (second edition), 68.

⁶James Kurikilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India: Ancient Christianity in Bharuch and Taxila*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005.

underestimated because of his excessive reliance on the *AJT*.⁷ A review of the book of Medlycott accused him for his dependence on *AJT* which, according to him, was entirely fiction and for not showing that Apostle's visit to Gundaphar was fictional.⁸ Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn who worked on the *AJT* rejects the historical value of the book.⁹ Bornkamm affirmed that *AJT* was of no use to history.¹⁰ Van den Bosch, another western scholar, states that *AJT* "does not furnish us with sufficient historical proof that Thomas actually went to India."¹¹ George Nedungatt concedes the fact that *AJT* rests on widely diffused tradition comparable to the tradition about the other four leading apostles.¹² It is against this backdrop that Kurikilamkatt goes a step further and proves that *AJT* in its original form is basically an historical document though in course of time it was tampered with by people of vested interests. With a view to forestalling the possibility of doubting the identity of India mentioned in the *AJT*, Kurikilamkatt dwells on the term "India" (*Hendo* in Syriac), based on ancient works

⁷Montague R. James in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1906) 635-6.

⁸"S. Thomas et l'Inde a propos d'un livre récent," *Le Muséon* 25 (1906) 262-271

⁹Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, ed., *The Acts of Thomas. Introduction, Text, Commentary*, Leiden, 1962. There are five important apocryphal Acts, namely, Acts of John, of Paul, of Peter, of Thomas and of Mathew. Acts of Judas Thomas is the full name. It was written originally in Syriac. The early Syriac version is lost. The present text available to the scholars is the retranslation from the Greek as stated by Klijn. It is believed that the book in its present form was composed in Edessa sometime between 230 and 250 A.D. Ref. James Kurikilamkatt, 10. Later, on page 156 he says that it was composed between 225 and 250 A.D. This is considered to be the earliest source regarding the apostolate of St. Thomas in India. Egeria, a pilgrim lady from Spain visited Edessa and the Martyrium of St. Thomas there in 384 A.D. In her diary of 21 April 384 there is mention of her having seen the *AJT* in Edessa in the *Martyrium*. Ref. Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, trans. by G.E. Gingras, New York, 1970. On account of the fact that it contains information about the customs and manners of Indians, it is held that some portion of the *AJT* has Indian origin. It was interpolated by Manicheans. Originally it was meant to be a handbook for those pilgrims coming to the *Martyrium* at Edessa. James Kurikilamkatt, 14.

¹⁰Günther Bornkamm, *Mythos und Legende in den apokryphen Thomasakten: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Gnosis und zur Vorgeschichte des Manichäismus*, Göttingen, 1933, 121. Cfr. George Nedungatt, *Quest for The Historical Thomas: Apostle of India*, Bangalore, 2008, 96.

¹¹Lourens P. Van den Bosch, "India and the Apostolate of St. Thomas," in J.N. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*, Leuven: Peters, 2001, 125-148.

¹²George Nedungatt, "Attention to the specific literary genre as well as the comparative study of the principal apocryphal Acts of the Apostles leads us to the conclusion that the account of the *Acts of Thomas*, which affirms the mission and death of the Apostle Thomas in India and places his tomb there, rests on a widely diffused tradition, which is comparable to the tradition about the other four leading Apostles, Peter, and Paul, Andrew and John," page, 96.

and states that there is no room for confusion.¹³ He holds the view that the *AJT* was composed in a Syriac milieu in Edessa, city in northern Mesopotamia between 225 and 250 A.D. It was originally composed in Syriac language and was translated several times into Greek as concluded by Klijn who did a serious research on the *AJT*. The earliest Syriac version was lost and the present Syriac version is retranslation from the Greek.¹⁴ A Spanish pilgrim by name Egeria who visited the Martyrium of St. Thomas in Edessa on 19 April 384 recorded in her diary that she had seen *AJT* there. It was composed well before the origin of Manicheans. The historical places mentioned in the work are chiefly Barygaza (Bharuch or Braoch) in Gujarat, Takshasila or Taxila in Pakistan, while the historical persons mentioned in the work are Judas Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ, Gondophares, the Indo-Parthian king who ruled the north western

¹³There are ample evidences to prove that India was well known to the West. Darius is reported to have sent Skylax of Karyanda to India in 517 B.C. Herodotus wrote a book about India in 430 B.C. Ktesias, the Knidian wrote his *Indika* containing stories about India. Alexander the Great of Macedonia crossed the Indus in 326 and established contacts with king Poros and defeated him and appointed the vanquished to rule Indians in his name. After the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. Chandragupta Maurya liberated Punjab from the Greek domination and assumed power. Seleukos, the king of Syria sent Megasthenes in 302 B.C as Ambassador to the court of Chandragupta at Pataliputra (present day Patna) who wrote a book about India. Similarly, Antiochus Soter, the successor of Seleukos, sent Deimachos to Bindusara, the son and successor of Chandragupta. He too wrote a book on India. The Egyptian Ptolemies too kept cordial relations with the Mauryas. Ptolemy Philadelphus sent Dionysius to Pataliputra as ambassador. So, the Greek writers knew India very well, though it was chiefly the northern parts of India. The Romans too had good commercial relations with India. Ever since Egypt became a Roman province in 30 B.C. the Romans opened maritime trade with India. Strabo in 5 A.D. testified that about one hundred and twenty ships sailed from Myos-Hormos to India (Strabo II.5.12) which went to Barygaza, the rival port town of Muziris and the ports of the southern parts of the peninsular India. Myos Hormos was a Red Sea port constructed by the Ptolemies around the third century B.C. The excavations conducted by David Peacock and Lucy Blue of the University of Southampton, locate Myos Hormos in the present day site of Quseir al Quadim, eight kilometers north of the modern town of Quseir in Egypt. It was connected to the Nile and Memphis by a Roman Road built in the first century A.D. The city of Memphis is located 20 kms south of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile. Myos Hormos after the Ptolemies, was with Berenice, one of the two main ports in Roman Egypt for trade with India. Hippalus, a Roman merchant in 47 A.D. made a successful voyage across the sea to India. The author of *Periplus of Erythrean sea* was also familiar with the port towns of India including Muziris. Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Alexandrian in A.D. 520 visited the western coast of India and other parts. A.C. Perumalil, 5-33 *passim*.

¹⁴For a detailed study on the historical and linguistic aspects of the *AJT*, ref. Kurikilamkatt, 7-18.

part of India from 20 to 50 A.D.¹⁵ and his brother Abadgasses who succeeded him.¹⁶

a) Barygaza

The author of *Periplus Maris Erithraeae* (circa A.D. 60) considers Barygaza,¹⁷ a very important port town in the international seaborne trade of ancient India. It was well connected with the overland and maritime sections of the ancient silk route (*Seidenstrasse*) extending from southern Europe through Egypt, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Central Asia, Ancient India, Java-Indonesia, and Vietnam until it reaches China.¹⁸ St. Thomas is thought to have

¹⁵Kurikilamkatt does not appear to be consistent in pointing the date of the reign of Gondophares. The regnal period of Gondophares is given as 21-51 A.D on page 74 of his work, while on page 156 he gives 20-50 A.D.

