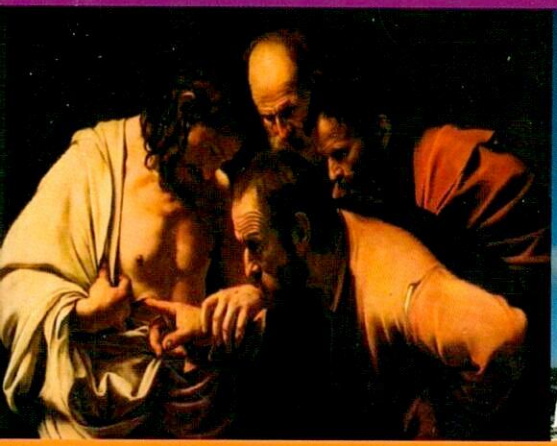
A SAGA OF FAITH

ST. THOMAS
THE APOSTLE OF INDIA





S.J. ANTHONYSAMY

The author deserves praise for giving a detailed picture about the life and ministry of St. Thomas basing himself on the New Testament, the apocryphal writings and also by relying abundantly on the early church writings and also on the testimony of the fathers.

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil
Major Archbishop of Erankulam-Angamaly

Disciples Of St. Thomas

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St. Thomas, the Apostle of India.

S. J. ANTHONYSAMY

Published by
NATIONAL SHRINE OF ST. THOMAS BASILICA
SANTHOME, MYLAPORE,
CHENNAI - 600 004. INDIA.

2009

First Edition : 2004
Second Edition : 2009

Printing and Distribution :

Disciples Of St. Thomas

Disciples of St. Thomas (DOST)
Santhome, Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004, India.
Website : www.santhome.org
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E-mail : simonchumkat@santhome.org
Fax: 091-44-4210 0076

PRINTED IN INDIA

Foreword



I am very happy to present "A Saga of Faith" written by Fr. S.J. Anthonysamy, professor in Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee. The author has taken keen interest to present various aspects regarding the life and ministry of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India. The ministry and death of the Apostle are closely connected with the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore especially with the Santhome Cathedral. The tomb of St. Thomas in the Cathedral Basilica attracted many pilgrims especially those from the community of St. Thomas Christians. I am really happy to note from the book that due importance is given to the tomb by carefully constructing an underground tomb-chapel.

"A Saga of Faith"- a book in five parts and also an appendix as part six, is interesting to the readers. The author deserves praise for giving a detailed picture about the life and ministry of St. Thomas basing himself on the New Testament, the apocryphal writings and also by relying abundantly on the early church writings and also on the testimony of the fathers. Source of the statements in the book and also in the appendix referring to the tradition and historical monuments like the "bleeding Cross" need to be subjected to further study and historical scrutiny. As the author himself writes in the preface, this book is a popular presentation

and not a scientific and historical work. But this in no way overshadows the importance of the book. The author has succeeded very well in bringing to the fore the importance of Santhome Cathedral Basilica and also the Church in Mylapore which can legitimately take pride in possessing the tomb of St. Thomas, one of the twelve and the Apostle of India. I wholeheartedly congratulate Fr. Anthonysamy and wish him all the best.

+ Varkey Vithayathil

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil
Major Archbishop of Erankulam-Angamaly
28th November, 2004

Appreciation

India is indeed privileged to have one of the only two churches built over the tomb of an Apostle - St Peter's Basilica in Rome and the Santhome Cathedral Basilica in Chennai, where St Thomas lies buried. St Thomas, the Apostle, after preaching the Good News on the West Coast, came to Madras and suffered martyrdom an a hill at the out skirts of the city, today known as St. Thomas Mount.

We are indeed proud of St Thomas, Apostle of India, an unlearned simple fisherman from Galilee, who was called by Jesus to become one of His twelve Apostles. His great love for his Master was shown to us at the time when he accompanied Jesus to the house, where Lazarus had just died, though the other Apostles feared being stoned by the Jews. "Let us also go that we may die with him" said Thomas. His act of faith "My Lord and my God" has richly indulgenced the Church to use this faith at the elevation of the Sacred Host in the Holy Mass and at Benediction.

Our learned Rector of the Major Seminary, Rev Fr. S. J. Anthonysamy has made an excellent attempt, perhaps the first one to detail the whole life history of St Thomas in this publication, entitled "A Saga of Faith", based on Biblical sources, Apocryphal literature, Patristic tradition and traditional beliefs of the people. I am sure this good handbook will be extremely useful for pilgrims and those who wish to know more of St Thomas' life and his apostolic mission.

This book will be released on the occasion of the solemn blessing of the renovated Santhome Cathedral Basilica on 12th December 2004 - a fine tribute to the hard work and commitment of Fr Lawrence Raj, Parish Priest and his team of helpers.

Bishop Lawrence Pius D
Administrator
Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore

18th November 2004

Preface

St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ certainly evokes sentiments of pride among us Indians, particularly those of us from Kerala and Tamilnadu. We do believe that this apostle had preached the Gospel in our regions. While our acknowledged sources in the New Testament as to the life of Thomas with Jesus are quite enriching, his ministry in the early Church is not recorded in any of them. As for his arrival in India and his mission here in our land, we are constrained to depend only on some apocryphal writings of the early Christians. Quite a number of early Church Fathers have made enthusiastic references to his ministry in India. Certainly some monuments and later excavations in the traditionally believed sites of Thomas' ministry do throw some light on his work in India. And above all the active faith of Christians in Kerala, who even pride in calling themselves as "St. Thomas' Christians" and the sense of elation that had been part of the life of Catholics in the old Diocese of Mylapore and presently the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore over the possession of the tomb of the Apostle do not fail to provide us with a dimension of credibility about Thomas here in India. Certainly the life and ministry of the Apostle Thomas has been a great **Saga of Faith,** able to impress us even up to this day.

Several attempts had already been made at various times to reconstruct the life and ministry of St. Thomas. This is yet another humble attempt. This modest work on St. Thomas the Apostle of India has six parts: the first part focuses on the biblical traditions, namely some texts from the Gospels and Thomas' personal associations with Jesus. Christ himself; in the second part, we shall have a look at the apocryphal traditions on Thomas, that is, a literature of the early Christians which speaks of St. Thomas

certainly on the basis of some history, but surrounding him with a folkloristic aura; the third section will dwell briefly on the Christian traditions on Thomas centred around the statements of the Fathers of the Church and other early Christian writers; the fourth part looks into the South Indian traditions pertaining to the sites associated with Thomas here in India. This fifth part intends to portray the later ecclesiastical history of Mylapore and Madras, beginning from the Padroado jurisdiction and reaching up to the present day situation. There is also a sixth part which is an appendix added towards the end, consisting of themes which do have an indirect bearing on the life and mission of the Apostle, and help the reader to understand and appreciate the saint.

The most important of the sites associated with the Apostle Thomas in India, nay in the whole world is no doubt his tomb. In fact there are only two churches built directly over the tombs of the apostles; the most celebrated one is the great basilica of St. Peter built over the tomb of the Apostle Peter in Rome, and the second is the basilica of St. Thomas the Apostle over his tomb in Mylapore, India.

The Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore which proudly possesses this sacred site has taken efforts towards the restoration of the beautiful gothic Cathedral, built over the tomb of the Apostle in 1896. As part of the work of restoration, an underground tomb-chapel has also been carefully constructed enhancing the dignity and importance of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Thomas. The newly constructed crypt chapel will certainly enable pilgrims to visit the tomb even while liturgical services take place in the Basilica, and to enable them to pray in quiet.

Rev. Fr. Lawrence Raj, the dynamic parish priest and the brain behind this entire project wished to commemorate the historic event of the inauguration of the renovated Cathedral with its newly constructed crypt and some significant accessories like a museum and a mini-theater. And it was his proposal to bring out a write-up

on St. Thomas and his mission in India on this occasion, namely 12th of December, 2004, in order to help the numerous pilgrims and visitors to have a better knowledge of the Apostle, and thus help to enhance their Christian faith .

Hence this modest effort to bring out a book on the life and mission of St. Thomas the Apostle, with a special reference to Mylapore and its subsequent developments. It is mostly a popular presentation and does not claim to have a scientific character about it. Several authors have done serious research on the mission of the Apostle. I have read most of these works and have compiled the salient features from them for the benefit of the present day readers. I am grateful to all these authors who have remained my main sources to bring about this writing on St. Thomas the Apostle of India.

A SAGA OF FAITH on the life and mission of St. Thomas the Apostle of India, presents a man deeply committed to his Master Jesus Christ, and his travels to distant lands with a firm apostolic zeal to proclaim the Gospel. This was an event of the first century of the Christian era, and is unsurprisingly surrounded by many a legend and folklore. But the underlying spirit of faith that characterized the Apostle cannot but leave us in deep admiration and gratitude. May the saga of St. Thomas the Apostle have its impact on all the readers of this book and increase their faith in our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

I am grateful to His Eminence Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil as well as to His Lordship Bishop Lawrence Pius for their insightful forewords. I am also grateful to Fr. Jobby of the St. Thomas Pastoral Centre, Chennai (Syro-Malabar), for taking efforts to procure the 'foreword' of His Eminence, the Cardinal. Some of my colleagues and students at the Sacred Heart Seminary have spared no pains in shaping up the print material. My heartful thanks to all of them. The ever-enterprising Fr. P. Lawrence Raj, but for whose persistent requests and reminders this book would not have seen

the light of day abundantly merits my appreciation and gratitude. My thanks also to the Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts (SIGA) for their artistic work.

3rd December, 2004.

Fr. S. J. Anthonysamy
Sacred Heart Seminary
Poonamallee.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Lives of saints, particularly of the martyrs, do inevitably attract people for the kind of sacrifices they have undertaken in their lives. Their struggles and hopes as well as their joys and pains in their enthusiastic service to Jesus their Lord and Master do leave indelible impressions among the followers of Christ. After all Christ himself had been the greatest of all martyrs! St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus, and one of the earliest martyrs to his cause, in our Indian soil, does have an unflinching affinity to all of us here in South India.

I am extremely happy that "A Saga of Faith" which depicted the life and martyrdom of the Apostle Thomas from a theological and historic perspective is now making its second edition. It is a happy sign that the Indian readers are catching up with the life of their Apostle. A Malayalam version of this book by Fr. Jaison Vadakumcherry had been released a year ago, while a Tamil version is in the process of publication. May all such literature only help in the building up of a deep Christian faith in our land.

May I sincerely thank Fr. Cyriac Illimoottil, the administrator of the National Shrine of St. Thomas Basilica and Mr. Simon Chumkat of the "Disciples of St. Thomas" for their generous and consistent efforts in bringing out the second edition of "A Saga of Faith".

Fr. S.J. Anthonysamy
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Adyar, Chennai 600 020

18. 5. 2009

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Part One

BIBLICAL TRADITIONS ON ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE



Reliquary containing the relics of St. Thomas–the tip of the lance with which he was pierced and a piece of his bone. This precious treasure is in the custody of the Prior of the Cathedral, at San Thome.

Chapter 1

St. Thomas in the New Testament

i. Some New Testament Personalities:

New Testament certainly abounds in many a personality besides Jesus Christ. Mary plays an unique role as the mother of Jesus, and as a future mother of the Church, but for most part she is silent. St. Joseph fades away soon after the infancy of Jesus. Among the apostles who were directly called by Jesus during the early part of his ministry around the Sea of Galilee, the most prominent role is given to Peter. Simple by nature and enthusiastic by temperament Peter did interact with Jesus many a time. He was in fact appointed to lead the Church after Jesus (Mt 16:13-20; Jn 21:15-19). While Peter's human weakness is highlighted by his sad denial of Jesus, he becomes a man of courage and spearheads the Church after the resurrection of Jesus. In fact his role in the conversion of Cornelius sets the pattern for the mission of the Church among the gentiles (Acts 10-11).

Paul of Tarsus whose call to be an Apostle of Jesus has been of an exceptional character (Acts 9:1-19), was indeed "one who was untimely born" as expressed in his own words (1 Cor 15:9). Although he had no role to play during the lifetime of Jesus, yet as far as Christianity is concerned he may be considered as the second founder after Jesus Christ. His missionary journeys taken up with great zeal for Jesus Christ, and his epistles conveying the most important doctrines of Christianity should be cherished in all ages.

James and John referred to as Boanerges or 'sons of thunder' have also made a remarkable inner company with Jesus along with Peter. This trio were privileged to witness 2Jesus' transfiguration (Mk 9:2-8), the resuscitation of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37), and also

the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:32-42), John's influence in the early Church as well as in the long Christian tradition has been very great thanks to the Fourth Gospel which he had authored giving a classical Hellenistic slant to the Christian doctrines.

Of the other apostles directly called by Jesus on the shores of Galilee, most of them play only a marginal role in the first three Gospels, apart from the infamous Judas who betrayed Jesus. We do not find any special place given to them in the history of the first century Church as presented by the Acts of the Apostles. A certain James mentioned as the "brother of the Lord" (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3; Gal 1:19) seems to have been quite prominent in the Jerusalem Christian community. He had a pivotal role to play in the First Council of Jerusalem, which decided that gentiles who embraced the Christian faith need not be burdened with certain unnecessary Jewish obligations. There were others like Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Luke and Mark who were the devoted disciples of Paul or Peter and some of them have also been credited with having written some parts of the New Testament literature.

What about Thomas? How does he figure in the New Testament?

ii. St. Thomas in the New Testament

The first three Gospels, namely Mark, Matthew and Luke have no other information about Thomas except to place him in the list of the twelve apostles called by Jesus during the early part of his ministry in Galilee (Mk 3:17; Mt 10:3; Lk 6:15). Another book of the New Testament, namely the Acts of the Apostles also mentions Thomas in the list of the twelve apostles as awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit after the Ascension of Jesus to heaven. (Acts 1:13). Thomas normally occupies a middle order in the list presented by the first three Gospels as well as the Acts of the Apostles. But it is only the fourth Gospel, namely that of John, which presents some short but very important texts as to the role

of Thomas in the life and ministry of Jesus. It is only with these texts that we may be able to reconstruct the characteristic traits of Thomas, and even venture to get some idea as to his life.

It is the fourth evangelist John who gives a more generous treatment to the Apostle Thomas, mentioning him no less than four times in his Gospel, and linking him with some important events in the life of Jesus.

The Gospel of John was written towards the end of the first century. While the Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as a teacher and wonder-worker within a historic framework, John takes a totally different approach to the Jesus event. John presents his Gospel as an unique expression of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who had pre-existed from all eternity. Jesus came to this world that we may have life in his name (20:31). With this purpose John presents Jesus as the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the good shepherd (10:11), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth and the life (14:6), etc. In fact John very skillfully attaches these attributes to Jesus with a divine self-assertion, "I am" reminding us of God Yahweh of the Old Testament who revealed himself to Moses with the name "I am who am" (Ex 3:14). Hence John ventures to establish the divine-human character of Jesus with such assertions by Jesus as, "I am the light of the world", "I am the bread of life", etc. And this is simply John's way of asserting Jesus' equality to God. And it would be quite natural that whatever character he presents in his Gospel, the fourth evangelist would do so only to enhance his basic theological ideas. And we should treat the accounts concerning Thomas in the Gospel of John from this perspective. What then are the four important narrations mentioned about Thomas in the Gospel of John? And how are they going to help us to reconstruct the character of Thomas? And how are these accounts going to present some lessons to us in our own context? Before we discuss such important issues let us have a look at the written accounts of John's Gospel on our apostle Thomas.

a. Jn 11: 7-16 "Let us go and die with him" (vs 16)

The occasion was when Jesus desired to travel to Judea in order to go to Bethany on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus had just heard that his friend Lazarus was sick, and then subsequently dead. The disciples were most reluctant about this journey since just a few days earlier Jesus was about to be stoned by the Jews of Jerusalem for asserting his total identity with the Father: "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30). But Jesus went on insisting with his unwilling disciples that he should take up this difficult journey. And it was then that Thomas took a stand totally different from the others and clinched the issue with this firm statement: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (11:16).