¹⁶Kurikilamkatt, 156.

¹⁷Barygaza in Greek, Bharukachcha in Prakrit and Bhrukshetra in Sanskrit. It is known as Broach, or Bharuch in modern times. It is situated on the delta of Narbada river. In *AJT* it is named as Sandruck Mahosa in the Syriac version and Andrapolis in Greek version. It was under the rule of Western Kshatrapas or Andhra kings whose territory extended from the Telegu country right across India to Nasik. The dynasty of Satavahans of the Andhra kings came to an end by 225 A.D. It was connected with Taxila both by way of land route via Ujjain and, Mathura to the Grand Trunk route connecting Taxila with Pataliputra and by waterways via Indus delta. Western Kshatrapas had a kind of subordination to the Indo-Parthian kings of Taxila.

¹⁸The Silk Road gets its name from the lucrative Chinese silk trade, a major reason for the connection of trade routes into an extensive trans-continental network. The German terms "Seidenstraße" and "Seidenstraßen"- 'the Silk Road(s) or 'Silk Route(s)' were first used in 1877 by the German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, who made seven expeditions to China from 1868 to 1872. The English term "The Silk Road" has come into general use. While silk was certainly the major trade item from China and was a major reason for the connection of trade routes into an extensive trans-continental network, in fact, it was an extensive network of routes few of which were more than rough caravan tracks, which is why some scholars prefer the term "Silk Routes", although silk was by no means the only item trade. The Silk Routes (collectively known as the "Silk Road") were important paths for cultural, commercial, and technological exchange between traders, merchants, pilgrims, missionaries, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers from Ancient China, Ancient India, Ancient Tibet, Persian Empire and Mediterranean countries for almost 3,000 years. It gets its name from the lucrative Chinese silk trade, which began during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). Extending 4,000 miles (6,500 km), the routes enabled people to transport goods, slaves and luxuries such as silk, satin, hemp and other fine fabrics, musk, other perfumes, spices, medicines, jewels, glassware and even rhubarb, as well as serving as a conduit for the spread of knowledge, ideas, cultures, zoological specimens and some non indigenous disease conditions between Ancient China, Ancient India (Indus valley, now Pakistan), Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. Trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, India, Egypt, Persia, Arabia, and Rome, and in several respects helped lay the foundations for the modern world.

travelled from Jerusalem going down Caesarea to Alexandria where he laboured among the Jews for some time. It was calculated that one third of the population of Alexandria during this period consisted of Jews. He started from Alexandria in the company of Haban, the trade commissioner of the king Gondophares and reached Barygaza.¹⁹ The work under review identifies Andrapolis or Sandruck Mahosa of *AJT* with Barygaza of *Periplus*, the city of *Satakarnis* and the author states that it was the first port of India disembarked by St. Thomas the Apostle where he converted a Jewish girl, the king and his relations.²⁰ His argumentation rests on the customary practice of the Greeks and the Romans to name a place after the dynastic names or the ruling people. According to the Greek version of *AJT*, the port of disembarkation of the apostle was *Andrapolis* and according to the Syriac version it was *Sandruck mahosa*. Kurikilamkatt relies on *Periplus* for his argument about the presence of Jews in the court of the Satakarnis in Barygaza. Beautiful Jewish girls from Persia were brought to Barygaza for the harems of the rulers which is supported by Strabo too. Kurikilamkatt writes:

...Andrapolis and its description in the *Ath* fits perfectly such a place as Barygaza. Our proposition, Barygaza as the Sandruck Andrapolis of the *Ath* is well supported by internal and external evidences... Both internal and external evidences... help us to (sic) reach a conclusion that the first city of India or the city of the first India where the apostle is said to have made first Indian convert is the port city of Barygaza mentioned in *Periplus* and Strabo for the modern Broach on the west cost of India in the present state of Gujarat.²¹

It could be through the land route from Barygaza that the Apostle Thomas went to Taxila, to the court of Gundaphares, writes Kurikilamkatt.

Although the term *the Silk Road* implies a continuous journey, very few who travelled the route traversed it from end to end. For the most part, goods were transported by a series of agents on varying routes and were traded in the bustling markets of the oasis towns.

¹⁹The usual route from Alexandria to Barygaza or Muziris was the one from Alexandria down the Nile by Memphis as far as Koptos, thence by land to Berenice from there, through the Arabian Sea to Okelis, Aden or Kana and thence to Barygaza or Muziris. (Cfr. J. Rooney, *Shadows in Dark*, 26, quoted by Kurikilamkatt). Warmington calculates the possible duration of the sea-voyage in the first century A.D.: from Alexandria to Coptos (up Nile by boat) 12 days; Coptos to Berenice (by camel) 12 days; Berenice to Ocelis or Cane (30 days after a long break; Ocelis-Muziris or Barygaza-40 days.

²⁰Kurikilamkatt, 61-63.

²¹Kurikilamkatt, 66.

b) Taxila

Another historical place which housed the headquarters of the Indo-Parthian king Gondaphares who ruled over the vast domain from 21 A.D. to 51 A.D. was Taxila.²² It is situated 36 kilometers away from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. The archaeological site is known as Sirkap and was known in history as Takshasila, the famous city of classical times and well known to be heard in the west and surely brought to the notice of the people as the city of India ruled by Parthian king. Internal evidences in the text of *AJT* also show that Taxila must have been the city meant by the author.²³ "There are many circumstantial internal and external evidences in the *Ath* itself to assume that the author had Taxila in his mind when he wrote about the kingdom of Gudnaphar. The apostle met the king in the royal palace, which according to the *Ath* was well inside the city walls"²⁴

c) Judas Thomas

One of the historical persons mentioned in the *AJT* is the apostle Thomas. Kurikilamkatt writes that the name Thomas comes from the Aramaic word "toma" meaning twin. It was transcribed by the Greeks as Thomas and translated as Didymos. The Church of Edessa called him Judas Thomas. Thomas in Aramaic and Greek seems to be an epithet meaning simply "twin", not a personal name.²⁵ He further writes:" The 'Thomas' of the synoptic Gospels and the 'Thomas Didymos' of John and the 'Judas Thomas' of the Syriac tradition becomes Thomas the Apostle of India in the Fathers of the Church

²²George Nedungatt is of the opinion that Gundaphares, the governor of Arachosia conquered the neighbouring regions and ruled from 19 to 45/46 A.D. as the founder of Indo-Parthian kingdom. Nedungatt, 115.

²³Taxila was the city of India's first grammarian Panini. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the region from the time Darius I conquered in the fifth century B.C. It was a great centre of Buddhist learning and a meeting place of three great trade routes, that is, one from Eastern India described by the Greek writer, Megasthenes, as the royal High way. The second from Western Asia, and the third from Kashmir and Central Asia. At the time of Macedonian invasion under Alexander the Great, in 326 B.C., it was a very rich and flourishing city ruled by Ambi who is generally called by his Dynastic title Taxiles. He surrendered himself and his kingdom to Alexander. About eighty years after the break up of Alexander's empire Taxila was taken over by Great Asoka (273-232 B.C.), who made it his residence in the capacity of the viceroy of the Punjab in the Mauryan empire. Indo Greeks succeeded the Mauryas in the second century B.C. and later the area with Taxila was wrested by the Indo-Scythians of whom Gondaphares was the greatest.

²⁴Kurikilamkatt, 84-85. He makes references to the reports of excavations conducted by ASI. Sir John Marshall, *Excavations at Taxila, Annual Report, 1912-13* & A. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, 111.

²⁵Kurikilamkatta, 21.

and early Christian writers." He affirms that it is this apostle Thomas who occupies the central stage in the in the *Acts of Thomas*.²⁶ According to Kurikilamkatt, after the crucifixion of Christ probably in 29-30 A.D., Thomas must have worked in and around Jerusalem, Alexandria and Persia for a considerable period of time. Later he left for India from Alexandria by covering a period of six months or so to reach Barygaza. He must have taken one year for the short stay in Barygaza and the journey from there to Taxila. So, his visit to Gondophares must have taken place around 44-45 A.D.,²⁷ before the invasion of Kushans. Gondophares must have died around 51 A.D. according to Kurikilamkatt. According to the Malabar tradition he must have landed in Muziris/Maliankara in 52 .A.D.

d) King Gondophares

The historicity of the king Gondophares found in the *AJT* is proved in the light of the discovery of i) large horde of coins bearing the name of Gondophares and ii) Takht-i- Bahi inscriptions. A.C. Perumalil writes categorically repudiating the relation between Gundaphares of the coins and inscription : "Even if the Godophares of the coins and the Gunu..phara of the inscription are proved to be identical, his connection with St.Thomas yet remains to be established."²⁸

i) Numismatic evidence

Kurikilamkatt makes mention of the unearthing of coins bearing the name of Gondophares from the Kabul Province in 1834 by Masson. The inscription on one side of the coin was in Greek and in Karoshti on the other side. Reinad drew the attention of the scholars in 1848 in connection with the Gondophares of *AJT*. More coins were found in successive years from Kabul, Kandahar, Seistan and Western and Southern Punjab. Based on the numismatic evidence the historicity of Gondophares and his family members was proved by scholars. Kurikilamkatt concludes:

There was mentioned the name of an Indian king in the narrative of the story of the apostle Thomas in all its versions and this was known only in connection with the apostle till the discovery of the coins bearing his name in 1834 and the subsequent findings in the north western parts of India. Now we know that there existed a king named Gondophares in India and he was an Indo-Parthian, which explains his Iranian name, who had his capital at Taxila and who ruled over a vast domain from 21 to 51 A.D.²⁹

²⁶Kurikilamkatta, 26.

²⁷Kurikilamkatt, 88.

²⁸A.C. Perumalil, 71.

²⁹Kurikilamkatt, 74.

The king Gundaphares of the *AJT* could be none other than the Gondophares of the Indian coins. So, there is nothing legendary and mythical in the story of the *AJT* as far as the name of the king is concerned, argues Kurikilamkatt.³⁰

ii) Epigraphic evidence

A piece of stone with inscriptions was discovered at Takht-i-Bahi, a little north East of Peshawar in 1872 by Bellow. Cunningham who studied the inscription gave the following reading. In the 26th year of the great king Guduphara, in the *samvat* year three and one hundred (100+3 repeated in figures) in the month of *Vaisakh*, on the 4th day for his own religious interest and the religious merit of his mother and father.³¹

According to A.C. Perumalil, Gudnaphar of the Takht-i-Bahi inscription could be the king of Mahisha Ur of the Deccan or Mysore by name Kutnappar, while Habban could be "Appan", a native of Mysore. Perumalil writes:

...we arrive at a conclusion that the Indian merchant Habban came from the Mahisha Ur of Deccan. Habban's master Gudnaphar would be the king of Mahisha Ur (Mysore). This very idea is accepted by the Ethiopian versions of the Acts. There the translator has said that it was the king of Gona that invited Thomas. This *Gona (kona-buffalo)* is a Kanarese word for *erumai* in Tamil and Mahisha in Sanskrit; consequently the king of Gona is the king of Mysore.³²

With a view to reconciling the Malabar tradition according to which Chola king invited Thomas, Perumalil states that the Mysore region formed the part of the Chola kingdom.³³

Being aware of the objection raised by A.C. Perumalil for the interpretation of the inscription Kurikilamkatt subscribes to the view of Rooney and states that *samvat* 103 is A.D. 46 and so the king Gondophares began his reign in 21 A.D.³⁴

In view of the evidences adduced above, Kurikilamkatt asserts the historicity of *AJT* "...we guarantee historical veracity and validity of the story of the *Ath*"³⁵ Of course one has to sift the historical part from the interpolations and use it judiciously. He does not dismiss with the possible Indian origin of the text at least in its prototype. He writes:

³⁰Kurikilamkatta, 90.

³¹Quoted by Kurikilamkatt, 75.

³²A.C. Perumalil, 70.

³³A.C. Perumalil, 71.

³⁴Kurikilamkatt, 77-78.

³⁵Kurikilamkatt, 158.

...it was possible that a story describing the mission of the apostle in India had found its way to Persia." He adds that the "... author of the *Ath* should have had strong reasons to suppose that his readers would believe him when he wrote that Thomas had gone to India."³⁶

The general conclusion of Kurikilamkatt reads:

Thus both internal and external evidences substantiate the assumption of the *Ath* that Thomas had preached in North India...If the author of the *Ath* wanted to associate Thomas with any other king he could have assumed the name of some more important and well-known names like Asoka or Kanishka. The fact that the name of Gondophares itself was preferred shows that the author was concerned with historical accuracy. Thus we hold the mission of the apostle to India as a *historical probability*: an event that could have happened.³⁷

The historical probability is raised to the level of historical fact by asserting the existence of Christians converted by St. Thomas. Kurikilamkatt substantiates this historical fact by referring to the Christians met by Pantenus, the Alexandrian who arrived in India in 189 A.D. as described by Eusebius and Jerome. Pantenus visited Northwest India and came across the Christians there. He carried to Alexandria the information about the mission of St. Thomas in India. It could be because of this that Origen spoke about the preaching of St. Thomas in Parthia. Theophilus, the Indian reached India in 354 A.D and visited Gujarat. These two missions speak of the Indo-Alexandrian connections too which can subscribe to the opinion that St. Thomas came to India directly from Alexandria as surmised by Kurikilamkatt.³⁸ He provides more instances of the existence of Christians in various parts of India pointing to the missionary activities of St. Thomas as reported by visitors.

A few other evidences as the Taxila Cross discovered in 1935 from the ancient city of Sirkap where once stood the palace of king Gondophares, and the inscription found in one of the Udaipur temples in the Madhya Pradesh now in the catholic diocese of Sagar are also brought to light by Kurikilamkatt with a view to strengthen the North Indian mission of St. Thomas.³⁹ Scientific analysis of the

³⁶Kurikilamkatt, 157-58, 159.

³⁷Kurikilamkatta, 216.