What emerges, as the character trait of Thomas in the above incident is the boundless courage of the Apostle. He had no fear from the Jews of Jerusalem mostly influenced by the fundamentalist Pharisees and the self-centred priestly class. The bold expression of Thomas could also have a specific background of its own. There was the Zealot factor in many Jewish young men of the time of Jesus. It was a movement committed to a bold and even a violent stand as to the liberation of the Jewish land from the occupation of the Romans. Many of the disciples of Jesus had been part of such a movement, and their sympathies were still there in spite of Jesus' proclamation of love and forgiveness in his Kingdom mission. And coming to Thomas, his bold readiness even to die with Jesus, as he asserted, could also be traced back to his own former leanings towards the zealot cause which wanted its followers to be ready for any sacrifice in order to liberate their land.

b. Jn 14: 1-6 "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? (vs 5)

It was the time of the last supper of Jesus. The happy occasion began to take a solemn mood and subsequently a cloud of sadness surrounded the disciples. Jesus had just washed the feet of his

disciples giving them a great example of service. He reminded them that they too should follow his example since, "servants are not greater than their master". But the solemnity of this occasion suddenly gave way to sadness when Jesus predicted his betrayal by one of them (13:21): While the identity of the betrayer was still unknown to them Jesus continues to speak of his death when "God will also glorify him" (13:32). Then he drops another bombshell telling Peter, "before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times" (13:38). And this must have been too much for the disciples to absorb.

As these predictions began to haunt the disciples Jesus tries to cheer them up by speaking of the "Father's house", with its "many dwellings" and how he would "go to prepare a place" for them (14:2-3). And when Jesus takes for granted that the disciples did surely know the way to the place he was going, it was Thomas who breaks the gloomy silence hitherto maintained by the disciples. In a tone of deep anxiety at the way matters seem to be evolving, a composed Thomas comes out with a very simple question to Jesus: **"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"** (14:5). This simple and candid declaration should have really moved Jesus and he tries to assuage the apprehension of his outspoken disciple with these words for everlasting memory: **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. If you know me, you know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (14: 6-7)**

The evangelist John is portraying to us an excellent quality of the Apostle in this passage, namely his calm simplicity. Though perturbed by the new directions that Jesus was trying to project to them, hitherto not heard from him, he is apparently the spokesperson of the other disciples in seeking a clarification. And the candid question of Thomas is the cause of a great revelation

from Jesus who declared, "I am the way, the truth and the life". And it is needless to say that the answer of Jesus could have given an immediate confidence to the disciples; but down the centuries this revelation of Jesus has been the source of comfort and consolation to millions of believers.

c. Jn 20: 24-28 "My Lord and My God" (vs 28)

This is the most striking resurrection apparition scene narrated by the evangelist John. Jesus had appeared to the disciples when Thomas had been absent. And when told of the apparition he stubbornly refuses to believe it because he could never think that the severely slashed and pierced body of Jesus could be restored. But Jesus appears again to the disciples and confronts Thomas directly with his risen body and challenges his faith about him. It is then that Thomas comes out with his total surrender to Jesus with a faith expression that has stimulated and encouraged millions of people down the ages, "My Lord and My God" (20:28)

This event involving a doubting Thomas needs a further discussion. It was not Thomas alone who had doubted about Jesus' resurrection. There have also been other disciples who were not able to accept such a feat on the part of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew clearly states that even as the risen Jesus was commissioning the disciples to proclaim the Gospel, "some of them doubted him" (Mt 28:17); Mark mentions that the testimony of Mary Magdalene that she saw Jesus and that he was alive did not receive a healthy response; it is said that "they did not believe it" (Mk 16:11, 13). Jesus is presented by Mark as upbraiding the disciples for their lack of faith and stubbornness" (Mk 16:14). The disciples of Emmaus departed from Jerusalem in total disappointment about Jesus and with a lack of faith in his resurrection of which the women who visited his tomb were so assertive. Here too Jesus expresses his sense of dissatisfaction for the lack of belief on the part of the disciples (Lk 24: 25).

In the Gospel of John, Thomas is presented with his stubborn doubt about Jesus' resurrection (Jn 20:25). We should not see here just a single individual who has problem with the resurrection of Jesus. The evangelist seems to be taking the theme of Jesus' resurrection to a much broader level. Thomas seems to be symbolizing the prevailing disbelief among many of the early disciples of Jesus Christ. Most scholars are of the opinion that John had recorded quite a number of resurrection apparitions in his Gospel only to convince those who were still skeptical about the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

But Thomas is also presented as a man surrendering himself to Jesus with his deep faith, though a delayed one. He is made to encounter with all the physical dimensions of the risen Jesus and he accepts him with a total submission with an admission of defeat. His confession, "My Lord and My God" manifests his faith. But we are carefully reminded through Thomas that Jesus' resurrection pertains to the superior realm of faith. And it need not rest on the conditions of physical proofs. In fact Jesus has a word of praise for all those who express their belief in his resurrection without demanding any external substantiation. We should also note that Thomas' confession of faith in Jesus is the only most explicit statement of faith in the Gospel of John on the divinity of Jesus. Thus Thomas a symbol of total lack of faith becomes a symbol of absolute surrender in faith. He becomes a great Christian model for generations.

d. Jn 21:2 Thomas by the Sea of Tiberias

This is the final apparition of the risen Jesus and it takes place in the northern part of the region of Galilee, around the sea of Galilee. The readers should understand that the sea of Galilee was only a big lake. The Greek word *thalassa* could mean either the boundless ocean or a restricted lake. Our interest in this apparition is only to note the prominent position Thomas seems to have enjoyed in

Tiberias in the post-resurrection Church. In the list of Apostles given here he is placed immediately after Simon Peter, unlike the middle order which he held in the earlier lists. He has preceded even the sons of Zebedee who were normally placed after Peter. The relevant text here reads as follows: "Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two others of his disciples" (Jn 21:2)

This last reference to Thomas in the Gospel of John raises a further question here. What was the place of Thomas in the early Church? The evangelist John has given such a place of prominence to Thomas that we are inclined to believe that he played some important role in the Johannine School of the first century which is supposed to have produced the Gospel of John. It is none other than Thomas who makes a confession of deep faith in Jesus even if it were to have preceded a complete mistrust of the same Jesus? Hence his place next to Peter himself. And this issue of prominence given to Thomas in the early Church is all the more confirmed by the place of importance he has in the apocryphal literature of the first three centuries which we shall treat in a later section.

Chapter 2

The Early Life of Thomas

i. The Name 'Thomas'

We do not have much direct evidence as to the early life of Thomas. His name raises many curious questions. Was it a name given by his parents after his birth, as it was usual among the Jewish families? Or did it develop in the course of time based on some of his characteristics? The latter idea may be more favoured considering the etymology behind the name. The synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles merely present him as Thomas (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13). But the Gospel of John, the last to be written, projects Thomas four times and in three of these Thomas is presented with an additional surname "the Twin" or in Greek *"Didymus"* (Jn 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The very name Thomas which is apparently a transliteration of the Aramaic *te'oma* or the Hebrew *te'om* means 'twin'.

But how did Thomas get this additional name? Did Thomas have a twin? Who was it then? John's Gospel is silent on this issue. It is only the third century apocalyptic book *Acts of Thomas* which suggests that Thomas was Jesus' twin! And another apocryphal writing, namely the Gospel of Thomas suggests that his real name was Judas and calls him Judas Thomas. It is possible that his real name was Judas and the name Thomas was a later development. But why such a development? The only explanation for this nomenclature is a legendary tradition which has come down to us.

We had mentioned that it was the apocryphal book *Acts of Thomas* which speaks of Jesus as the twin of Thomas. This is a strange sort of revelation! The only plausible tradition seems to be that Thomas looked like Jesus Christ in external appearance and hence possibly he was jokingly called the twin of Jesus Christ[1]. And possibly this

legend grew among the Christians towards the end of the first century, and hence found its place in the fourth Gospel written around this time. And the narratives of John's Gospel in which Thomas figures prominently do bring out the notion of Thomas showing a strong emotional closeness to Jesus. His readiness to die with him, and his distressed question about where he was going, his haunting sorrow over the crucified Jesus which refuses to admit his glorious resurrection are some evidences of Thomas' affective relationship with Jesus. The apocryphal writings featuring Thomas could not have come to existence if the early Christianity did not have this tradition of Thomas having been close to the person of Jesus.

ii. His Socio-cultural Background

We may only surmise as to the birthplace of Thomas. It was probably Tiberias. That is where we find Thomas along with Peter and other disciples after they had sadly returned from Jerusalem unable to accept the tragedy that befell Jesus. They wished to resume their normal existence and hence the evangelist presents them with their traditional profession of fishing. It is only at this time that the risen Jesus appeared to them (Jn 21:1).

The town of Tiberias also figures in the fourth Gospel as a place around which Jesus did involve himself with his ministry. It was probably around here that Jesus worked his miracle of loaves (Jn 6:23). John considers the sea of Tiberias so important for him, that he makes an explicit reference to it as another name for the more popular sea of Galilee (Jn 6:1). In all probability several of Jesus' disciples including Peter, James and John could have hailed from Tiberias.

What could have been a simple fishing hamlet in the western coast of the lake of Galilee known as Rakkath earlier (Josh 19:35), became the city of Tiberias. It was founded around the year 20 AD

by Herod Antipas. It was named after Tiberius Caesar, emperor of Rome (14-37 AD). It is said that during its construction as a city several tombs were discovered rendering the site unclean for Jews. Hence Herod could have tried to fill the palace with a large gentile population. The Herodian, Roman as well as the Gentile character of the city has much to do with the character of Thomas and other disciples who could have hailed from Tiberias. They were indeed fully averse to the political domination of the Herodian dynasty as well as the colonial rule of Rome. They could have just tolerated the presence of the Gentiles that is the non-Jews among them, and did continue to cherish their marginalized status.

How about the early upbringing of Thomas? As it was the custom among the Jews, Thomas would have received his primary lessons about religion within the family itself, first from the mother and later from the father (cf. Pr 31:1; Ex 10:2; 12:26; Dt 4:9). The whip and the rod seemed to have played their part in the training of boys in Jewish families (Pr 13:24; 22:15; Dt 8:5). It is quite possible that Thomas did not learn to read at this time, as writing and reading was the luxury enjoyed by the families of the professional Scribes. Thomas could have learnt many passages from the Old Testament through the oral repetitions from the elders. He could have also learnt some trade during his youth besides his own hereditary profession that is, fishing. It is possible that he learnt some carpentry too, as a side profession. The Jewish history reveals that the first century Jewish religion and culture witnessed an extreme form of Jewish nationalism. Many a Jew was disillusioned by the blasphemous situation of foreign political domination in their land. And added to it were their sufferings due to the exorbitant taxation by these powers. Matters came to a piquant situation when Quirinius the Roman governor announced a new census with a view to increase their coffers with fresh taxation around the time of the birth of Jesus. And this was the occasion when some of the extremists indulged in a revolt against the Roman rule. They were

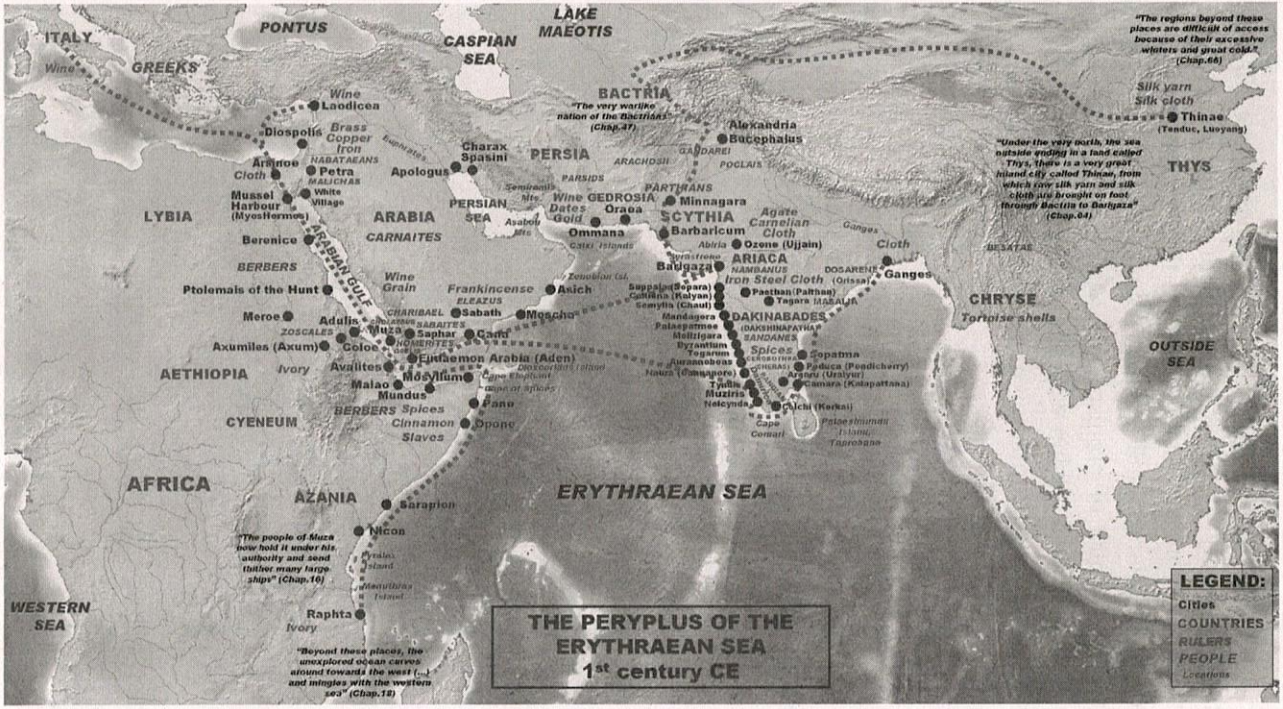
chiefly responsible for the outbreak of the rebellion against Roman rule in 66 AD. Although the actual members of the Zealot movement were not numerous, yet considering their terrorist activities against the foreign domination of their land, a lot of sympathy seems to have been gained by them from many a honest citizen of Palestine.

What would have been the attitude of Jesus towards the Zealots? Although Jesus was certainly not in favour of the oppressive foreign regimes in Palestine, yet he would not have advocated violence against them. He was sympathetic to their cause, but not agreeable to their method of agitation. There is an instance of Pilate violently dealing against some Galileans, possibly of Zealots (Lk 13:1-2). And Jesus' response to such an event is one of total compassion for them. He asks, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they are worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

We may safely construe that quite a number of Jesus' own disciples would have been in sympathy with the Zealots. As mentioned earlier perhaps some of them could have been members of the group earlier. One of the disciples is even known as Simon the Zealot. And there are scholars who maintain that Judas' betrayal of Jesus was due to his unfulfilled aspiration to make Jesus take to a political role in suppressing the Romans. And Peter openly expresses his disagreement with Jesus when he declares service and suffering to be his messianic mission (Mk 8: 31-33).

The disciples whose origin was Tiberias could have really cultivated a spirit of the Zealots considering the Herodian and Roman infiltrations in their own town. The sons of Zebedee were even known as "sons of thunder" due to their harshness towards the foreigners. At one time they even wished to command fire to come down from above and consume some Samaritans for not accepting Jesus (Lk 9:54). And how about Thomas? Some of his outbursts

like, "let us go and die with him", or "unless I see....I will not believe" do surely have the harshness of a Zealot and betray a spirit of rebellion so characteristic of this movement. Like his friends Peter, James and John, Thomas too could have been groomed in a spirit of protest against anything that was alien to them. And their discipleship with Jesus goes through several snags thanks to their earlier formation of sympathy with the Zealot cause.