³⁸Kurikilamkatta, 216-17.

³⁹Kurikilamkatt, 143-44. The eleventh century temple in Udaipur had an inscription which is now lost. Baron Textor de Ravisi, former governor of Karaikal presented a paper at the XXII international Congress of Orientalists in Rome in 1899 and brought out the mural inscription discovered in Udaipur. A scientific study of the mural inscription points to the existence of a church in 78 A.D. This may prove

inscription on the wall of the temple placed the date of original church in Udaipur as 78 A.D. which would prove the existence of a Christian community there by 78 A.D.⁴⁰ Remnants of Christian communities are found in Tatta and its environs in Sind in Pakistan as proved by Kurikilamkatt. Some Fakirs both in northern and southern parts of Sind with their headquarters at Tatta claim to be the followers of St. Thomas, *Thum Bhagat*, that is, of Thomas the Saint. They are reported to be practising Christian rites and claim to possess a book which they call Gospel of Mathew.⁴¹ The investigations conducted by Rev. A. Trotter, they call themselves *Bar Thoma*. Attempting to establish the fact that there are descendants of the converts of St. Thomas, Kurikilamkatt, refers to a village near Taxila in the district of Islamabad, which is called *Gar Thoma*. Some Christians and Muslims in this village are devotees of St. Thomas.⁴² Similarly from the reports of Jordanus of Severac in 1321, Kurikilamkatt tries to prove that there were the descendants of the converts of St. Thomas in Barygaza which could have been the result of his preaching there.⁴³ Kurikilamkatt concludes:

All these elements enable us to establish the mission of the apostle Thomas in North India as an event that has tangible historical results in the country. So now the *Ath* can also be considered a book having a historical nucleus, a fact which really adds weight to our findings. The *Ath* is historical in the sense that it was composed during a certain period and in a historical place and had based its story on historical places, persons and events.⁴⁴

Finally it is concluded that the "North Indian tradition about the mission of Thomas in India is both *valid and historical*."

George Nedungatt after a short discussion on the mission of St. Thomas in North west India and his relation with Gondophares concludes:

The north-western Indian tradition regarding St. Thomas, the Apostle centred on Taxila is attested by patristic texts which speak of the mission of the Apostle Thomas to Parthia. *This coincides with the ATH but is independent of it*. It narrates his apostolate in the kingdom of Gundaphar in India. Besides certain findings from the ruins of Taxila like the Taxila Cross, there are scattered traditions about St. Thomas Apostle in several other places in north India and Pakistan. They seem

the existence of a Christian community in Udaipur in the first century A.D. The Taxila cross could be probably a medal in the form of a cross worn around the neck.

⁴⁰Kurikilamkatt, 143-44.

⁴¹Kurikilamkatt, 114, quoting J. Rooney.

⁴²Kurikilamkatt, 116.

⁴³Kurikilamkatt, 109.

⁴⁴Kurikilamkatta, 218.

to be apt to warrant the title of Thomas as the Apostle of India and Pakistan.⁴⁵

George Nedungatt while dealing with the mission of St. Thomas in North West India says that there are a number of coincidences which compel one to accept the mission of St. Thomas to Taxila or the kingdom of Gondophares. The reign of the king Gondophares corresponded precisely to the period of the post-Pentecostal mission of the apostles so that the visit of St. Thomas to the king clicks into place chronologically. Besides, according to the tradition in vogue in Kerala, St. Thomas landed in Kodungallur (Muziris) in 52 A.D., a year after the death of Gondophares in 51 A.D. This chronological sequence could not have been invented by any fake tradition. Further, this period coincides with the invasion of Kushans causing wide-spread devastation which must have compelled St. Thomas to move out. Finally, The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:6, 22) took place about 50 A.D. in which all the apostles participated. According to the tradition St. Thomas too was present at the council.⁴⁶ Thus Nedungatt is in full agreement with the opinion about the north Indian mission of St. Thomas.

Benedict Vadakkekara furnishes a host of quotations supporting the north Indian mission of St. Thomas based on the *AJT*, coins bearing the names of Gondophares, Gad, his brother and successor, and the Takht-i.Bahi inscription.⁴⁷ He seems to endorse the opinion about the North Indian apostolate of St. Thomas and says that the *AJT* makes it clear that St. Thomas moved from there to the South probably after the death of Gundaphares. He makes reference to the apocryphal work, *De Transitu Mariae*, a very ancient Christian writing, where in it is mentioned that Apostle Thomas from his mission at Taxila was summoned to be present at the bedside of Blessed Virgin in her last moments.⁴⁸ He concludes: "Hence the acceptance of a mission of

⁴⁵George Nedungatt, 280. He devotes ten pages for the discussion on the North Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. He does not dwell on the numismatic and epigraphic evidences in detail.

⁴⁶Nedungatt, 275.

⁴⁷Benedict Vadakkekara, *Origin of Christianity in India: A Historical Critique*, Delhi, 2007, 137-146.

⁴⁸ Vadakkekara, 146; In fact Moraes underlining the exit of St. Thomas from the kingdom of Gundaphar, refers to this apocryphal document. Ref. George Moraes, *History of Christianity in India*, 34. It is interesting here to make a reference to a mural painting in a Church in Kalkar, Germany where the picture of Blessed Virgin Mary, in her sickbed is presented. Near by St. Thomas was being brought in by an Angel. The Apocryphal work is reported to be of the fifth century A.D. Therefore, it is possible that the tradition of St. Thomas' Apostolate in India was widespread in Europe in a very early period.

Apostle Thomas to North West India, instead of undermining in any way the tradition of the Indian Christians, actually endorses it."⁴⁹

Benedict Vadakkekara writes:

Until recent times, it was objected that the name of the King Gondapharnes could not be Indian, and that it was urged that no historian had ever spoken of a king of that name. In fact, up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the name was to be found no where outside the legend. Thus the discovery of coins minted in Gondapharnes' name provides further credibility to at least some of the circumstances in the *Acta Thomae*.⁵⁰

St. Thomas is said to have directed his attention to Gondopharnes' kingdom on account of the Jewish presence there.⁵¹ Jewish influence was so great there that even a special script originated in those districts, denominated Karoshti script, which is derived from the Hebrew script. The script was officially used during the whole first century. The coins of the Greek, Scythian and Parthian kings bear inscriptions in Greek and Karoshti scripts, the language of the later inscriptions being nevertheless in Sanskrit.

George Mark Moraes based on *AJT*, epigraphic and numismatic evidences deals with the mission of St. Thomas in the Punjab, the region under Gondophares. He goes to the extent of establishing the possibility of the conversion of the king to Christianity. But he says that the port of disembarkation namely, Sandaruk-Andranopolis cannot be identified.⁵² Similarly T.K. Joseph, who devoted fifty years of his life for the investigation of the history of the St. Thomas Christians while decrying his mission to Malabar and the South, supports strongly the north Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. A.M. Mundadan, cursorily states: "in support of the early Christianization of North India, we do not have any actual vestiges as we do for South India."⁵³

II. South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas

Apart from large number of western scholars T.K. Joseph rejects vehemently the south Indian apostolate of St. Thomas as mere legend.⁵⁴ The following scholars consider the apostolate of St. Thomas

⁴⁹Vadakkekara, 146.