ITALY
Wine
GREEKS
PONTUS
LAKE MAEOTIS
CASPIAN SEA
Wine
Laodicea
Diospolis
Brass
Copper
Iron
Eumenites
NABATAEANS
Armoue
Cloth
Petra
MALICHAS
Apologus
Charax Spasini
PERSIA
BACTRIA
"The very warlike nation of the Bactrians" (Chap.47)
Alexandria Bucephalus
GADAREI
ARACHOSH
POCLAIS
PARSIDS
PARTHIANS
Semiramis Mts
Mussel Harbour (Myos Hormos)
White Village
LYBIA
PERSIAN SEA
ARABIA
CARNAITES
Asabon Mts
Wine
Dates
Gold
GEDROSIA
Minnagara
Oraea
SCYTHIA
Agate
Carnelian
Cloth
Barbaricum
Ozene (Ujjain)
Ganges
Cloth
Ommana
Cinni Islands
Abiria
Berenice
ARABIAN GULF
BERBERS
Zenobian Gt.
Barygaza
ARIACA
NAMBANUS
DOSARENE
Ganges
Iron Steel Cloth
(Orissa)
Wine
Grain
Frankincense
ELEAZUS
Asich
Suppara (Sopara)
Calliana (Kalyan)
Semylla (Chaul)
Paethan (Paithan)
Tagara (TAGARA)
Ptolemais of the Hunt
CHARIBAEL
Sabath
Moscha
DAKINABADES
(DAKSHINAPATHA)
SANDANES
Meroe
Adulis
ZOSCALES
Saphar
Cane
Mandagora
Palaepatmae
Mellizigara
Byzantium
Togarum
Auranaboas
Nauza (Canagore)
Tyndis
Muziris
Nelcynda
Spices
Cinnamon
Slaves
Sopatma
Peduca (Pondicherry)
Arsaru (Uraiyur)
Camara (Kaveripattanam)
Calchi (Korkai)
Cape Comari
Palaesimundi Islands, Taprobane
Axumites (Axum)
Coloe
HOMERITES
Eudaemon Arabia (Aden)
Ivory
Avalites
Mosyllum
Cape Elephant
Zenobian Gt. Island
Malao
Mundus
Panu
Opone
AETHIOPIA
CYENEUM
BERBERS
Spices
Cinnamon
Slaves
AFRICA
AZANIA
Sarapion
ERYTHRAEAN SEA
Nicon
"The people of Muza now hold it under his authority and send thither many large ships" (Chap.16)
Pyralis Island
Mesathiras Island
WESTERN SEA
Raphta
Ivory
"Beyond these places, the unexplored ocean curves around towards the west (...) and mingles with the western sea" (Chap.18)
"The regions beyond these places are difficult of access because of their excessive whiters and great cold." (Chap.66)
Silk yarn
Silk cloth
Thinae
(Tenduc, Luoyang)
"Under the very north, the sea outside ending in a land called Thys, there is a very great inland city called Thinae, from which raw silk yarn and silk cloth are brought on foot through Bactria to Barigaza" (Chap.64)
THYS
BESATAE
CHRYSE
Tortoise shells
OUTSIDE SEA
THE PERYPLUS OF THE ERYTHRAEAN SEA
1st century CE
LEGEND:
Cities
COUNTRIES
RULERS
PEOPLE
Locations

Chapter 3

Thomas the Valiant

A character that has been much praised about Thomas was his - courage to cling on to Jesus in spite of possible physical dangers to his life. When Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem to be beside his friend Lazarus who had just died, Thomas stood by him although the other disciples discouraged him from taking up such a visit which would put Jesus' life in danger from the hard-core Jews there. Thomas' words on this occasion have been recalled again and again by the Christian faithful down the ages: "Let us also go that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16). The courage of Thomas was not just a spur of the moment bravado, but his audacity arising out of his conviction that the Jewish stand against Jesus was merely a self-centred abhorrence spearheaded by the self-seeking Pharisees and Scribes of Jerusalem. And Thomas was ready to be with Jesus come what may, since Jesus' mission was certainly to liberate the Jews from the throes of many a selfish Jewish leader. But in order to understand better the valiant stand taken by Thomas we should have a better understanding of the real situation in the Jewish capital of Jerusalem, and the fundamentalist Jewish leadership.

i. The Mission of Jesus in a Fundamentalist Jewish Society

The proud section of the walled city of Jerusalem was none other than the temple constructed by King Solomon in the 8th century B.C., attracting millions of Jews every year. Situated in the region of Judea, Jerusalem was also the capital city of Palestine. All the religious leaders as well as the political authorities resided in Jerusalem. The High Priest the most important person in the Jewish community not only presided over the cultic activities but was also the .president of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious council which judged all matters concerning Judaism.

Jerusalem was also a place where the Scribes and Pharisees moved around flaunting their power as they performed their respective functions. The former were the official interpreters of the Law and the latter the recognized custodians of Jewish cult and tradition.

The Jewish society was a totally theocratic one with the fundamentalist traditions of cult and Law dominating every aspect of the day to day life of people. Some of the harshest expressions of such fundamentalism were the rigid demands of Sabbath observance, and the harsh treatment meted out to the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the women, the tax collectors all of whom were considered as "sinners". In general the sinner class included all the poor of Palestine, who formed nearly eighty percent of the total population. And they were the poor agricultural farmers who were at the mercy of constant draughts and famines, the uneducated fisher-folk around the sea of Galilee, and the numerous sick population like the blind, the lame, the paralytic, the leper - most of them maimed even from birth thanks to the ill-fed mothers who begot them.

The fundamentalist Jewish religious leadership just got used to the miserable socio-economic conditions of their people and even attributed their misery as God's punishment on them. But Jesus manifested a totally different attitude towards the society of that time as he began his Kingdom mission among them.

Jesus' style of functioning was unique. He was a person totally committed to the people and catered to their spiritual as well as their temporal needs. In the midst of a life of economic poverty, social discriminations and political oppression the people set their hopes on the Messiah who would soon come and help them out of their misery. It was a time of anxious expectation. And Jesus did not belie their hopes. He gave them assurance that he had come to relieve their misery. In fact in the inauguration of his mission at

the Synagogue of Nazareth, the text of Is 60:1-2 with its clear allusions to the mission of the future Messiah to the poor and the needy was fully endorsed by Jesus with the words, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"(Lk 4:21). Here is a summary of Jesus' ministry:

- He assured people that a new society of love and justice was soon to dawn on them with such solemn proclamations as, "The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom of God is at hand...." (Mk 1:15)

- He raised the hopes of the poor by assuring them "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven!" (Mt 5:3)

- He gave comfort to everyone saying, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10)

- He defended his healings performed even on the much revered Sabbath days when all work was forbidden. His life-giving mission should not be hampered by meaningless regulations. His casual remark was, "The Sabbath was made for human kind and not human kind for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27)

- He saved the women caught in adultery going against the old law of Moses and even challenged her accusers, "let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone against her" (Jn 8:7)

The Jews of the higher class in general and those in authority like the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Priests in particular, were up in arms against Jesus even from the first days of his ministry. In the first place they were not able to accept the fact that Jesus attracted large crowds of people particularly among the poor. His mission in favour of the Kingdom of God with all its characteristics of love,

compassion, justice and equality could not but enthuse the poor and be in disagreement with the obsolete, outdated and anti-people rules and regulations of the Jewish faith. The Jewish authorities became hostile to Jesus and began to look for an opportunity to do away with him even from the earliest days of his ministry (Mk 3:8). Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish authority was aggressively hostile to Jesus.

ii. Jesus' Controversial Visits to Jerusalem

Jesus, the good Jew that he was, did not fail to go to Jerusalem and worship in the temple. But every visit of Jesus to this sacred city ended up in a controversy just because his way of functioning did not correspond with the traditional approaches of Jerusalem. In fact he challenged the Jewish authorities either directly or indirectly every time he took upon some activity in Jerusalem. Significantly the Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as making just a single solemn visit to Jerusalem and that was to undergo his passion and death. But the fourth evangelist records several visits of Jesus to Jerusalem and every visit is momentous by the controversy that is created around him. Our study of the brave declaration of Thomas to go and die with Jesus at Jerusalem should be seen in the context of these visits.

i. The first official visit of Jesus to the city of Jerusalem was to celebrate the Passover festival (Jn 2:13-25). In fact it was the cherished desire of every Jew to celebrate this most important festival of their religion at least once in Jerusalem. Wherever a Jewish family celebrated the festival with the Passover meal, it was to conclude with these noteworthy words, "Next year in Jerusalem!". The Passover reminded them of the liberation they received form Yahweh from the slavery of Egypt and it also in a way urged them to show a similar concern to the poor and the needy around them.

Jesus' first Passover visit became a big controversy because of his violent behaviour within the precincts of the temple. The temple was no doubt crowded with devotees who flocked from all over Palestine in order to make their festive offerings. But what was a purely religious affair gradually developed into a roaring business of selling birds and animals for sacrifice, and exchanging of money to make offerings. It was certainly done with the generous approval of the temple authorities, the priests, for the immense profit it brought to them. At the very first sight of this scene Jesus was incensed with anger. Taking a whip in his hand, he indulged himself in a most unexpected behaviour, namely driving the traffickers out of the temple with a violent use of the whip. Why such an aggressive action on the part of Jesus? It was his zeal for the temple! In what way was the temple contaminated? Well, the place where the marketing took place was precisely the court of the gentiles where the discriminated non-Jews were permitted to worship (Is 56:6-7). Hence the heinous crime of injustice was committed in the very temple premises. And Jesus' Kingdom mission would not accept such a blatant violation of justice. And if proof was required for the authenticity of his action, it would be given after he was killed. A new temple, namely Christianity which would become the universal temple, with membership from every ethnic race in the world, would come up with his resurrection.

The prophetic action of Jesus in the temple did have its bitter repercussions on him. The Jews eyed him with anger and hatred. His first Passover visit to Jerusalem thus ended with Jesus being considered unwanted in Jewish circles.

ii. The second visit of Jesus to Jerusalem described by Jn 5:1-18 could have been on the occasion of another festival of Passover or the feast of the Tabernacles. One more controversy comes to the fore with this visit of Jesus. The event concerns his healing of a paralytic who had suffered from his physical infirmity for over 38

years. His long cherished dream that he could be healed in the pool of Bethsaida by the healing powers of the occasional bubbling spring could never be realized, as someone ahead of him became the beneficiary of the immediate effect of the spring each time it sparkled up In such pitiful circumstances Jesus heals him immediately and asks him to go home carrying his bed as a sign that he was totally alright.

The healing event becomes a controversy simply because it took place on a Sabbath day. In the ten commandments given by God through Moses the people of Israel were asked to rest from all activities on the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-10; Dt 5:12-14). The Jewish understanding of the origin of the Sabbath with its basic tenet of a cessation of all work is linked to God himself. He takes rest and hallows the seventh day after he had completed the work of creation in the first six days (Gen 2:1-3). Hence the Sabbath had a divine connotation and had to be taken seriously.

But in the course of time certain exaggerations on Sabbath observance crept in. The Pharisees increased their self importance by assuming to be custodians of Sabbath and included many a ridiculous prohibitions interfering even with basic human rights. Some of these were like carrying a bed (Jn 5:10), nursing a sick person (Mk 3:2; Lk 13:14), picking up ears of corn to satisfy hunger (Mt 12:2), and walking further than a prescribed distance (Acts 1:12). Jesus did not condemn the Sabbath itself, bat the inhuman prohibitions attached to them. He preached that the Sabbath obligations should yield before the precept of the love of neighbour since the Sabbath. was made for man and not man for Sabbath (Mk 2:27). Besides certain essential works of God continue in process even on Sabbath day and restoration of the health of a person is certainly an essential service at which God is continuously at work. Hence Jesus' assertion near the pool of Bethsaida, "My Father is still working, and I am also working" (Jn 5:17). The event

of the Sabbath healing ended in a note of bitterness against Jesus with the Jews seeking to kill him not only for breaking the Sabbath but also for claiming that God was his Father (Jn 5:18). After this controversial visit the Jews were really looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus, and he did not wish to go about in Judea, as freely as he did in Galilee (Jn 7:1).

iii. The third visit of Jesus to Jerusalem along with his brothers was yet again on a festival, the festival of tents, another occasion for a pilgrimage to the holy city. It was essentially an agricultural festival of the ingathering of fruits (Dt 16:13-15). This festival commemorated the Israelite settlement in the greener pastures of Canaan after a difficult life in Egypt as well as the desert of Sinai. (Dt 26:6-11).

As Jesus visited Jerusalem and the temple during this festival, he began to teach the people there as his custom was. This time his teaching was of an apologetic nature, defending his work with the people. It is on the last day of the festival that Jesus makes this important but controversial revelation about his mission. The following assertions of Jesus could have further annoyed the Jewish leaders and added to their hostility. What made matters even worse was that many of the common people were gradually drifting away in his favour:

- "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the ones who believes in me drink" (Jn 7:37-38), and the immediate response of the crowd was, "This is really a prophet....This is the Messiah" (Jn 7:40)

- "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12); this statement of Jesus followed the event in which he saved the life of the woman caught in adultery, and totally bewildered her accusers, the hard-core Jews.

- "I testify on my own behalf and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf" (Jn 8:18).

- "Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). And this bold assertion of Jesus was followed by some of them picking up stones to throw at him, and he left the temple (Jn 8:59).

No doubt Jerusalem, the temple precincts, and the neighburhood surrounding it were quite dangerous for Jesus as well as his disciples. And Bethany was just two kilometers away from Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders had built up a systematic hatred against Jesus, and they were convinced that he could not be permitted any more to continue with his mission of defying their age-old traditions. Their leadership ran the risk of being rejected by the people. That would mean a total change of Jewish perspectives and outlooks. Hence their animosity against Jesus. And Jesus was bent on going to Bethany to show his love for the family of Lazarus, and to raise him up in spite of the dangers to his life.

Thomas, the Valiant

Thomas' determined courage to support Jesus and follow him even to death does indeed leave a very favourable impact on his behalf. How come that he stands apart from the rest of the apostles in his valiant support for Jesus? Certainly Thomas was possessed of a character which depicted a deep commitment to the person and message of Jesus. He had simply developed a mature personality over the years and this bore fruit at a critical stage of his discipleship with Jesus. This astonishing character trait of Thomas could also have been reflected by the fourth Gospel from an enterprising role he had been playing in the first century Christian community where this Gospel had developed.

Then what about the stubbornness which the same Apostle Thomas had manifested a few days later in not accepting the resurrection

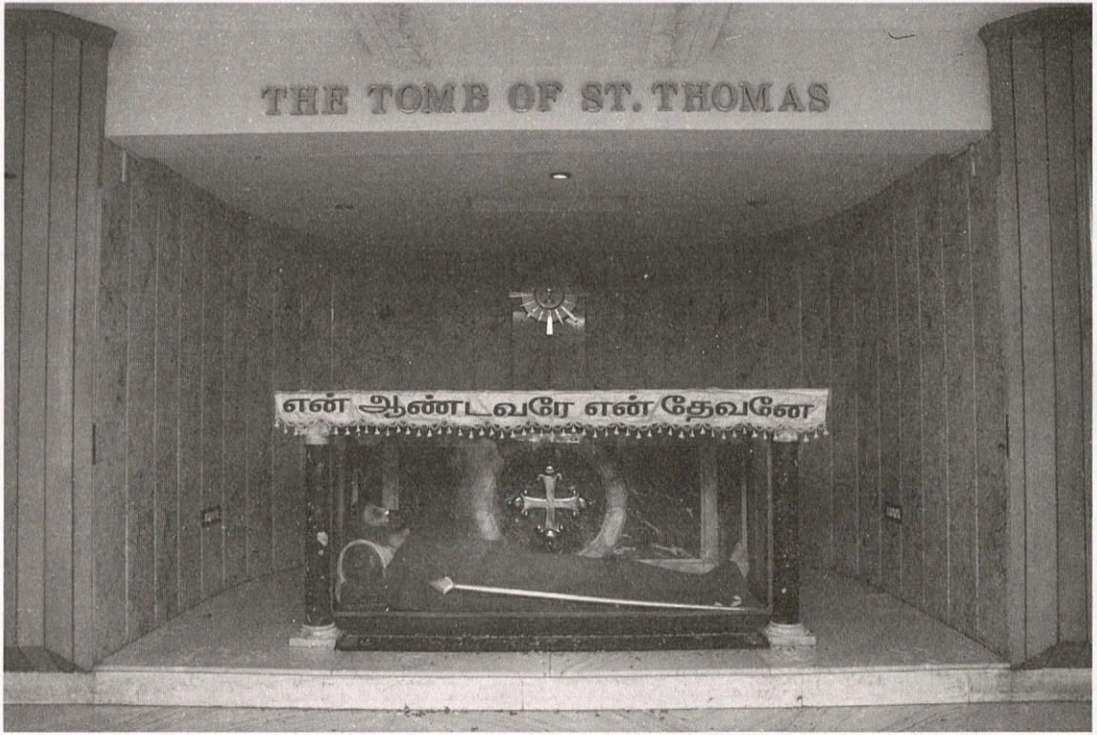
of the same Jesus? As mentioned earlier here too he was honestly representing the prevalent sentiments of his times; but what is again more important is that it is Thomas who makes a total reversal of the sentiment of doubt with his excellent attitude of faith and total surrender to Jesus. Here again the Apostle has shown his, valiant personality. He had the courage to reverse his position when he was made to confront the real truth about Jesus. The wounds received by Jesus on the Cross which have been haunting him are now presented to him as the triumphant marks of the risen Jesus. And he did not need any more proof as he surrendered with his profound confession, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28)



The Gothic Cathedral at Mylapore, built in 1893.

Part Two

APOCRYPHAL TRADITIONS ON ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE



Tomb of St. Thomas in the Cathedral at San Thome.

Chapter 1

What do the Apocryphal Books tell?

In this section we shall satisfy our curiosity as to the contents of the apocryphal books which have come up in the Church in the name of St. Thomas the Apostle. In the first chapter we shall discuss the first four of these books which contain a general doctrine which in a way corroborates the truth contained in the New Testament. In the second chapter we shall look into one particular apocryphal book known as the *Acts of Thomas* and one that is most relevant for our purpose as it contains some important insights about the mission of the Apostle in India. And in the third we shall also search for some issues which make these apocryphal writings relevant for us in our study of Thomas.

We have a fair idea of St. Thomas and his character from the writings of the Gospel traditions of the New Testament, particularly from the last written Gospel of St. John. What happened to this exceptionally brave and nonetheless stubborn Thomas is not referred to in the only officially recognized history of the early Church, "the Acts of the Apostles". The Acts apparently wishes to speak of the ministry of the apostles, but ends up speaking only of just a few of them and that too a ministry carried out in the vicinity of Palestine, that is Asia Minor and then Rome. Luke the author of the Acts is modest about the area covered by his historic account of the early Church namely the mission of the apostles exercised in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). His notion of the ends of the earth did not go beyond Rome, the then centre of the civilized world. It is only Peter, Paul and to some extent John whose ministry is mentioned in the Acts. What about the other apostles? Did they not also take the mandate of Jesus Christ to "go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation"? (Mk 16:15). And where are

we to find records of their missionary activities? In the absence of any records of such missionary ventures of the rest of the apostles in the canonically accepted books of the Bible, we have to look for them in the literature termed as apocryphal which also arose in the early Church.

What is the apocryphal literature and how does it throw light on the missionary ventures of St. Thomas the Apostle? The Greek word *apocryphos* simply means 'hidden', A literature whose authenticity is doubtful and whose authorship is apparently of a doubtful nature, has been termed as apocryphal, or of a hidden or veiled character. But there has been an abundance of such literature particularly surrounding some biblical personalities like Adam and Eve, Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Enoch and Ezra of the Old Testament, as well as of Peter, Paul, James, Thomas, John, Andrew, Bartholomew, and Philip of the New Testament. There are interesting accounts of the life and activities of these personalities not found in the so called authentic canonical literature officially accepted by the Church.

Do the books of the apocryphal literature have any value? Certainly they do. We cannot discard them totally as arising from the whims and fancies of whoever authored them. There could have been several of them. The authors do have some points to make for the people of their time. These writings also do have some historical facts about them, but perhaps somewhat exaggerated with the additions of folklore for the purpose of impressing upon the readers. The apocryphal writings are embellished with stories and legendary details to the extent that often the main event having a historical foundation gets lost. It is to be noted that the apocryphal literature does help us in our search to know more about the life and ministry of several biblical personalities.

It is quite interesting to note that Thomas the apostle is one of those heroes of the early Church who is credited with the apocryphal literature, a sign that he was quite a popular figure in the early

Church. He is particularly associated with the Syrian-Churches. Eusebius quotes Origin as saying that Thomas preached in the eastern parts of Syria and his body was venerated at Edessa since the 4th century (Hist. Eccl. 3.1.1).

The following apocryphal books are associated with Thomas the Apostle and do throw some light on the stature he held in early Church. A short comment on each of them and how they give us a notion on the Apostle Thomas will not be out of place here.

i. The Book of Thomas the Contender
ii. The Gospel of Thomas
iii. Infancy Gospel of Thomas
iv. Apocalypse of Thomas
v. Acts of Thomas

i. The Book of Thomas the Contender[2]

This book could have been composed in the first half of the 3rd century A.D. Thomas is mentioned here as Jude surnamed Thomas. Probably Jude was the original name of the apostle. The Greek name Didymus, the twin, which is a translation of Thomas as mentioned earlier, could have been added later to suit the Greek audiences. This book, as also the other apocryphal books on Thomas rose out of traditions native to Edessa in Syria. The character of Thomas is presented in the book as a valiant person who contends against the temptations of the flesh.

This writing has a long dialogue between Jesus and Jude Thomas in the form of questions and answers almost like a book of Catechism. It looks as if Jesus after his resurrection, and just before his ascension to heaven had decided to give a summary of his teaching and add also some insights to his doctrine to a few of his select disciples. Among them was also Thomas. And it looks as if Thomas had some special claim to such a special revelation for

his being a "twin" of Jesus, by reason of his external appearance as mentioned earlier. The new insights to Jesus' teaching in this book mostly pertain to the ascetical aspects of a Christian life. There is a strong insistence that the passions of the body may drag a person away from his real Christian character and drive him to the fires of hell. Our body needs to be controlled by discipline. And hence various pieces of advice are given by Jesus through Thomas towards a Christian regulation.

What is of great interest for us is that whoever authored a work of this kind to help the early Christian community with disciplinary measures chose Thomas to be an instrument of such a revelation. This only enhances his status in the community.

ii. The Gospel of Thomas[3]

This Gospel could have been composed sometime between the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. It was discovered at Nag Hammidi in Egypt in 1945 and published in 1958. The Gospel contains a series of proverbs, parables and sayings of Jesus and exhibits certain Gnostic ideas popular in the early Church. Jesus is presented as the speaker with Thomas writing down what he hears from Jesus. It is quite evident that this book too had its origin in the traditions of Syriac speaking Churches where Thomas had been revered.

The Gospel of Thomas differs from the canonical Gospels of the New Testament. The canonical Gospels present Jesus with an active ministry which consisted of his physical movement from place to place and his active involvement with people. His proclamations and miracles were part of his ministry. But the Gospel of Thomas has a different approach. It offers salvation through an encounter with the sayings of "living Jesus". The readers of the Gospel of Thomas are invited to drink deep of the wisdom of Jesus contained in his sayings and thus spiritually enrich themselves. People would discover the Kingdom of God only within

the sayings of Jesus and not outside of them since they make us the "children of the living Father". We become fully identified with Jesus through accepting his sayings. Saying 108 of the Gospel of Thomas makes this idea clear: "Jesus said, 'Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me: I myself will become that person, and hidden things will be revealed to them".

The main issue of the Gospel of Thomas seems to be to project Jesus as the teacher of wisdom. A distinctive community of Jesus' followers was formed to propagate that wisdom. Thomas was the spokesperson of that community. It is a great honour conferred on our Apostle by an early Christian community.

Most scholars are of the opinion that the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas has had its influence from the Gnostic teachings of the time which propagated the importance of knowledge as the source of salvation, as against involvement in activities.

Our concern with regard to the Gospel of Thomas is again more on the person of Thomas rather than on the content of the Gospel. He had been chosen as the channel of a deep wisdom which in fact corroborates on several aspects of the message already contained in the canonical gospels which embrace the day to day life. Why was Thomas chosen to be the agent of Jesus to convey such a corroborative message? What made the followers of Jesus in the flourishing Christian community to make Thomas the hero of their writings? As presented in the fourth Gospel written in the nineties of the Christian era, Thomas had emerged as a popular figure in the early Church. He was considered as a firm follower of Jesus enhancing the faith of the Christians of the time.

iii. The "Infancy Gospel" of Thomas[4]

This is another writing from the middle of the 2nd century A.D., containing many a miracle attributed to Jesus in his infant or boyhood stage. It is simply part of the folklore of the time. The boy

Jesus between the age of five and twelve is presented as one who performs such miracles. While the Gospel of Thomas presents a sage-like Jesus with attributes of wisdom, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas depicts the boy-Jesus with a playful temperament and the stories attributed to him at this stage of his life do have a frivolous character about them. This apocryphal work too has a Syrian tradition behind it and the fact that Thomas was a great hero in the early Syrian Christian community gave rise to this account too under this spurious authorship. The story line is as follows:

1. There is a prologue in which Thomas speaks in the first person.
2. When Jesus is five years old he cleans the pools of water and brings twelve clay sparrows to life.
3. Jesus strikes dead the son of Annas the Scribe
4. Jesus strikes dead a young boy who bumps into him.
5. Joseph rebukes Jesus for his playfulness and he then strikes his detractors blind.
6. Zacchaeus attempts to teach Jesus the alphabets, but Jesus confounds his teacher.
7. Zacchaeus speaks to the people and praises the powers of Jesus.
8. Jesus laughs, speaks as a heavenly redeemer and then heals those whom he struck blind.
9. Jesus' playmate Zenon dies from a fall and Jesus raises him from the dead.
10. A young man cuts his foot with an axe and Jesus heals him.
11. At six years of age Jesus saves the water spilt from a broken jug.
12. When Jesus is eight years old he sows a single seed and harvests hundred measures.
13. Jesus stretches a piece of wood which Joseph cut too short.

14. Joseph takes Jesus to another teacher, but again Jesus responds in such a way that the teacher becomes unconscious.
15. A third teacher tries to teach him, but Jesus teaches him Law and then heals the other teacher.
16. Joseph's son James is bitten by a viper and Jesus heals him.
17. A child dies and Jesus raises him from death
18. A workman dies and Jesus raises him from death.
19. At twelve years of age Jesus and his parents go to the temple of Jerusalem for the Passover festival.
20. A brief editorial conclusion.

Thomas and Jesus' Infancy

What strikes us most about the Infancy Gospel of Thomas is that it seems to be answering the question of how Jesus spent his infancy or his boyhood, that is, from the age five to the age of twelve, when he went to the temple of Jerusalem with his parents. Since the canonical Gospels give a very scanty information (Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2), the early Christians did need some more insights and they are provided with some exciting events pertaining to the boyhood of Jesus. Many of these events are certainly folkloristic and somewhat frivolous in nature but they did serve to help the faith of the people in the divine character of Jesus. There are scholars who also attribute some of these miracle stories of the boyhood of Jesus as possibly belonging to the later "hidden years" of Jesus as a young man, that is from twelve to thirty, about which too the Gospels are silent. The term 'infancy' could refer to the whole period of Jesus' 'hidden years'.

Our more important question is how Thomas could be associated with the infancy stories pertaining to Jesus. He was certainly not associated with the infancy or the boyhood of Jesus as a playmate

at Nazareth or elsewhere. But the community or the individual who compiled these stories made use of the name of Thomas, for his popularity in the community would have been quite great. Such tactics of pseudonymous adoptions were quite common in those days. And our attitude of esteem and regard for St. Thomas only increases that his stature in the early Church of Syria was remarkable.

iv. The Apocalypse of Thomas [5]

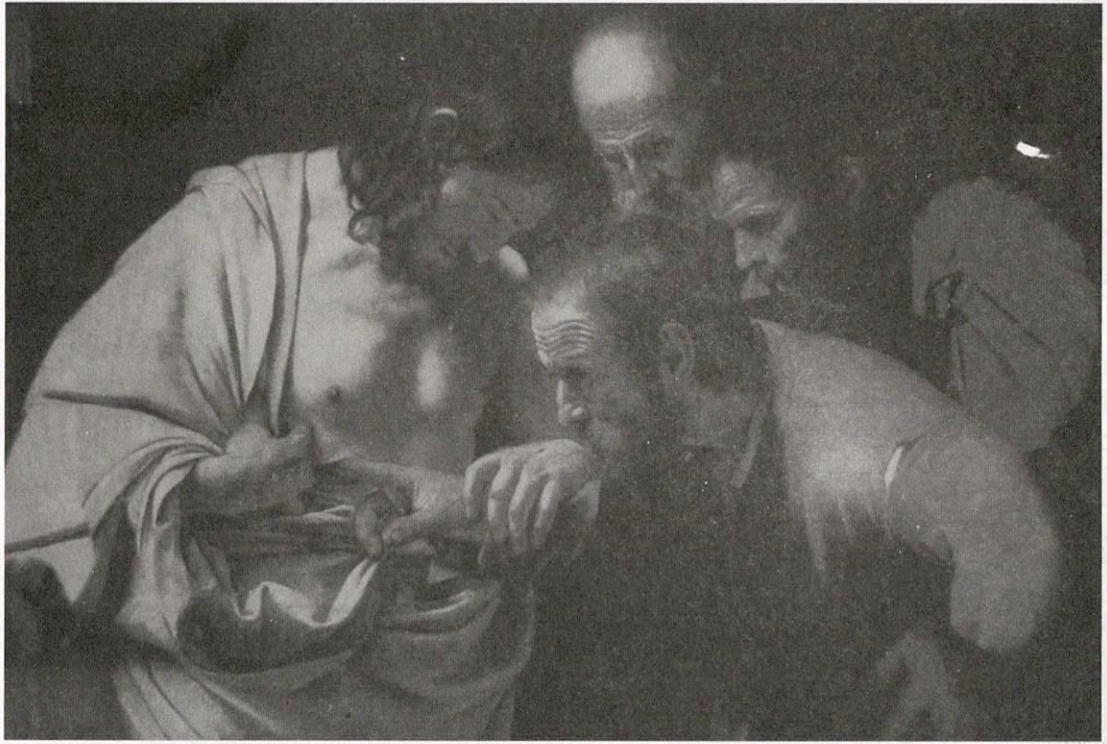
This is yet another book attributed to Thomas, and it describes the events that were to occur before the end of the world. This could have been composed in the 5th century A.D or even earlier. The content of this book is as follows:

It begins with a revelation of Jesus to Thomas. Jesus identifies himself as "the Son of God the Father" and "Father of all spirits" and makes Thomas aware of the "signs which will be at the end of the world". These will take place over a period of seven days.

- On the first day it will rain blood on the earth
- On the second day smoke will cover the whole earth.
- On the third day pillars of smoke and stench of sulfur will fill the earth.
- On the fourth day an earthquake will topple all the pagan idols.
- On the fifth day darkness will cover the whole earth.
- On the sixth day people will hide from the angels of justice and the bodies of the saints will arise.
- On the seventh day the angels will make a war and deliver the elect who have believed in Jesus. They will rejoice over the destruction of the world.

This book has quite some similarities with the Book of Revelation in the Bible, where John the Apostle is the recipient of a divine revelation regarding the persecution of Christians in Rome and the

end of the world. Here in a later apocalyptic literature the recipient is another apostle, Thomas. Once again the stature of Thomas is enhanced in the sense that he was considered with respect in the early Church.



St. Thomas touching the wounds of Jesus Christ

Chapter 2

Acts of Thomas[6]

Of all the apocryphal writings on Thomas, this is the most relevant one for us in India. And it is the only document of the early Church which offers us an assurance of the mission of Thomas in India. This writing is also of Syrian origin and comes out from the city of Edessa where Thomas has been specially venerated. The first version of this work could have been of the 2nd or 3rd century A.D., when much of the apocryphal literature came to light. But this version could have been later expanded to include many more legends and thus enhance the mission of the apostle. The enlarged Syrian version belongs possibly to the 5th or 6th century A.D. The Greek version is of even later origin, possibly of the 10th or 11th century A.D.

A careful survey of the contents of this work consisting of 171 small chapters in 13 acts conveys to us the mission of Thomas in India under various dimensions. This writing no doubt combines popular legends with useful instructions. And we may certainly accept that there is a nucleus of reliable history surrounded by a folklore often bordering on a lighter side of the missionary activities of the apostle. There is a historical foundation to this book as accepted by scholars. Names of princes historically attested in the northern India do find a place in the *Acts of Thomas.* The main content of this book is Thomas' presence in India and his missionary activities. A long treatise of this type cannot be a total fabrication of imagination. We shall now venture to see summarily the major contents of this book.

i. Thomas with King Gundaphar

The first act (chaps. 1-16) begins with the distribution of mission territories among the apostles in Jerusalem. Thomas is reluctant to

undertake his assignment to India. Jesus his master sells him to an Indian merchant, Haban, who has come to Palestine seeking a skilled craftsman. Thomas submits to God's will and departs with his new owner. On the way to India they stop in a city - Sandrok in Syriac, Andropolis in Greek - where a royal wedding is in progress. At the banquet Thomas encounters a Hebrew flutist for whom he sings the Hymn of the Bride (chaps. 6-7). A waiter insults Thomas but soon meets with a dire fate in accordance with the apostle's prediction. The prophecy brings Thomas to the attention of the king, who requires of him a nuptial blessing for his daughter. After Thomas prays for the bride and groom, Jesus appears to the couple and converts them to celibacy, to the dismay of the parents. Before the king can react, Thomas departs.