⁵⁰Vadakkekara, 138.

⁵¹Henry Heras, *Two Apostles of India*, Trichinopoly, 1944, 8.

⁵²George Mark Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India from Early Times to St. Francis Xavier: A.D. 52-1542*, Bombay, 1964, 25-33.

⁵³A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India Vol. I, From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*, Bangalore, 1989, 61.

⁵⁴T.K. Joseph, "St. Thomas in South India: A critical View of the Legend," *Indian Antiquary* 55 (1926) 221-223.

in south India *Historical and Certain*: John P. Maffeus(1605), Joseph Simon Assemani (1728), Johannes F. Raulin (1745), Claudius Buchanan (1814), Mathias H. Hohlenberg (1822), E.C. Kenneth (1877), Sylvian Levy (1897), Alphonse E. Medlycott (1905), Karl Heck (1911), Joseph Dahlmann (1912), Ladislauss Zalesky (1915), Alaons Vãth (1918/1925), Albert Gille (1924), Henry Hosten (1936), John Stewart (1928), Georg Schurhammer (1934, 1955-1973), P.J. Thomas (1920/1924), K.N. Daniel (1950), E.M. Philip (1950), A.C. Perumalil (1952/1971), Mark G. Moraes (1964), Placid Podipara (1966/1970), Thomas J. *Navakatesh* (1967), V.C. George (1969), Giuseppe Sorge (1983), A. Mathias Mundadan (1984), Martin Gielen (1990), Benedict Vadakkekara (1995/2007), Xavier Koodapuzha (1998), James J. Kurikilamkatt (2005) George Nedungatt (2008). Father Bernard Thoma in three volumes worked on the St. Thomas Christians providing arguments based on tradition and other monuments.⁵⁵

Nagam Aiya in his *Travancore Sate Manual* writes: "There is no doubt as to the tradition that St. Thomas came to Malabar and converted a few families of Nambudiris, some of whom were ordained as priests such as those of Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam."⁵⁶

A pioneer Indian scholar, Placid Podipara had repeatedly and tenaciously presented the south Indian apostolate of Thomas as historical fact.⁵⁷ But he did not do so systematically or comprehensively in a full volume or always meeting the demands of modern critical historiography as stated by Nedungatt.⁵⁸ A.C. Perumalil studied the patristic testimony, but not adequately. More recently Athikulam⁵⁹ has returned to it but not quite systematically or comprehensively. Mathias Mundadan in his *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, 1984, has a substantial chapter of fifty eight pages on the "origins of Indian Christians from the apostolate of St. Thomas. In another book he has collected the traditions of St. Thomas Christians.⁶⁰ The *St. Thomas Christians Encyclopedia of India I* (1973) has made a selection of writings deemed to favour the thesis about the origins of the Thomas Christians from the Apostle Thomas and has illustrated their traditions and heritage.

⁵⁵Bernard Alenchery, *Marthoma Christianikal* (1916), Second edition by Pellissery Printers, 1992 in a single book.

⁵⁶Bernard Alenchery, *Marthoma Christianikal*, Vol. 2, 122.

⁵⁷Placid Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, London, 1970.

⁵⁸Nedungatt, xxx.

⁵⁹James Athikulam, *St.Thomas the Apostle in Patristic Tradition*, Rome, 1999.

⁶⁰A.M. Mundadan, *Traditions of St.Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1970.

Claude Buchanan writes, "We have a good authority that Apostle Thomas died in India as that Apostle Peter died at Rome."⁶¹ Georg Schurhammer summarizes the findings conveniently. "The main building in Arikamedu was built in the second half of the first century A.D. ...but it was abandoned before the end of that century because of flooding. A close study of the measurements of the bricks of this building has shown that they are identical with those of the apostle's tomb at Mylapore. ... According to the tradition of the Thomas Christians the martyrdom of the Apostle Thomas took place in the year 72. This coincides with the dating of the bricks of the tomb and of the Roman warehouse at Arikamedu in the second half of the first century."⁶² Against the opinion that the tomb in Mylapore was forged, Adolph Medlycott writes:

If the claim of Mylapore to be the place of the martyrdom and of the burial of the apostle was not based on undeniable fact, the Christians of Malabar would never have acknowledged their neighbour's claim to hold the tomb of the apostle, neither would they ever be induced to frequent it by way of pilgrimage. Had this been a case of a fictitious claim put forth to secure public notoriety and importance, they would as probably have, any way, set up one for themselves, and would have certainly ignored the claim of the former.⁶³

A.C. Perumalil who is critical of the North Indian apostolate of St. Thomas endorses fully the South Indian apostolate. He writes: "The Portuguese did not make or fabricate these traditions [traditions about the South Indian apostolate of St. Thomas]; they were there when the Portuguese came and they simply put in writing what they saw and found in the country."⁶⁴ While agreeing that St. Thomas came to India, he explores the possibility of his coming to the Deccan which according to his interpretation agrees with the *AJT*. He states that Habban, the Indian merchant attached to his master Gudnaphar hailed from Mysore (*Mahisha Ur*). His name could be Appan and that of his master Kutnappar. To explain the Kerala tradition, he affirms that Kutnappar was the king of Chola country with its capital at Arkkad. He concludes that in the light of *AJT*, St. Thomas came to Chola kingdom in south India.⁶⁵ He refers to *Veeradian* Songs, ballads

⁶¹Claude Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, Cambridge, 1811 (reprint, London, 1814), 135.

⁶²Georg Schurhammer, "Gesammelte Studien, III, ed., Laslo Szilas, Rome-Lisbon, 1964, 260, see also, "New Light about the Tomb of Mylapur," *Festschrift Placid J. Podipara*, ed. Jacob Vellian, Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1970, 99-101, at page 101.

⁶³Adolph Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, 134.

⁶⁴A.C. Perumalil, 94.

⁶⁵A.C. Perumalil, 70-71.

sung by a class of Hindus called Veeradians which are sung on the occasion of Christian marriages. These songs mention the preaching of St. Thomas.⁶⁶ Similarly he makes reference to the tradition about the seven churches or Christian communities supposed to be established by St. Thomas in Kerala.⁶⁷

Benedict Vadakkekara, being fully aware of the disdain the western scholars maintained towards the *AJT*, proposes to highlight the Indian tradition independent of *AJT* and affirms the South Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. He attempts to make tradition yield history.⁶⁸ He writes:

The tradition of the Indian Christians is inseparably bound to precise dates, existing families and places. All through the documented period of the history of Christianity in India, the contents of the tradition have remained constant and fixed. The unanimous and express consensus within the community regarding the particulars of the tradition has all the requisites of a contemporary historical document. All these specifics have been irremovably wedded to definite fixed points. These moorings have not undergone translocations or replacements. It is this constancy in the concreteness of the tradition that has made it function as history for the community.⁶⁹

He holds the view that the traditions of the Indian Christians, the *AJT* and the ecclesiastical writings converge at the Apostle's empty tomb in Mylapore.⁷⁰

According to Vadakkekara tradition comprehends all the stories, legends, ballads, customs and celebrations through which the community experiences and expresses its shared belief and consciousness that its origin goes back to Apostle Thomas.⁷¹ He assumes that tradition of this fact pointing to St. Thomas as the founder of Christianity is a historical fact. He contends that Indian tradition about the origin of Christianity in India and especially in South India from St. Thomas, the Apostle is ancient, constant, and consistent which necessarily takes one to conclude that it is historically true. In other words he considers consistency as the criterion of truth. Nedungatt shows the fallacy of this approach saying: "Truth is consistent, but not all that is consistent and constant

⁶⁶A.C.Perumalil, 97.