In the second act (chaps.17-29), Thomas, now already in India, is interviewed by King Gundaphar, for whom the apostle undertakes to construct a palace. With the king's abundant supplies Thomas initiates a programme of relief for the poor while preaching the Gospel. Gundaphar, on an inspection visit, discovers the truth about Thomas' activity. He is displeased for wasting his funds on the poor rather than building the palace. He imprisons the apostle with the merchant Haban. While they languish in jail awaiting punishment, the king's brother, Gad, dies and goes to heaven, where angels show him various mansions. He requests to dwell in one of them but is told that it belongs to his brother. Gad obtains permission to return to earth to purchase the property, whereupon Gundaphar finally understands the sort of palace Thomas had been constructing. Both royal brothers are converted and seek initiation. In the first major liturgical passage, Thomas anoints the two royals, preaches, and celebrates the Eucharist.

In the third act (chaps. 30-38) Thomas, instructed by a nocturnal vision, discovers the corpse of a youth. A serpent claims responsibility and then sings of his diabolical lineage. At Thomas'

command the serpent sucks his poison from the youth and dies. The youth then happily comes back to his life. All of this prompts a series of homilies from Thomas advocating an ascetical life and promising forgiveness to the youth and other bystanders.

In the fourth act (chaps. 39-41) Thomas is brought to the city riding on a donkey. The donkey talks and claims its descent from Balaam's donkey in the Old Testament Book of Numbers. The donkey dies after Thomas reaches the city, and he orders that the donkey be given a proper burial.

In the fifth act (chaps.42-50) Thomas is confronted by a woman possessed by a demon. Thomas exorcizes the demon, who complains at length before being expelled. After an elaborate prayer Thomas baptizes the woman and celebrates the Eucharist.

In the sixth act (chaps. 51-61) Thomas is told of a youth crippled at the reception of the Eucharist. An inquiry reveals that the youth had tried to convince a beloved prostitute to embrace celibacy. Her refusal provoked him to kill her. Thomas prepares holy water to cleanse him but he remains in despair. The apostle brings him to the victim's corpse, where, prompted by Thomas, the youth prays and revives the woman, who gives a graphic account of hell and the punishments in store for the wicked (chaps. 55-57). Inspired by this vision, Thomas preaches repentance and conversion to Jesus, the fulfillment of Scripture. Prayers of praise and requests for divine aid close the section.

ii. Thomas with King Misdai

In the seventh act (chaps. 62-68) Thomas encounters a character prominent in the rest of the work who will finally (chap.169) be ordained a presbyter. He is a military commander, later identified as Siphor, who serves King Misdai. He seeks assistance for his wife and daughter possessed by demons. The apostle departs with him, after praying for his flock and appointing a deacon in his place.

In the eighth act (chaps.68-81) Thomas and Siphor travel together until the animals drawing their cart drop from exhaustion. Thomas sends Siphor to request assistance from a herd of wild asses who readily comply. One of these animals is endowed with speech like the donkey in the fourth act. Thomas prays and sends this donkey to exorcise the demons who possess Siphor's wife and daughter. The donkey does so, rendering the women unconscious. The demons try to strike a bargain with Thomas, but he rejects their offer. The asses then preach, urging the crowds to listen to the apostle. Thomas offers a lengthy doxology to Christ, restores the women to consciousness, and dismisses the helpful beasts.

In the long ninth act (chaps. 82-118) the romantic dramas become more prominent. A noble woman, Mygdonia, wife of a high royal counselor, Carish, comes to hear Thomas preach. After a sermon on chastity, humility, and related virtues, she asks to be baptized, and Thomas admonishes her to forsake the world. That night she refuses to eat or sleep with her husband, who has a symbolic dream ?bout an eagle who snatches a partridge from him. Mygdonia hints at the interpretation of the eagle as Thomas and the partridge as herself. With a tense farewell, Carish goes to attend on the king, while Mygdonia seeks out Thomas. Later Carish confronts Mygdonia and piteously entreats her to return to his bed and board. But she prays to be delivered from him and flees. After a bitter soliloquy Carish complains to King Misdai, who summons Siphor. While Thomas questions Mygdonia about her husband, the king questions the commander, who explains how Thomas healed his wife and daughter. The king authorizes Carish to arrest Thomas, who is interrogated, scourged, and imprisoned. The apostle offers a prayer of thanksgiving that echoes numerous gospel texts. He then launches into a poetic reflection, the Hymn of the Pearl (chaps. 108-113). Carish returns home to find Mygdonia unkempt and in squalid attire. After emotional appeals to give up her religious folly, he finally tries to bargain Thomas' life for Mygdonia's love.

She remains adamant. Still unbaptized, she yearns to see Thomas, takes money for bribes, and hides from her husband.

In the tenth act (chaps. 119-133) the conflict intensifies. While Mygdonia is in hiding with Marcia her nurse, Thomas comes to her. Marcia provides bread, water, and oil. Thomas blesses the oil, baptizes the two women, and celebrates the Eucharist before returning tc prison. Dawn finds Carish in a dramatic confrontation with Mygdonia while King Misdai again interrogates Thomas. The king advises and Carish implores Thomas to convince Mygdonia to return to her husband. Thomas accompanies Carish to his home and advises Mygdonia to obey her husband, but she refuses. Thomas returns to Siphor, who requests baptism. The apostle preaches, baptizes, then celebrates the Eucharist with Siphor and his family.

In the eleventh act (chaps. 134-138) Thomas gets into deeper trouble. Misdai tells the story of Mygdonia to his own wife, Tertia, whom he urges to visit Mygdonia. Tertia complies, but Mygdonia preaches Thomas' Gospel. Tertia, enthralled, visits Thomas, then tries to evangelize the king. An exasperated Misdai finds Carish and together they seek to arrest Thomas.

In the twelfth act (chaps. 139-149) Thomas continues to make important converts. Vizan, the king's son, assumes command of the soldiers guarding Thomas and the apostle preaches to him. Misdai tries to interrogate Thomas under torture, but the instrument of torture, a set of hot slabs, is miraculously neutralized by a sudden flood, which threatens to submerge the area until stopped by Thomas' prayer. Thomas then bids his followers farewell and prays.

In the thirteenth and final act (chaps. 150-171) Vizan asks Thomas to visit his ailing wife. Mygdonia, Marcia, and Tertia, miraculously freed from imprisonment, come and, like the friends of Socrates,

seek to take Thomas into exile. Tertia explains how they came to the prison, guided by a divine visitation. Thomas leads his visitors in prayer and song. Vizan, sent to bring necessities, meets his wife, Mnesara, miraculously healed and guided to the prison. All assemble at Vizan's house, where Mnesara recognizes Thomas as her healer. Thomas prays, blesses the oil, then anoints and baptizes Vizan. Mygdonia baptizes Mnesara and Tertia. Thomas celebrates the Eucharist, then returns to prison for a final farewell. After the guards report to Misdai the strange comings and goings of the night, there follows another dramatic encounter between Misdai and Thomas, reminiscent of that between Pilate and Jesus. The king orders Thomas to be removed and killed by piercing him with a spear. Thomas compares his fate to that of Jesus, bids final farewell to his friends, and prays before being slain. After his death he appears to several of his followers. Later Misdai searches for Thomas' bones, with which to heal an ailing son. They have been taken West, but the king uses dust from the tomb area to good effect. After Thomas appears to him he is brought to Siphor, now a presbyter, and requests prayers. The work ends on this happy note, with the persecutor brought to the threshold of conversion.

iii. Jesus and Thomas parallels in the Acts of Thomas:

1. Thomas, who was a fisherman, is represented as being a carpenter, so that he may have the same occupation as Jesus.
2. He is also represented as preparing mansions in heaven, like Jesus.
3. He is sold for twenty pieces of silver, as our Lord was sold for thirty pieces.
4. He heals sick persons, paralytics, lunatics.
5. He casts out devils.
6. He raises the dead.

7. After restoring two women, who seemed to be dead, he bade their servants give them some food.
8. The people crowd around him so that they tread on one another.
9. He rides on donkey just as Jesus did.
10. As he is dragged away to be tried by King Misdai a courtier says, "Let us see if Jesus will deliver him from my hands".
11. When examined by Misdai, he gives him no answer as Jesus before Pilate.
12. At a later point, he says to Misdai, "Thou hast not power over me as thou thinkest".
13. He is scourged.
14. As Jesus was handed over to the soldiers and a centurion for crucifixion, so in the Greek text, Thomas is handed over to four soldiers and an officer. In the Syriac text the number is indefinite.
15. He is pierced with spears and dies.
16. His body is wrapped in linen.
17. He is buried in the tomb of the former kings, as Jesus was buried in the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
18. After his martyrdom, Thomas appeared to his followers, just as Jesus appeared to his disciples on several occasions.

Before we venture upon the issues that are relevant for the mission of Thomas here in India, we may note two important factors which even a casual reader would not fail to note in the Acts *of Thomas*. The first factor is that the author is quite interested to present the story of Thomas in a way that parallels with the life of Jesus Christ himself. We can understand the preoccupation of the author who wishes to project his hero Thomas the Apostle who comes closest to his master and mentor Jesus Christ. The second is the Indian

factor. The author may not be familiar with India, its geography or its political history. But he is sure of his hero having done a wonderful apostolate in that far away land. He would like to present him as a missionary *par excellence* following the ways of Jesus himself.

Chapter 3

Acts of Thomas in Indian Setting

i. "India" in the Acts of Thomas

The Acts of Thomas does abound in legends as is characteristic of any apocryphal literature. What is of interest to us in India are certain factors in the book which touch upon our land and the mission of Thomas here. In the first place the mention of India in a writing which had originated in remote Syria and that too in a remote period of time when communications were in a primitive state does boost our belief that our country did have an association with the apostle Thomas. The text of the *Acts of Thomas* has these words of Thomas when India fell to his lot: "I am a Hebrew; how can I teach the Indians?" When he was further coaxed upon to accept this assignment he seems to have insisted stubbornly, "Whithersoever Thou wilt, O Lord, send me: only to.India I will not go..." This stubbornness of character is familiar to those who know Thomas from the Gospel of John where his attachment to Jesus borders on obstinacy. At a time when there seemed to have been a danger at Jerusalem to Jesus and the other disciples, and Jesus expressed a desire to visit the place for the sake of his friend Lazarus, he directly opposed the fears of the other disciples with the words, "Let us also go that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16). But why was Thomas so stubborn about not taking up India as his place of mission? He was possibly skeptical about his success there considering the total strangeness of the land with its alien language and culture. And could he really, accept a divine mission of difficult proportions and do justice to the task ahead of him? That should have been his legitimate preoccupation! But he changed his mind and accepted the mission, thanks to the great faith he had nurtured around Jesus.

ii. King Gundaphar of Gandhara

A second reassuring factor in the *Acts of Thomas* regarding the apostle's mission in India is the mention in this narrative of one Gundaphar as the king of India. We may set aside all the stories surrounding such a person as narrated in the *Acts of Thomas!* But there is no sufficient reason to set aside the very existence of the king by such a name. Till the middle of the 19th century there was no sufficient historical evidence for him and he was considered legendary. However a large number of coins discovered in Kabul or Kandahar and in the western and southern parts of Punjab, bear the name of Gondophares. According to investigations made by scholars one may reasonably say that the period of this Gondophares of the coins is between 20 and 45 A.D. His kingdom lay around Peshwar.

Do the *Acts of Thomas* give any historic basis for the mission of Thomas in India? With the discovery of the coins of Gondophares many an archeologist do seem to accept such a possibility. And Thomas could have visited the courts of kings during his visit in India, and one of them could be the Gondophares of the Takh-ti-Bahi inscription and coins. He was evidently the ruler of an extensive territory which included as part of it much more of India than simply a portion of the Peshwar district. Later writings have identified this ruler as King Gundaphar of Gandhara with his capital at the ancient Takshasila, famed as a centre for learning[3].

The first part of the *Acts of Thomas* seems to recount the fact that Thomas did spend part of his ministry in the northern part of India, in the Parthian empire and it is only then that he travelled towards the southern part of India. It is to be noted that according to Origen (A.D 200-251) it was Parthia which fell to the lot of Thomas at the division of regions among the apostles for their missionary enterprises. And Parthians figure in the big list of various ethnic races who were in Jerusalem influenced by the Pentecost

outpouring. This Parthia lay in the north western part of India comprising of the present Pakistan, and possibly also parts of Afghanistan, and hence not too far from India. Hence if the *Acts of Thomas* asserts that the territory that fell to the lot of Thomas was India, it is quite understandable since Parthia was on the borders of India.

iii. King Misdai of South India?

The second part of the Acts speaks of the ministry of Thomas in the land of King Misdai also known as Masdai, Mesdai or Misdaios (Greek) and Misdeus (Latin). Who was this king and what was the location of his kingdom? *The Acts of Thomas* simply presents him as another king in whose kingdom the apostle had his ministry. At the conversion of the queen the king got annoyed with the apostle and ordered him to be slain and hence he became a martyr.

While some scholars think that the personage of Misdai is simply fictitious, there are others who think that the name is a corruption of Vasudeva[8] possibly one Kanishka's successors. There are also scholars who identify Misdai with Mahadeva, a potentate in South India. In fact the general tenor of the second part of the *Acts of Thomas'* from Acts 9 onwards does have a south Indian flavour with the presence of carts drawn by bulls or donkeys as ordinary means of transport, as well as of palanquins for ladies of the royal families. There is also a South Indian touch in the description of reiterated ablutions before meals, the garments of mourning and the sashtanga namaskara. In short we may admit a skeleton of history in the midst of an abundance of court tales and royal intrigues very characteristic of the South Indian royal households'.

Many scholars read in the Acts *of Thomas* two areas of Thomas' mission in India: the first in the Parthian empire where he came as far as the Indo-Scythian border province of Kandahar; and after some interval he made a second trip to India and this time to the

southern parts of the country, when he evangelized Malabar as well as the Coromandal coast. And it is also surmised that after the first part of his mission namely in the north western parts of India, Thomas went back to Palestine after hearing of the death of Mary in 48 A.D., and returned to India only after the Council of Jerusalem in 50 A.D.

iv. Acts of Thomas with South Indian Nomenclature.

Our discussion on the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle in India has been only from the remote insights we receive from the apocryphal writing, *Acts of Thomas*[10]. Before we conclude this section on the apocryphal background to the mission of Thomas we should say that there are scholars who are somewhat skeptical about the historic link between Gondophares and Thomas. They claim that neither the coins-of Gondophares nor the inscriptions at Takt-i-bahi have anything to do with Thomas[11]. But against this extreme position, a great majority of scholars hold a more favourable position, almost re-reading the Acts of Thomas, with Indian, nay South Indian nomenclature. If we divest this book of its fictitious elements then what we have is that St. Thomas came to India, preached the Gospel in the Kingdom of a certain king known as Gundaphar or Gondophares, and converted him to Christianity and many others along with him. He then proceeded to another kingdom and this time he converted the queen and several others; the king was angered at the audacity of the Apostle and had him killed. Thus Thomas died as a martyr.

Those who take the *Acts of Thomas* with a more positive approach, approve of the south Indian apostolate of Thomas even more enthusiastically. They base themselves on the second part of the *Acts* which does contain a south Indian flavour as to the customs and manners described there. And they maintain that many a name mentioned in the Kingdom of Masdai are just alterations of the original names common in the Coromandel coast which was the

second major part of Thomas' mission in India. There has been some imaginative reconstruction of the names of persons and places making Thomas' work around Mylapore a greater reality. The following text may invite our smiles but it is quite relevant for our story here".

"Some of the names mentioned in the Acts, in connection with the visit of the Apostle to the Coromandel Coast, have been considered fictitious by certain writers, while others have declared them to have stood for real characters and given them Indian names of their choice. Sifur has been changed into Sitaraman, Sinthice into Sinna-Achi, Mygdonia into Magudani, Carish into Krishna, Narkia into Nari and Tertia into Thirupathi. It is true that the names as they stand in the acts have a foreign tinct except Vizan, which indicates the son of King Masdai. The change from Vijayan to Vizan is really understandable. One of the female characters is called Mygdonia. It is the name of a country situated on the Macedonian Coast. The author of the Acts must have used the term to denote a South Indian lady called Mangaladevi or Mangaladayini. Carish, a male character, appears in certain texts as Chariseus, or Caritius. It is possible that the Indian name Karuisan (one who has Karu as his Lord) became Karish, at the hands of the writer of the *Acts*. Karu is an epithet for the God Siva, in Sankskrit. Similarly, Tharika (protecting), Maneswari (lady of the heart), Nari-Mukya (chief maid), and Sinna-Achi, must have become respectively Tertia, Manashar, Narsika and Sindiche, at the hands of the foreign scribe. The General appears as Sifur in the acts; the term seems to have been derived from Sipra in Sanskrit, which denotes any one of the following: Moon, Yama, and Siva. Soma, meaning Moon, is a common name among the Hindus in South India. In the same way, Sipra must have been in vogue as a personal name. These considerations on the nomenclature in the Acts of Judas Thomas also will force us to conclude that St. Thomas, after leaving the Kingdom in South India had his subsequent Apostolate on the

Coromandel Coast mainly among the Hindu population of the region?

It is also of interest to us that there are writers who even associate Gondophares with a south Indian king, more precisely a king from Tamilnadu, Kandapparasa. And the following write up about the re-reading of names is bound to bring up more smiles as to the mission of Thomas around Mylapore".

"Some historical writers refer to Kandapparasa or Kandapparajah as the rule of the kingdom on the Coromandel Coast, where St.Thomas preached the Gospel and try to maintain that Kandaparasa is only a variation of the name Gondophares of the Acts of Judas Thomas. This hypothesis has led to the inference that the incident of the miraculous palace building related in the *Acts* occurred in South India and not in the North. We have already found that the miracle of the celestial palace building took place at Taxila, the capital of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares, who ruled in North India with his dominions adjacent to the river Indus. Thus, the attempt to identify Kandapparasa with the Indo-Parthian Gondophares becomes gratuitous. The similarity in sound between Kandaparasa and Gondophares carries us nowhere. The existence of a South Indian ruler named Kandapparasa as the contemporaiy of the Apostle St. Thomas, leads us to the conclusion that King Masdai alias Mahadeva of the Acts of Judas Thomas must have been none other than the Kandapparasa under reference. Kandapparasa occurs as the combination of two words, Kandappa and Arasa; Kandappa, a personal name, and Arasa, the titular term. With this splitting up of the word Kandapparasa into its two component parts, the affinity in sound between Gondophares and Kandapparasa does not deserve serious consideration at all".

Conclusion

We may conclude this section on the apocryphal literature and the role they play in unearthing certain character traits of Thomas the

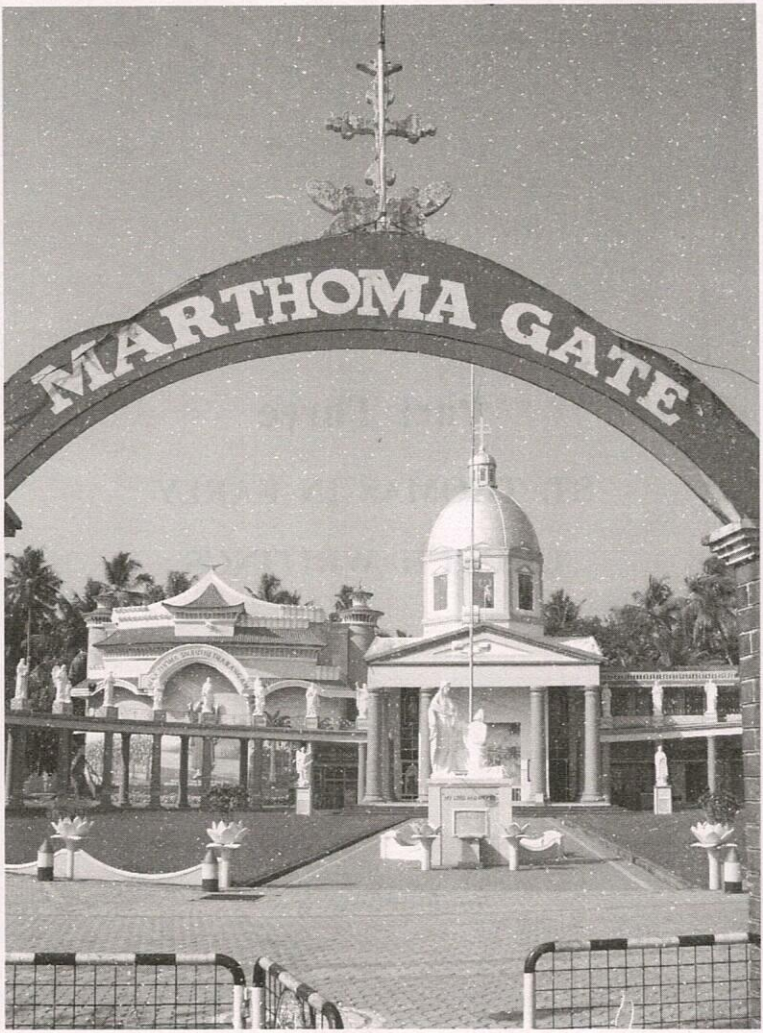
Apostle with a feeling of contentment. At least one work of this literature, namely the *Acts of Thomas* also known as Judas Thomas, has been extremely useful in our assessment of the visit and apostolate of the Apostle Thomas in India. And a re-reading of the text of the Acts with an application to South India does indeed bring us to close quarters as far as the Apostle's mission here is concerned. It may look a bit too farfetched. But this is certainly not the only source of our belief that the Apostle had his apostolate in India, or was involved in a great mission in South India. What then are the other sources? We have some authentic documents of the Church almost contemporary to those of the apocryphal literature and some of them even earlier than the latter. Our next section is to discuss the Fathers of the Church and the role they play in assessing the apostolate of St. Thomas in India.



St. Thomas, One of the Twelve, Apostle of India.

Part Three

ST. THOMAS IN EARLY CHURCH WRITINGS



Kodungalloor – The place where St.Thomas landed in A.D.52.

Chapter 1

St. Thomas in the Writings of the Fathers

After having looked into the apocryphal literature surrounding St. Thomas, we should also study the literature provided by the Fathers of the Church regarding the life and mission of the Apostle Thomas. Who are the Fathers of the Church? They are the writers of Christian antiquity covering a period of nearly seven centuries beginning with the post-apostolic times. They wrote about the Christian faith and defended it in the years following the missionary activities of the apostles. They were known for their orthodoxy in doctrine, holiness of life, and they were respectfully recognized by the Church. And their testimony of events and persons does indeed command a great credibility. They were certainly not scholars in history and their testimonies are meant only to enhance our faith. What do the Fathers of the Church say about St. Thomas the Apostle and his mission in the early Church?[14]

i. The Doctrine of the Apostles

The first work of importance for us, and composed by some Fathers of the Church is the Doctrine of the Apostles written around 250 A.D. It was written originally in Syriac. The statement that beckons us in this book reads as follows:

"After the death of the Apostles, there were Guides and Rulers in the Churches; and whatever the . Apostles communicated to them and they had received from them, they taught to the multitudes. After their deaths, they again committed and delivered to their disciples after them everything they had received from the Apostles; also what James had written from Jerusalem, Simon from the city of Rome, and John from Ephesus and Mark from the great city of Alexandria, and Andrew from Phrygia and Luke from Macedonia and Judas Thomas from India, that the epistles of an

Apostle might be received and read in the churches in every place like those Triumphs of their Acts, which Luke wrote, are read, that by this the Apostles might be known...."

"India and all its own countries and those bordering on it even to the farthest sea received the Apostle's hand of priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the Church he built there and ministered there"

This authentic statement from the third century writings of the Fathers conveys to us some important truths regarding the Apostle Thomas and his mission:

- In the first place India is accepted as the place of the mission of the Apostle Thomas and that he had been communicating his missionary ventures with the Mother Church.
- While the other Apostles or disciples were assigned areas that were not too far away from Palestine, Thomas had a difficult mission in the sense it was quite a distant one and this explains the reluctance of Thomas to accept such a lot as expressed in the apocryphal book, *Acts of Thomas.*
- The area to be evangelized by Thomas was not only India but also "countries bordering on it, even to the farthest sea". The earliest traditions speak of missionary activities of Thomas as beginning from Mesopotamia in the vicinity of Edessa, and continuing through Persia, the frontiers of Tartary, and Caucaus, preaching to the Parthians, Medes, Bactrians, and Hyrcanians on his way to India. And a shorter -version of his apostolate reads "Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes and Indians, and he was killed at Calamina and his body was transferred to Edessa"[15]

ii. St. Gregory Nazianzen (329-390)

This great scholar and doctor of the Church is full of sympathy and admiration to the early apostles and disciples of Jesus who daringly

went to territories unknown to them and laboured much so that the light of the Gospel may spread all over. And he writes: "What? Were not the Apostles strangers amidst the many nations and countries over which they spread themselves, that the Gospel might penetrate into all parts that no place might be void of the triple light or deprived of the truth, so that the cloud of ignorance among them who even sit in darkness and the shadow of death might be lifted? Peter indeed might have belonged to Judea; but what had Paul in common with the gentiles, Luke with Achaia, Andrew with Epirus, John with Ephesus, Thomas with India, Mark with Italy?"

iii. St. Ephrem (4th century)[16]

St. Ephrem, a Syrian Father of the Church makes several references to St. Thomas the Apostle and India in his hymns:

i. In one of his hymns the devil is presented as making this statement about St. Thomas, "The Apostle whom I slew in India".

ii. In another hymn which he addressed to St.Thomas himself he sings: "Blessed art Thou, whom the great King sent, that India, to His One-begotten Thou should espouse!".

iii. In other hymns of St. Ephrem there are clear references that St. Thomas the Apostle suffered martyrdom in India, that he was buried there and that he worked-miracles in India.

iv. Referring to the translation of his remains to Edessa, he says that Edessa became the blessed city by possessing the greatest pearl that India could yield.

The above testimony of St. Ephrem is not to be considered merely as that of a single individual, but as that of the whole Church of Edessa, where these hymns were widely used and where St. Thomas the Apostle was venerated with great devotion. These

hymns apparently embodied the local traditions which were common knowledge among the people there. If these traditions were not based on historical facts, it is difficult to believe how they could have been incorporated in the Liturgy itself.

iv. St. Ambrose of Milan (333-397)

St. Ambrose was fully acquainted with the Greek and Latin classics and he was certainly quite aware of India, her culture as well as her people. He was so interested about the Indian customs and manners that he is supposed to have rendered into Latin from Greek a treatise, "De Moribus Brahmanorum" (About the Customs of the Brahmins). In this book he speaks of the life of the Brahmins by introducing an excellent discussion between a Brahmin known as Dandamis and Alexander the Great. In many of his writings, St. Ambrose makes references to the wise men of India, of the Indian Ocean, of the great river Ganges and of Persia. He makes quite a significant reference about Thomas when he states, "Even those kingdoms which were shut out by rugged mountains became accessible to them, as India to Thomas, Persia to Matthew..."

v. St. Jerome (342-420)

St. Jerome was the most erudite of the Latin Fathers. His bold undertaking to learn Hebrew language in his seventies in order to translate the Bible into Latin speaks volumes for his determination and intellectual bent of mind. And the Vulgate translation of Jerome has remained the official version of the Catholic Church even to this day.

St. Jerome's erudition extended even to the secular literature both in Greek and Latin. He was also aware of the various trade routes to India. He seems to have had a detailed knowledge of India, its geography as well as its people.

Speaking of the Indian people he divides them in two sects, the Brahmins and the Samanes. He presents a glorious picture of the

Brahmins. They are so abstemious that they eat the fruits of the trees near the river Ganges or rice and flour supplied by the public; when the king meets them he adores them as he considers that the peace of the country depends on their prayers.

Jerome exhorts the Christians to live a higher Christian perfection following the example of the mortified life of the Brahmins who live only on barley, rice and fruits. He was also aware of the Sati practice among the Indians and he says, "Among them there is a law that the dearest wife is cremated with her dead husband".

St. Jerome's knowledge of the routes to India is evident in the following statement he had made: "The sailors of the Red Sea, in which we must wish that the real Pharaoh was drowned with his army, arrive at the city of Auxum after many difficulties and perils. On both shores live nomads and even very ferocious beasts. Always on the look out and always armed, they convey the food materials for the whole year. The sea is full of hidden rocks and rough shoals so that the sentry sits on the high mast and gives orders as to the directions of the ship. Happy is the voyage if after six months they reach the port...it *takes almost a year to reach India* and *thence to the river Ganges...*"

The following information given by St. Jerome is also quite relevant to us: *"The chief port of India to which the Romans came at this time was Muziris, situated in the pepper country of Malabar"*

St. Jerome's reference on St. Thomas in India is made in reference to Jesus Christ as well as the other Apostles: "He (Christ) was indeed at one and the same time with the apostles during the forty days and with the angels, with the Father and in the uttermost ends of the ocean. He dwelt in all places, *with Thomas in India,* with Peter in Rome, with Paul in Illyricum, with Titus in Crete, with Andrew in Achaia, with each apostolic man in each and every country".

vi. St. John Chrysostom (+ 407)

This is yet another Father of the Church who evinced keen interest on the sepulchers of the early saints for their importance as centers of faith in Jesus Christ and their role in the development of Christianity. In fact St. John Chrysostom does not mention the role of the Apostle Thomas in India, but simply states that an Apostle preached the Gospel in India. And he also says, "We do not know where many of the Apostles were buried, but we know where the sepulchers of Peter, Paul, John and Thomas are situated."

vii. St. Paulinus of Nola (353-431)

Like the other Fathers of the Church St. Paulinus of Nola is concerned over the fact that the Apostles indeed took up the command of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). And he joyfully records, "So God bestowing his holy gifts on all lands, sent His Apostles to the great cities of the world... Parthia receives Matthew, *India receives Thomas.*

viii. St. Gaudentius, Bishop of Brescia (+410)

Bishop Gaudentius speaks with veneration of the relics of the various saints of the early times. And he is particularly proud of the relics of the saints in the possession of his Church, namely those of Saints Thomas, John the Baptist, Andrew and Luke. He announces joyfully, "We possess here the relics of these four who having preached the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, were put to death by the unbelieving and perverse men.... John at Sebastena, a town in the province of Palestine, *Thomas among the Indians"*

ix. St. Gregory of Tours (538 - 593)

St. Gregory Bishop of Tours in France conveys to us two pieces of important information about St. Thomas the Apostle in India. In the first place he tells us about the pilgrims visiting the sacred sites in India and particularly the tomb of the Apostle Thomas. Already

from the fourth century there have been traders and travelers who were visiting India for its importance in trade and its advancement in culture. Among them were also Christian pilgrims who devotedly paid homage to the sites hallowed by saints. One such pilgrim was Theodore who visited the tomb of Thomas the Apostle and personally reported to St. Gregory of his happy experience in India.

And basing himself on the testimony of Theodore, Gregory writes of Thomas as follows: "His holy remains after a long time were removed to the city of Edessa in Syria and interred there. In that part of India where they first rested stands a monastery and church of striking dimensions. Theodore who had been to the place had narrated this to us."

x. St. Isidore of Seville (+638)

St. Isidore of Seville in Spain was a man of vast learning and he too was well versed in the geography of the Eastern countries. He had a clear knowledge of the countries like India, Persia, Mesopotamia and Arabia. And he was also quite knowledgeable about the vast territories which St. Thomas visited in view of his missionary apostolate. He writes, "This Thomas preached the Gospel of Christ to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hyrcanians and the Bactrians, and to the Indians of the Oriental region. He penetrated the innermost regions and sealed his preaching by his passion. He died transfixed with a lance at Calamina, a city in India, and there he was buried with honour".

This Calamina mentioned as the place of Thomas' death or burial is none other than the present Mylapore. There are many explanations for the name Calamina[17]. It seems to have derived from two Tamil words *kallin mel or kallin mele* that is 'on the stone' or 'on the hill'. The tradition that Thomas died on the mount now known as "St. Thomas Mount" may have been referred to as *kallin mele,* which evolved itself as *kalamene, kalamine and then*

Calamina. And Mylapore was referred to as Calamina since the tomb of Thomas was there. And Mylpaore itself could have gradually included also chinna malai (Little Mount) or peria malai (St. Thomas Mount) both of which were associated with the death of Thomas the former containing the cave where Thomas was hiding and the latter as the hill on which he was pierced with a lance. Any way both these hills have their own historical traditions as sacred spots hallowed by the presence of the Apostle and are now sacred shrines frequented by pilgrims right through the year.

xi. St. John Damascene (+ 754 A. D)

St. John Damascene writes, "India, an immense and thickly populated country, is situated at a great distance from Egypt and is separated from that country by the Ocean. It touches Persia on one side of the land. Trie most holy Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles was sent to India to preach the Gospel of salvation". What is of importance in the testimony of this scholar saint is that he distinguishes Egypt and consequently Ethiopia from India which is at a great distance. For, many an early writer was often confused between Ethiopia and India.