⁶⁷They are Cranganore, Palayur, Kottakkavu, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Kollam: A.C. Perumalil, 99.

⁶⁸"And it is the task of today's historian to make their tradition yield a history which can be both historically coherent and scientifically verifiable": Vadakkekara, 28.

⁶⁹Vadakkekara, 339-40.

⁷⁰Vadakkekara, 343.

⁷¹Vadekkekara, 113.

is truth. Error also can be consistent with itself from the beginning till the end.”⁷² Emphasizing on the role of tradition in making an event historical, Vadakkekara concludes:

...the tradition of the Indian Christians represents a historical event, an event that necessarily and intrinsically involves the presence and activities of Apostle Thomas in South India, his establishing of a Christian community, and his death and burial at Mylapore. The ancient tomb of Mylapore, the *Acta Thomae*, the testimonies of ecclesiastical writers, and the constant belief of the different Churches serve as collateral evidence in vouching for this event.⁷³

Arguments and Supportive Evidence for the Origin from Apostle Thomas

Vadakkekara brings out the arguments in support of the South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas.

A. Tradition of Indian Christians

Vadakkekara writes:

On the one hand, there is the fact of Apostle Thomas being sent out to preach, and on the other, there is a community of Christians which avers with persistence that it had been to its own ancestors that Thomas had preached. No other Christian community anywhere in the world has made a rival claim that would invalidate the tradition of the Indian Christians. Under these circumstances, the existence of an ancient Christian community in India professing that it was established by Apostle Thomas, is itself indicative of the genuineness of the tradition.⁷⁴

He argues:

The Apostles addressed the Good News first to their own kith and kin. It had been for preaching to the Jews that Apostle Thomas reached the Malabar Coast. Some socio-cultural elements and

⁷²*Nedungatt*, xxxi. Here one may recall the problem of fabricated document of the Donation of Constantine which was held for centuries as a valid document. The *Donation of Constantine* (Latin, *Donatio Constantini*) is a forged Roman imperial decree by which the emperor Constantine I supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the pope. During the Middle Ages, the document was often cited in support of the Roman Church's claims to spiritual and earthly authority. Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla is credited with first exposing the forgery with solid philological arguments, although doubts on the document's authenticity had already been cast by his times. Scholars have since dated the forgery between the Eighth and the Ninth Century. Catholic priest Lorenzo Valla in *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (1440, ed. Mainz, 1518), proved the forgery with certainty.

⁷³Vadakkekara, 347-48.

⁷⁴Vadakkekara, 113.

practices common to the Jews and the St. Thomas Christians are highlighted to show that the Jewish settlements drew Apostle Thomas to India and that the Christian Community he established was made up of Jewish converts also.⁷⁵

Vadakkekara adds:

It is a strange coincidence that the seven churches founded by St. Thomas in South India are situated in or near these Jewish colonies. In the close proximity of the ancient Church of Palayur, there is a spot still marked off as "Jewish Hill". It was normative for the St. Thomas Christians to have biblical names. Names of ancestors are automatically handed down with the result that one and the same name is perpetuated from one generation to another.⁷⁶

1. Uniqueness of tradition

This uniqueness of the tradition finds tacit consonance with the other churches of antiquity, as no other Christian community in the world has a rival tradition, for example, of possessing the tomb of Apostle Thomas... Given the fact that the apostle was a person known to all the Churches, the absence of rival traditions is in itself a clear vindication of the authenticity of the tradition of Indian Christians.⁷⁷

2. Consistency of Tradition

One of the most striking features of the tradition of the Indian Christians is the consistency with which it has been maintained and religiously handed down by the community.

3. Unanimity of tradition

Down through the centuries, the new entrants into the community have accepted the communal tradition with the result that all the members have come to identify themselves personally with the descendants of those whom Apostle Thomas had won for Christ. The southists alone have a different tradition according to which they are not members of the community founded by Apostle Thomas but are the progeny of the settlers from West Asia who had come to offer logistic support to the Indian Church.⁷⁸

B. Tomb of Apostle Thomas at Mylapore

In the West, from the time of the *Acta Thomae* there has been a tradition locating the Apostle's tomb in India. But it was Mar Solomon (Metropolitan of Perath-Maishan Ca. A.D. 1222) who first

⁷⁵Vadakkekara, 117.

⁷⁶Vadakkekara, 117.

⁷⁷Vadakkekara, 121.

⁷⁸Vadakkekara, 123-24.

cited this tradition pinpointing Mylapore in India as the place of the tomb:

Habban, the merchant, brought his body, and laid it in Edessa, the blessed city of Our Lord. If ever the tomb's genuineness had been suspected or if the community's unanimous consensus had been wanting, there would have cropped up 'rival tombs' or rival traditions. It does not otherwise make sense why a people who have always been natives of Malabar should consider a spot in a remote and alien land as their hallowed place.⁷⁹

A.C. Perumalil refers to the removal of the relics of the Apostle from Mylapore by the ruler of Vijayanagar in 1559 and the return of the same to Mylapore after some time. He writes that half of the relics and the spear-head were taken away by Fr. Lopo d' Almeida who gave them to Dom Jorge Temudo, bishop of Cochin. Later on Bishop Dom Frei Andre de Santa Maria gave the relics to the church of St. Thomas in Goa.⁸⁰

The cross with Pahlavi inscription in the tomb of St. Thomas also points to the antiquity of the site as a Christian shrine. Pahlavi was the official language of Persia during the Sussanian dynasty (227-651 A.D) and, thereafter it went out of use. Hence, this cross with its inscription could have been made only when Pahlavi was still a current language, that is, before the middle of the seventh century. It is noteworthy that when the *Acta Thomae* situates St. Thomas' mission field in the kingdom of Gondopharnes in North-west India, it does not attempt to locate his tomb there.

George Nedungatt⁸¹ considers the existence of the tomb at Mylapore a solid proof for the south Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. He refers

⁷⁹Vadakkkara, 131-32.

⁸⁰A.C. Perumalil, 87.

⁸¹George Nedungatt (page, xxx) observes that the works of scholars starting with Placid Podipara to Benedict Vadakkkara have not dissipated the western misgivings nor did they open a dialogue between the East and the West. He is of the opinion that though Vadakkkara filled his work with innumerable quotations, he did not succeed in establishing true dialogue with the Western Scholars since he could not get over the epistemological problem. Therefore, Nedungatt took up the challenge of opening a fruitful dialogue between the East and the West and modify the content of the statement of Rudyard Kipling by proving that the twain shall meet in Thomas the "Twin" against the backdrop of his trust in the optimism of Goethe. He subscribes to the view of G.T. Mackenzie, the British resident in Travancore that the authors working in the European libraries compile several theories that do not give weight to the tradition so warmly held by the Syrian Christian of Kerala. But Nedungatt does not confine his work to tradition alone. He goes a step further and emphasizes on the patristic texts and archaeological evidences to establish the

to the bricks used for the tomb and the details of excavation conducted in Arikamedu by the Archaeological Survey of India. Based on the reports of the excavations conducted by Mortimer Wheeler and his associates in Arikamedu in 1945, it was found that the bricks used for the structures in Arikamedu in the second half of the first century A.D. are of the same quality and size as those found in the tomb of Mylapore. These bricks were Roman bricks brought in the ships as ballast. The report of the excavations of Mortimer Wheeler has been published.⁸²

The Tradition, Western as well as Indian, is positive, uniform and constant that the tomb of the Apostle Thomas is in India. The Mylapore tomb is the only tomb of the Apostle Thomas ever known to history, a tomb without a rival, like that of Peter in Rome. The archaeological evidence that this tomb was built with the first century Roman bricks may not by itself be a clinching argument; but within the whole setting of the Mylapore tradition, it poses a question to those who demand contemporary documentary evidence about the mission of the Apostle Thomas to India. The fact that this tomb is situated on the Coromandel Coast, and not in Malabar, has effectively the value of a *lectio difficilior* which adds up to the probability of its genuineness. The Mylapore tomb is free of the usual marks of a forged tomb. The foreign voice about "Calamina" constitutes no real alibi nor is there a riddle without solution. The nearly bimillennial tradition of pilgrimage, both foreign and Indian enhances the credibility of the tomb traditionally venerated at Mylapore as that of the Apostle Thomas.⁸³

Tradition of pilgrimage to the Mylapore tomb strengthens the credentials of Mylapore as the place of the martyrdom of the Apostle

historical aspect of the apostolate of St. Thomas in south India. The methodology he adopted is Thomistic or scholastic discarded by a large number of modern scholars.

⁸²Vide R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, *My Archaeological Mission to India and Pakistan*, London, 1976; R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, A. Ghosh and Krishna Deva, "Arikamedu: An Indo-Roman Trading Station on the East Coast of India," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 2 (1946) 17-24; also *Ancient India*, July 1946.

⁸³The relics of the apostle were transferred to Edessa which was pillaged by Zangi of Mosul in 1144 and destroyed in 1145 by the Turks who took away the silver caskets in which the relics of the Apostle Thomas and others were kept, but cast away the relics. We do not know whether the Christians managed to save them. Ortona in Italy claims to have got them from the Mediterranean Island of Chios in 1258. What Ortona advances as proof is a marble tombstone, which the Ortonan sailors brought home along with relics from Chios. On it there is a Greek inscription "*Ho Hosios Thomas*," meaning St. Thomas. The Greek inscription should have been fabricated. If it were true, it should be *Ho Hagios Thomas*. So, the Bollandists regard it as a *pia faus*," pious fraud, of the Ortonans. For details about the fraud, ref. Nedungatt, 318-19. His arguments based on philological interpretation seem to be convincing and could be retained until the contrary is proved scientifically.

Thomas. If the Mylapore tomb were a pious fraud, excavation could be expected to yield a complete skeleton. No one would invent the tomb of an Apostle with just a few minor bone fragments as found by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. The Edessan apocryphal work *ATh*, whose interest in the tomb is marginal, would not have located it in India if it could help it. As such it furnishes indirect historical proof favourable to the Indian tradition about Mylapore.

When in the fourth century Ephrem sang of the Apostle Thomas' tomb in India, he was effectively referring to Mylapore. Archaeology takes us further back to the first century. The lowest strata of the Mylapore tomb was built with bricks baked in the first century A.D. An immemorial tradition of pilgrimage to Mylapore has venerated there the tomb of the Apostle.

According to the Thomas Christians liturgical and popular tradition, 3rd July in the height of the heavy rainy monsoon season is the date of the Apostle's death. This date could not have been the free choice of a fraud but was determined by the fact of the real event. As the manner of the death of the Apostle, the "twin" was pierced by a lance like Christ which may not be wholly arbitrary symbolism. In sum, *the core tradition* of Mylapore spells authenticity.⁸⁴ He suggests that Calamina could be a variant of *Cholamannu*, a Tamil-Malayalam word indicating the land of the Cholas where the tomb of the Apostle was known to be located.⁸⁵

Nedungatt adds:

The relics of the Apostle Thomas were venerated at Edessa in the fourth century. This is historically certain. And Edessa itself proclaimed through its mouthpiece, Ephrem, the Harp of the Spirit "that those relics were brought there from India. If so, the quest for the historical Thomas, the Apostle of India, can be terminated here, giving the true value to the Indian tradition that the Apostle died a martyr's death at Mylapore and was buried there in a tomb that has not ceased to attract pilgrims from antiquity down the centuries.⁸⁶

Patristic Testimonies

After examining the important patristic texts like those of Origen (186-255), *Acts of Thomas* (3rd century), Clement of Rome (3rd century), *Doctrine of the Apostles* (3rd century), Gregory Nazianzen (329-390) Cyrillona (d. 396), Ambrose (333-397), Ephrem (+373), John Chrysostom (347-407), Jerome (345-419), Gregory of Tours (538-594),

⁸⁴Nedungatt, 33.

⁸⁵Nedungatt, 172.

⁸⁶Nedungatt, 410.

Gregory the Great (590-604), Isidore of Seville (560-636), Codex of Fulda (8th century) and so on, Nedungatt states:

Whatever be the precise date of the transfer of the relics of the Apostle Thomas all the patristic texts concur with Ephrem on the source of their transfer, namely India. This massive evidence is not weakened by some other texts that mention some other country than India in the midst of the terminological confusion If this transfer is historical, it presupposes that the Apostle Thomas worked, died and was buried in India. This conclusion then is no legend or fable or unfounded "tradition" but solid historical fact as certain as transfer itself.⁸⁷

Nedungatt adds:

The wide ranging patristic texts, far from being discordant, are best understood if the Apostle Thomas is seen to have first evangelized Parthia (Indo-Parthia or India) and then moved to evangelize other peoples ending with South India where he preached the gospel and died as a martyr. The patristic witness about India's evangelization by the Apostle Thomas is not dependent on the *Acts of Thomas* but is derived from the common tradition reaching back to the Apostolic times.⁸⁸

Palayur Tradition

This tradition is particularly significant because it is both Christian and Hindu at the same time. It involves Brahmins who recognize that their ancestors were converted to Christianity by the Apostle Thomas, while several dispersed families trace their first Christian origins to the ministry of this Apostle at Palayur. This confluence of complementary traditions cannot be attributed to any collusion of the two communities of Christians and Hindus since the former stands to gain and the latter to lose. After an on the spot study of the Palayur story, the Belgian Jesuit Albert Gille Expressed himself fully convinced of the genuineness.⁸⁹ The four Chaldean bishops who arrived in Malabar in 1504 wrote to their Patriarch Elias that Palayur ranked second among the three most important Christians centres along with Kodungallur and Quilon.⁹⁰ On 29 October 1945, a hoard of Gold and Silver coins bearing the images of Augustus, Mark Anthony, Tiberius, Claudius and Nero was discovered from Eyyal, in the vicinity of Palayur. Palayur was linked with Kodungallur through canal. Here St. Thomas worked miracle and baptized thirty four Brahmin families out of forty and others except one left them place

⁸⁷Nedungatt, 231.