Chapter 2

St. Thomas in other Early Testimonies

As we have seen several Fathers of the Church conscientiously recorded their comments on the missionary situation of the early Church and hence enthusiastically included the role of the Apostle Thomas in India. Their testimonies are not only praiseworthy but are also to be commended for their pastoral trustworthiness. We shall now look into other testimonies of the period immediately following that of the Fathers of the Church.

i. An Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (883 A.D)

There is a report from the Anglo-Saxon chronicle regarding the tomb of the Apostle Thomas in India. In an entry of the year 883 it is stated that King Alfred of England had sent offerings to St. Thomas in India. It reads as follows: "And in the same year, Singhelm and Aesthalstan conveyed to Rome the alms which the King had vowed to send thither and also to India to St. Thomas..."

A similar information is found also in the writings of William of Malmesbury who states as follows: "Beyond the sea, to Rome and to Saint Thomas in India he (Alfred) sent many gifts. The legate employed for this purpose was Sigelinus the Bishop of Sherborne, who with great success arrived in India, at which every one of this age wonders. Returning thence he brought back exotic gems and aromatic liquors which the land there produces"[18] The meaning of sending alms to a person who did not certainly exist at that time can only mean that an offering was sent to his tomb for the purpose of maintaining it or to be used for the poor of the locality in the name of the saint buried there.

ii. Mar Solomon, Bishop of Bosra (1222)

In the year 1222, Mar Solomon Bishop of Bosra in Mesopotamia, wrote the following in his "Book of Bee", a precious Syriac

manuscript which is preserved in the archives of the Metropolitan Palace, Trichur, with this explicit note: "Habban the merchant brought the body of Thomas and laid it in Edessa, the holy city. But there are others who maintain that he was buried in Mahlup (Mylapore), a city in the land of the Indians"[19]. In all probability this Bishop and writer is giving his information based on two popular traditions of his time: the first on the translation of the body of the Apostle Thomas to Edessa (as reported in the apocryphal work, The *Acts of Thomas,* the second that he died in India and lies buried in a tomb at Mylapore which could have been known in his locality as Mahlup.

iii. Marco Polo (1292)

Marco Polo was a well-known traveler from Venice who made a visit to India in the year 1292. He has given some information in his writings pertaining to St. Thomas. He says, "The body of St. Thomas .the Apostle lies in this province of Malabar at a certain little town having no great population". Probably Marco Polo was of the opinion that Mylapore was part of the province of Malabar, since it lay on the coast continuing the stretch from the Malabar Coast. Elsewhere he states that the Apostle Thomas was buried in the tomb at Mylapore. He says further, "Before he came to that place (Mylapore) where he died, he had been in Nubia, where he converted many people to the faith of Jesus Christ..." This distinguished traveler from Europe also states, "The Saracens respected the Apostle as a prophet and saint of their own and venerated his tomb by frequenting it in pilgrimage. The Hindus too did venerate the tomb"[20].

We could not have expected a better assessment of a Christian shrine than what this great traveler has given. His impressions that the tomb was sacred not only to Christians' but also to Muslims as well as Hindus is quite commendable.

iv. Blessed Odoric of Pordenone (1324)

Blessed Odoric[21] was a pilgrim who visited the tomb of Thomas in Mylapore in the year 1324 after having first reached Malabar. He records, "From this realm (he calls it 'Minibar') it is a journey of ten days to Mobar (possibly Mylapore); and this is very great and has under it many cities and towns. And in this realm is laid the body of the Blessed Thomas the Apostle. His church is filled with idols, and beside it are some fifteen houses of Nestorians...."

The Nestorians were the followers of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople who was condemned by the third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431). Nestorius held that there was no hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ but only a moral union of a divine person and a human person. He refused to accept the title "Mother of God" to the Blessed Virgin Mary and hence his condemnation. But the Nestorians continued to flourish and even went over the world as missionaries. Hence the presence of some Nestorian Christians around the tomb of the Apostle Thomas in the 14th century is quite understandable.

v. Bishop John de Merignolli (1349)

Bishop John de Merignolli, Papal Legate to China visited Mylapore in the year 1349. It was his pilgrimage to the sacred site hallowed by the mission and death of the Apostle. And he makes the following remark about the presence and death of the St. Thomas there: "The third province of India is called Maabar (This word Maabar could mean Mylapore and not Malabar, since the latter never claimed the possession of the tomb of St. Thomas!), and the church of St. Thomas which he built with his own hands is there, besides another church which he built with the agency of workmen". With regard to the death and burial of the Apostle he adds, "The priests gathered up the earth with which the blood had mingled and buried it with him".

vi. Nicolo de Conti (1425-30)

Another traveler to India in the Middle Ages, Nicolo de Conti of Italy has recorded the following statement about his visit to the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle: "Proceeding onwards the said Nicolo arrived at a maritime city, which he named Malepur, situated in the second gulf beyond the Indus (Bay of Bengal). Here the body of St. Thomas lies buried honourably in a large and beautiful church, it is worshipped by heretics, who are called Nestorians and inhabit the city to the number of a thousand." Except for the fact that the Nestorians refused to accept the title "Mother of God" to the Blessed Virgin Mary, they were quite orthodox about several other aspects of the doctrines of the Church and seem to have showed much interest in the spreading of the Gospel in the far away missions.

There are two traditions attested to by the testimony of Bishop John de Merignolli: the first is that St. Thomas himself built a church in Mylapore, referred to as "the very narrow chapel built by St. Thomas himself"[22]. The second tradition which had also been long believed by the people in Mylapore was that the earth mingled with the blood of the Apostle was buried with his body.

vii. Bishops from Bagdad (1504)

Around the year 1504 four Bishops from Bagdad in Mesopotamia did visit South India and places hallowed by the apostolate of the Apostle Thomas and they wrote back to their Patriarch the following: "As to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle, some Christian men have gone into it, have inhabited it and are now busy restoring it; it is on the shore of the sea in a town called Mailapore, in the country of Silan (Solan, Cholan, Chola), one of the Indian countries"[23].

It is for the first time that we have a reference to Mylpaore as being located in the country of the Cholas mistakenly mentioned as

Solan by the bishops from Bagdad. As for the monastery it is possible that they are referring to the very edifice of the church around the tomb of Thomas, which by then was getting ruined and was badly in need of restoration.

viii. Duarte Barbosa (1515)

This Portuguese traveler and pilgrim made a visit to the tomb of the Apostle and has made the following statement: "Going yet farther and leaving behind Choramandal and the lands, there is on the sea strand a city which is right ancient and almost deserted, called Mailalpur, which erewhile was great and fair, pertaining to the Kingdom of Narasyngua. Here lies buried the body of the Blessed Saint Thomas in a church near the sea"[24]

And elsewhere Duarte Barbosa describes the condition of the same church as follows: "...The Moors and other heathens used to burn lights in it, each one claiming it as their own. The church is arranged in our fashion with crosses on the altar and on the summit of the vault and a wooden grating and peacock as devises, but it is now very ruinous and all around it covered with brushwood. A poor Moor holds charge of it and begs alms for it, from which a lamp is kept burning at night and on what is left they live. Some Indian Christians go there on pilgrimage and carry away many relics, little earthen balls from the same tomb of the Blessed Saint Thomas and also give alms to the aforesaid Moor, telling him to repair the said house".

It is clear that from the writings of Duarte Barbosa some calamity had fallen on the Christians of Mylapore already in the late 15th century and the church which housed the tomb of the Apostle had been dilapidated and left to the care of a Moor!

ix. Diogo Fernandes (1517)

Diogo Fernandes another Portuguese pilgrim seems to have visited the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore together with Bastio

Fernandes, and some Armenians. By this time, the body of the Church which housed the tomb, 26 feet in length and 17 feet in width was already in ruins. The walls were standing surrounded by high bushes all around. The grave, which was the monument in honour of St Thomas was to the right side of the altar and it was quite intact.

Diogo Fernandes is also remembered as the one who spent quite some time in and around Mylapore as a very devoted pilgrim. It was he who took the initiative to put up a small oratory in honour of the saint in the Mount of St. Thomas, that is, the hill where he was believed to have suffered his martyrdom. He should have spent time in prayer and meditation around this oratory.

x. St. Francis Xavier (1545)

St. Francis Xavier was among the most illustrious pilgrims who visited the St. Thomas shrine in Mylapore during the Portuguese period. It is recorded that the saint visited Mylapore in 1545 and stayed there for a few months as the guest of Fr. Gaspar Coelho. The purpose of the visit was to pray to the Apostle Thomas at the shrine and to obtain his help to resolve his doubts and anxieties about his plans to travel to the East and continue his apostolic labours in Malacca and thereafter to China. It is also reported that St. Francis Xavier spent long hours in prayer in front of a statue of Our Lady placed in the garden adjacent to the Church of St. Thomas. This statue of Mary in a seated position has been known even till today as Our Lady of Mylapore.

Following St. Francis Xavier, a century or more later, St. John de Britto, another Jesuit, too visited the shrine of St. Thomas at Mylapore in June 1681. It was a hard time for the people of the city due to some recent wars and this saint seems to have been with the people in their time of distress. St. John de Britto is reported to have visited the shrine for a second time in 1691 in his official

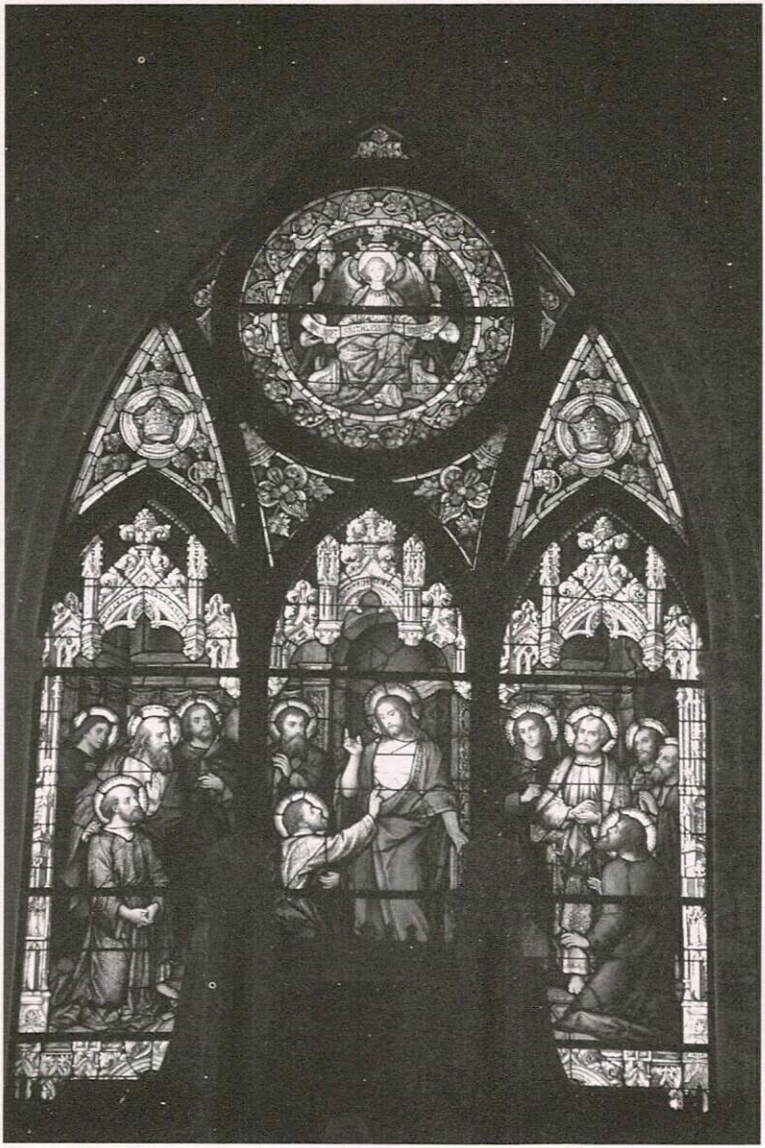
capacity as the Visitor of the Madurai Jesuit mission and prayed there.

xi. The Roman Martyrology (1584)

The Roman martyrology begun to be written in 1584 by the order of Pope Gregory XIII contains the following message[25]:.

"On the twelfth of the Kalends of January. At Calamina. The Martyrdom of St. Thomas the Apostle, who preached the Gospel to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians and the Hyrcanians. Then he went to India where after having instructed the people in the Christian faith, he died pierced with a lance by order of the King"

The people who are mentioned in the martyrology as well as in other writings, as having benefited from the preaching of Thomas, namely the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hyrcanians and the Bactrians formed a compact group, who were part of the later Persian Kingdom, in the northern part of India.



Stained Glass over the High Altar in the Cathedral at San Thome. St. Thomas is shown putting his finger into Our Lord's Side.

Part Four

THE SOUTH INDIAN TRADITIONS ON ST. THOMAS

Northern View of the Church at Palayur.



This Church was built with the permission of the Zamorin of Calicut in 1607, by Fr. Fenicio S. J., where he said Holy Mass.

Chapter 1

The Malabar Mission of St. Thomas the Apostle

We have so far examined the life and mission of St. Thomas the Apostle from three angles: first from the perspectives of the Word of God particularly in the Gospels, secondly from the apocalyptic literature, and more specifically from the *Acts of Thomas,* and thirdly from the expressions of the Fathers of the Church as well as other testimonies of the period subsequent to the Fathers. We should now enter into an important dimension of our study, namely the staunch traditions that prevailed in South India which firmly hold on to the fact of St. Thomas' mission in Kerala, in the Malabar coast, and later his mission and martyrdom at Mylapore in the Coromandel coast.

The State of Kerala, to the south west of India, known as Malabar till 1956 has the largest Christian population in comparison with the other states of the sub continent. In fact the Christians of Kerala alone constitute one-third of the total Christian population of the country, although the geographical extent of this land is just one-hundredth part of the entire country.

Kerala legitimately prides itself as the cradle of Christianity in India. And over the years, the Christian influence of Kerala has increased over leaps and bounds to the extent that the priests and religious of Kerala have spread all over India as active missionaries.

The main denominations among the Christians of Kerala are (i) the Catholics, (ii) the Jacobites, who form the Orthodox Syrian Church, and (iii) their offshoot the Marthomites. There are also small groups of Protestants forming the Church of South India. The Catholics, the largest group of Christians, belong to two recognized rites, first

the Syrian rite Catholics of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malanakra Church; and secondly the universally known Latin rite Catholics.

The Latin rite Catholics who are a minority in Kerala trace their origin to the proclamation of the Gospel by the Portuguese missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries. But the Syrian rite Catholics as well as the Christians of the Orthodox Church, pride themselves in tracing their origin to the Apostle St. Thomas who according to tradition reached the Malabar coast in 52 A.D. The Syrian Catholics of Kerala are one of the four oriental Churches, having in common the East Syrian Liturgical tradition, the others being those of Edessa, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and Persia. On account of this common heritage the Syro-Malabar Church continued its hierarchical relations with the Chaldean Churches under the Catholicate of Seleucid-Ctesiphon[26]. They are called Syrian, not because they possess any ethnic affinity with the people of Syria, but only because of the rite which they inherited from the Church in Syria, just as the Latins inherited their rite from Rome. Possibly the earlier affinities of the Apostle Thomas with places like Edessa, and the probability of his bones having been interred there could have established the links between the Syrian Church and the Christians of Kerala. This tradition about the bones of Thomas also arising from the *Acts of Thomas* as having been transferred to Edessa from Mylapore has been referred to by many a scholar some as a reliable one and others as unreliable[27]. It may be narrated as follows:

Probably at some date in the second century an Edessene merchant, with a few companions, brought a case containing some human remains to Edessa. They affirmed that they were the relics of the Apostle Thomas, and that he had suffered martyrdom in India, slain by spear-thrust. They said that they had stolen the relics, and had brought them from India by sea to Charax Spasini, a port

at the head of the Persian Gulf. From Charax they had taken them by road to Nisibis and thence to Edessa.