⁸⁸Nedungatt, 253.

⁸⁹Nedungatt, 335.

⁹⁰ref. Simon Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III. Pars I, *De Scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis*, Rome , 1725, 594.

after cursing it (*sapakad- Chowgatt*), Today it is a flourishing town of which Palayur is in the periphery. One *Nambudiri* family remained there without being converted. It is called Orumanayur. Some of the *Nambudiri* families like Kalathur Mana is said to have guarded a document *Nagaragrantha-vari* which contains the following notice: "Kali year 3153 [=52 A..D.) a foreign *sanyasi* called Thomas came to our village, preached there causing pollution. Therefore, we came away from that village."⁹¹ Though the Palayur tradition is damaging to the self-esteem of the Hindus, they do not disown it, thus arguing for its credibility. According to *Rambanpattu* (5.7.3) the Apostle Thomas preached the gospel at Palayur for an entire year and baptized 1,050 persons. The number need not be exact.

The Brahmins who became Christians continued to use the temple at Palayur for their worship. Thus the temple became Church. Close by is the water tank. On the ruins of that temple-church, the present church was constructed in 1600-1607 by the Jesuit priest James Fenicio. In the following century it was set on fire by the invading Muslim army of Tippu Sultan of Mysore who burned many churches and forced people into Islam. After Tippu's retreat, the roof of the church was renovated and more recently new structures were added. Brahmin families of Kalli, Kalikavu and Pakalomattam were originally situated near the Palayur temple. Palayur tradition is shared both by Hindus and Christians:

Palayur affords singular support for the Thomas Christian tradition regarding the apostle Thomas. Since it is a tradition shared by Christians and Hindus alike, it can be regarded as above suspicion. It explodes the Western theory that the apostolic origin of Indian Christianity was a fraud of the Indian Christians or one hoisted upon them by the Syrians. Since the Palayur tradition is attested by a written Hindu document, it is of singular historical value for Thomasology in its search for historical Thomas. Those writers who regard the Indian tradition regarding the Apostle Thomas as merely oral, legendary, based essentially on the Acts of Thomas or devoid of historical value for the lack of contemporary documents, have here something to unsettle their certainties and make them pause and reflect.⁹²

The tradition about Seven Churches Built by St. Thomas

Palayur, Kondungalloor, Kottakkavu (Parur), Kokkamangalam (Pallipuram), Chayal (Nilakkal), Niranam, and Kollam, Half church is

⁹¹Ref. E .R. Hambye, "Saint Thomas and India," *The Clergy Monthly*, 16 (1952), 363-375 , at 370.

⁹²Nedungatt, 342. For detailed information on the Hindu Tradition, ref. George Nedungatt, 335-342.

said to be in Thiruvancott or Malayattur, are said to have been established by St. Thomas. These churches may mean mere Christian communities.

Nedungatt concludes:

...when the Alexandrian philosopher and theologian Pantenus visited South India in 189-190 (as has been historically demonstrated by Albrecht Dihle), he met with Christians there who presented him with an Aramaic copy of the Gospel of Mathew, saying that it was given to them by an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Whether that Apostle was Bartholomew or Thomas, the apostolic origin of Christianity in India emerges as a historical fact. This conclusion is reinforced by Origen according to whom non-Aryan India was already evangelized. Lastly when due value is given to the ... Indian tradition regarding the Apostle Thomas, in some cases shared by Christians and Hindus alike, there can be no reasonable doubt that he evangelized India. And the quest for the historical Thomas can come finally to a close here with the historical certainty about his being truly the Apostle of India.⁹³

In fine one may say that the Palayur and the Mylapore traditions are taken up by Nedungatt as the most convincing evidences for the Apostolate of St. Thomas in South India. He underlines the fact that though *Acts of Thomas* is apocryphal and forms part of fiction, it has reference to some historical facts like the riding of Elephant in India in the work *David Copperfield* of Charles Dickens. He is of the opinion that the arguments brought out by him in his work would definitely open up a dialogue with the scholars in the west and finally the twain may meet in Thomas, the twin. It is possible that the readers may find the Thomistic methodology which the author follows is rather outdated and unpleasant.

On the whole the work of Nedungatt following the Thomistic methodology opens up a new avenue for further research especially the suggestion of two missionary journeys, one to Taxila, the headquarters of Indo-Parthian kingdom and the other to Muziris. The plausible dates suggested are worth investigating. The details of Roman trade with the western and Eastern coasts of India which flourished from the first Century B.C. to the third century A.D will help situate the apostolate of St. Thomas in a better light. Similarly, the recent findings of the excavations conducted in Pattinam, near Cranganore on the Malabar coast will add further evidences to the study. It will be definitely possible to assert the fact that the apostolate of St. Thomas is not a legend full of lies, and not one

⁹³Nedungatt, 410.

concocted by the Portuguese. The prejudices of some sections of Indians are now getting vanished since they would like to underline the fact that Catholicism in India was not the product of Colonialism. They would now try to find evidence to prove that Catholicism was in India even before the arrival of the Portuguese with a view to escaping the attacks of anti-colonial activists.

It becomes clear from the discussions above that the arrival of St. Thomas the apostle in India is a historical fact supported by literary work, the historicity and reliability of which are strongly supported by numismatic and epigraphic evidences like the coins of Gondophares, Takht-I-Bahi inscription, remnants of Christian communities in the North west of India, and material or archaeological evidences in the form of the tomb and traditions attested by ballads. The numismatic evidences prove the fact that Gondophares mentioned in the *AJT* was a historical personage who lived and reigned Indo-Parthian kingdom in the north west of India during the time of St. Thomas. The same is also proved by the scientific analysis of the Takht-i-Bahi inscription. The inscription discovered in the Udayapur temple in Madhya Pradesh also points to the fact that St. Thomas preached in India in the first century A.D. Other material remains in North West India as well as Broach, Kalyan and so on indicate the fact that St. Thomas the apostle worked in areas outside Malabar coast. The tomb of St. Thomas in Mylapore and the transfer of the mortal remains from there to Edessa as testified by the witnesses of the second, third and fourth centuries confirm the tradition. The writings of St. Ephrem (+373) constitute a very important testimony to the existence of a tomb in India and necessarily the mission of St. Thomas in India. Similarly the Palayur tradition shared by Hindus and Christians is another strong evidence to the preaching of St. Thomas in Malabar. It is therefore historically correct to state that St. Thomas is the Apostle of India and Pakistan.