The Syrian rite Christians are unique in the sense that they find such a close affinity with the Apostle Thomas that they call themselves "St. Thomas Christians". They firmly hold that it was St. Thomas who first preached Christianity in their territory that is in the Malabar Coast, and then moved to the Coromandel Coast in the eastern part. Our study of the apocryphal book the *Acts of Thomas* gave us some vague information as to the presence of Thomas first in the northern areas of India and then moving down to another kingdom which could possibly be in South India. And the story of the Acts is corroborated by the following factors:

i. Maritime Activity and Thomas' Journey

One of the most important arguments for the arrival of Thomas in the Malabar Coast was the feasibility of such a missionary journey in the first century. There was an intense maritime activity between the trade centres in places like Alexandria in Egypt and the Indian ports in the western coast of India. Great historians of that period do record such activities of trade. Strabo who wrote around 19 A.D. mentions that nearly 120 ships traveled from the West to India every year. A certain Hippalus had discovered the effects of the monsoon winds on the direction of the ships and this seems to have revolutionized the Roman trade with India in the first century. There seem to have been two important ports in the western coast of India one known as Barygaza in Gujarat[18], and the other called Muziris on the Malabar Coast in Kerala. In his Natural History, Pliny (50-60 AD) refers to ports in Malabar, through which pepper was exported. Muziris which is the same as Cranganore or Kodungallur was most famous as a center of trade in pepper vhich was the chief product of Malabar at that time. A.C.Perumalil quoting Periplus speaks of Muziris having other wares such as "great quantities of fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, spikenard from the

Ganges, malabathrum from the places in the interior, transparent stones of all kinds, diamonds and sapphires, and tortoise shell"[29]

Muziris having been such a popular port in the south western part of India, travelers to India could easily reach there and from there proceed to the other parts of India. And the missionary travel of Thomas to India could have been easily realized in the first century of the Christian era, considering the facilities of transportation available at that time. And hence the tradition that Thomas landed at Muziris to proclaim the Gospel in Malabar. This tradition which asserts Thomas' arrival in Muziris and his subsequent activities may be assessed as follows[30]:

In the year 52 A.D., the Apostle Thomas arrived in Muziris by sea, from the island Socotra. He could have traveled from Palestine through Alexandria, Nubia, Ethiopea and Socotra and reached Muziris. (Later St. Francis Xavier too preached in Socotra before he reached India). Thomas preached to the people and made many converts; he organized seven churches and ordained two presbyters. He next went to the east coast and preached there with success, the king as well as considerable numbers of the people accepting baptism. He had so much success in his work that the Brahmins of the district were filled with envy and anger; and, in a sudden riot, one of them pierced him with a lance, and he won a martyr's crown. The date of his death is given as 72 A.D. The maritime factor is an important one in the South Indian mission of Thomas who could have been quite aware of Apostle Paul who was making his missionary travels in the Asia Minor and accomplishing a very successful evangelizing activity. Paul's example would have certainly influenced Thomas and the facilities available in the South Indian ports were certainly seized by the Apostle to carry out his mission.

ii. Tradition from Ancient Malabar Songs

In any culture the folk tradition has played an important role in assessing certain historical dimensions of the people. Particularly at a time when the written word would have been rare, oral traditions could have developed and conveyed the feelings and sentiments which were cherished and treasured by the people. The people of Malabar were no exception to this general rule. They did cultivate their own songs with regard to their beloved Apostle Thomas and his mission among them. These songs seem to have been orally transmitted by them from family to family, and from generation to generation. The tradition that several Brahmin Nambudiries were converted to Christian faith by Thomas brings along with it that these converts did compose their own hymns and incantations to their Christian deity on the pattern of the Hindu Vedic hymns and songs. And it is said that when the Portuguese landed in Malabar in the 16th century they found these very lively indigenous Christian hymns through which the people had kept their faith. It is through them that they constantly retold the story of their Apostle Thomas. We may mention a few such oral compositions which have stayed alive even till today. Probably the Portuguese put these oral songs into writing sometime in the 16th century.

a. Margam Kali Pattu

The Margam Kali Pattu ('margam' means way or religion i.e Christianity) is mainly a description of the mission of Thomas under various aspects almost like the Gospels relating the mission of Jesus. Margam Kali Pattu can simply mean, a Religious Play Song, (kali in Malayalam means 'play'). It describes the work of St. Thomas in the Kingdoms of Chola and Kerala. Neither its authorship nor the date of its composition has been definitely known. It contains 400 lines. It could have been composed by a priest and orally transmitted to successive generations until it was committed to writing in 16th century.

b. Ramban Song

This lengthy song could have been composed by a disciple of St.Thomas, whose name was Malliekal Thoma Ramban. "Ramban" is supposed to designate a high-grade priest. What was first an oral version for a long period of time was later transmitted to writing in modern language by another Ramban of the same name, supposedly the 48th priest of the family.

The content of the Ramban song is Thomas the Apostle under the themes of his arrival, his mission and his martyrdom. In the style of the south Indian poetry, the song begins with an invocation to the Holy Trinity, Our Lord, and to "the Holy Mother of God whom St. Thomas taught us to know and to love". The song contains description about his apostolate in Malabar and then in the Chola kingdom on the east coast, where he suffered martyrdom.

There is one very remarkable story narrated in the Ramban Song about goddess 'Kali'. There was a shrine of Kali in the vicinity of Little Mount where St. Thomas was accustomed to go and pray. The priests of Kali insisted that the white man from Europe should also worship their deity Kali. But the Apostle refused saying that his act of worship would only bring disaster to the shrine. The Kali priest defied him to go ahead and what happened afterwards is described in the Ramban Song which speaks of the shrine consumed in fire and the saint dealt with violently.

"Mar Thoma made the sign of the Cross
Towards the esteemed Kali shrine
And fire consumed that shrine
The Embrans, filled with rage,
Tortured St. Thomas in various ways
One most cruel among them thrust his lance long
Deep in the Apostle's side and fled with the rest."

There may be a lot of exaggeration in the above description, but the song captures the possible mood of the local religious leaders to the

mission of the Apostle. They could have begun a harsh campaign against him which could have finally led to his death. The Ramban Song does venture to capture the mood of the time and transmit it in a popular language.

c. Marriage Songs

In South India, joyful occasions like marriages attract a lot of friends and relations, and the solemnity of the event is enhanced by appropriate songs sung by groups of women competing with each other. We are told that some of the traditional marriage songs in Malabar contained the theme of St. Thomas the Apostle[32]. This is only a proof that St. Thomas was a most loved and respected personality even in the socio-cultural life of the people of Malabar, who legitimately took pride in calling themselves St.Thomas Christians.

d. Veeradian Songs

These are ballads which are lengthy songs of several short verses repeated with the same melody also sung at marriages and other festivals[33]. Veeradians, mostly Hindus were a sort of professionals, who take up to such singing, and they receive gifts and remunerations for their performance. Even though they are Hindus, yet the theme they often take up for their ballads is St. Thomas the Apostle, his coming to India, his preaching and his death.

iii. The Seven Churches Tradition

The Malabar mission of Thomas has yet another tradition namely the seven nascent Churches or Christian communities founded by the Apostle. Factor which adds a lot of credibility. The continued belief that it was in these seven earliest communities that the first Kerala Christians had their origin develops their consciousness with regard to their identity as the St. Thomas Christians. And the following are considered to be these earliest Churches established by the Apostle:

i. Kodungallur

St. Thomas is believed to have landed at Musiri also known as Cranganore or Kodungallur. It is this port town which became the real cradle of Christianity in Kerala. There are two important conversions effected by the Apostle in this town at the initial phase of his mission[34].

He seems to have met a young Brahmin boy of the Maliyakal family and had a conversation with him about his worship in the temple. In the course of time Thomas seems to have convinced the boy about the one God, and the redemption brought about by Jesus Christ. He was baptized against the wishes of his family. They cast him away from the house, but he became an ardent disciple of the Apostle. He was also named Thomas. He became Maliyakal Thomas Ramban. But it was his another Maliyakal Thomas Ramban, a grand nephew of the first Maliyakal Thomas who seems to have composed the Ramban Song. There is also another tradition about the first mission of Thomas, namely regarding the conversion of Kerala Perumal with all the members of the royal family, about four hundred of them. There were also thirty two Brahmin families among these. The tradition continues to tell us some plausible details about this initial mission of Thomas. A Hindu temple and then a Jewish synagogue were converted as Churches to accommodate the large number of Christian converts who readily embraced Christianity thanks to the zeal of Apostle Thomas. Another tradition is that St. Thomas himself built his first church here.

ii. Kollam

Kollam, later known as Quilon, was also a great seaport, and an important Hindu Kingdom. With his success at establishing Christianity at Kodungallur, St. Thomas now moved to Kollam where there lived a big number of traders and merchants. St.

Thomas gained several converts here and also built a church for the benefit of the Christians. The Kollam Christian community has always claimed an apostolic origin, but the church which the saint had built had been washed away by the sea.

iii. Chayal

Chayal lying to the east of Kottayam is now a ruined town. It is believed that there was a road or a trade route from the port of Purakkadu to Madurai, the capital city of the Pandya king. The Apostle could have traveled from the port of Purakkadu and reached Chayal. He preached the Gospel there, and is believed to have established a Christian community. He had also built a church at Chayal. But what is left of this place now is only some ruins.

iv. Niranam

Niranam is believed to be the native place of Thomas Maliyakal Ramban who composed the famous Ramban song. It is an interior town, not far from the port of Purakkadu, lying to the east in the Pandya kingdom. Niranam could have been an important town arid hence it could have attracted the attention of the Apostle to go there and proclaim the Gospel and put up a church.

v. Kokkamangalam

Kokkamangalam a coastal town to the south of Muziris could have been easily reached by the Apostle by the sea and hence the possibility of his apostolate here, and the building of a church. It was a small place and hence does not find any mention in the writings of Pliny or Ptolemy who wrote about Muziris. But the Apostle did not think any place too insignificant for the proclamation of the Gospel.

There is an interesting tradition about this place. It seems that the cross which Thomas erected in this place was plucked and cast into

the sea by his enemies. But it floated and reached a small island near Pallipuram. On the site where it was washed ashore there now stands a chapel. And the cross venerated is believed to be the same one which was made by St. Thomas, floated and came ashore.

vi. Kottakkavu (Parur)

Kottakkavu also known as Parur on the coast to the south of Muziris seems to have been an important town in the first century. Its location on the coast certainly attracted the attention of the Apostle and he preached the Gospel there and sounded a Christian community. Subsequently he also built a church there according to his usual way of doing.

vii. Palayur

This coastal town to the north of Muziris seems to have been an important center of Thomas' mission. It is said that there was a big Jewish settlement in this town which naturally drew the presence of St.Thomas, himself a Jew. There is a hill here with the name 'Judakunnu' (Jewish hill). Thomas would not have gone here merely for some social purpose but to preach the Gospel among his own countrymen and women and to found a Christian community. There has been a tradition about Palayur that St. Thomas had performed miracles and converted a number of Nambudiris in this town, even converting a temple into a church. The fanatic Brahmins who remained opposed to the Apostle seem to have cursed the place, and hence even today they call it *chavakkadu,* the accursed place.

Excavations here have revealed that the present church had been built over a Hindu temple. Remains of a sacred pond, and broken images have been unearthed. In the 16th century a new church was built here around the old, but it seems that the people did not allow the old church to be demolished before the new one came up.

The tradition of the seven churches founded by the Apostle Thomas raises a few questions. 'Seven' being a biblical number for 'completion', did Thomas consciously go about seeking seven areas to do his mission and put up churches? Was he thinking of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Ch 2-3)? It was probably the later Christian tradition in Malabar which could have held on to the seven churches tradition in keeping with the biblical spirit. St. Thomas would have certainly manifested a lot of zeal in going about the various towns within his reach to proclaim the Gospel message, and this fact could have been developed as his founding of seven Churches, which were both the communities of Christians as well as the places of worship.

We may conclude this part on the mission of the Apostle Thomas in the Malabar Coast stating that there is another tradition that his apostolate in Malabar had two phases[35]. It is said that he landed at Muziris in 52 A.D., and after converting a number of high caste Hindu families in Kodungallur, Palayur and Kollam, he traveled to the Coromandel coast in the eastern side of India, and preached the Gospel there; he then proceeded to China and did mission work there. After his return to India, he went over to Malabar for second time, established more Churches, ordained priests from among the leading Christian families. Then he once again moved to the Coromandel Coast where he suffered martyrdom.



The Church which stands over the cave at Little Mount where St Thomas traditionally known to have hid himself from his murderers.

Chapter 2

The Mylapore Mission of St. Thomas the Apostle

Did Thomas come to Mylapore? Did he preach the Gospel here and the surrounding areas? There are three shrines in the city of Chennai claiming our attention as to their affinity with the Apostle. There is first of all the tomb of St. Thomas enshrined within the majestic Gothic Cathedral at Mylapore on the seashore. There is another shrine with a deep cave attached to it, about four kilometers from the tomb of the saint, claiming itself to have been the habitat of the Apostle to hide himself from his enemies and to keep himself close to God in prayer. And finally there is the hill shrine at what is now known as St. Thomas Mount where our saint is understood to have taken refuge from his enemies, but ultimately discovered and killed.

We shall approach this theme of the mission of St. Thomas at Mylapore generally referred to as the Coromandel Coast under three aspects. In the first place we shall see if the apocryphal book *Acts of Thomas* which gave the first information regarding the Indian mission of Thomas contains any reference to his apostolate in the Mylapore area. In the second place we shall discuss the Malabar tradition regarding the apostolate of St. Thomas in Mylapore; and finally we shall examine the traditions arising from Mylapore itself.

i. The Acts of Thomas and Mission in Mylapore

We have already touched upon this topic when we discussed the apocryphal works bearing the name of Thomas. Although there is no clear reference to Mylapore or for that matter even South India, yet many a scholar sees references to the mission of the Apostle in the South. Their main argument runs somewhat like this. The

Acts of Thomas was composed sometime towards the end of the second century or early third century, first in Syriac and then in Greek, possibly in Edessa. It gives just a skeleton of a history about St. Thomas' mission in India, surrounding it largely with folklore and legend, as it was the norm among the writers of this type of literature at that time. Even the names of characters involved with the Apostle and his mission are conveniently changed to suit the immediate Syrian or Greek readership. And the real characters then are hidden within the apparent ones. Hence even the name apocryphal literature (apocryphal means 'hidden').

With a view to discover the real characters behind the fictitious names occurring in the *Acts of Thomas* there have been efforts to re-read the text in the South Indian context. Though this argument may sound a bit too extravagant and farfetched, yet that seems to be the only way to corroborate the more feasible arguments with regard to the mission of the Apostle in South India.

In the first place the well-known Gondophares or Gundaphar of the *Acts of Thomas* who is the first and most prominent contact of Thomas in India, is christened as Kandapparasa or Kandappa Raja in keeping with the Tamil nomenclature. It is around him that Thomas' mission flourished in Mylapore and he had access even to the royal family many of whom were converted to Christianity. And Kandapparasa is supposed to have been a contemporary of Thomas in the Tamil Kingdom where Mylapore is a prominent city. Other name attributes are even more gratuitous like reading Sifur as Sitraram, Sinthice as Sinna Acci, Mygdonia as Magudani, Tertia as Tirupathi, or Vazin as Vijayan and King Misdai as King Mahadevan who apparently ordered the death of the Thomas.

While we may accept the possibility of a reference in the *Acts of Thomas* as to the mission of Thomas in South India, and even the probability of some Tamil characters hidden in the names mentioned in the *Acts,* yet some direct change of names is too farfetched. The

Acts may be valuable or worthless, but the South Indian Tradition does not depend upon it, except that possibly it gave the theme for its talented writer.

ii. The Malabar tradition of Thomas in Mylapore.

We have already described the Malabar tradition regarding Thomas and his apostolate in the Malabar Coast. It may be summarily stated as follows: The Apostle traveled to the Malabar Coast by ship and landed there some time in 52 A.D. He preached the Gospel in the coastal towns. The presence of a large number of Jews as well as other foreigners who were there for the purpose of trade also helped his ministry. He converted several Hindus among who were some Nambudiri Brahmins, as well as some royal households. After a few years the Apostle continued his journey along the seacoast and went over to the Coromandel Coast, in the eastern part of India. He continued his mission in the coastal city of Mylapore and won many converts there. And he was killed by some Brahmins in 72 A.D., and his body was buried in Mylapore in the very church, which the Apostle had built with his own hands.

When the Portuguese arrived in India at the end of the 15th century, probably their first Christian contacts were in the Malabar Coast with the St. Thomas Christians. It is from them that they learnt of the tomb of Thomas in the Coromandel Coast. By then the Christians from Malabar, as well as other western travelers and even pilgrims from the Near East were regularly going to visit and pray at the tomb of the saint in Mylapore. It is in the context of such a movement generated by the Malabar tradition that the Portuguese got themselves interested in the shrine of St. Thomas at Mylapore.

The Malabar tradition has continued with the Christians of Kerala down the centuries. Pilgrims from Malabar continued to frequent the tomb of Thomas in Mylapore even until today, and to take away

with them sand from the place of his burial as a mark of their devotion to the saint. The Malabar tradition on St. Thomas in Mylapore is kept alive until this day through the many traditional songs prevalent there like the Ramban Song, the Margam Kali Song and the Veeradian Songs.

The Malabar tradition also has a touch of the *Acts of Thomas*. He is said to have converted a certain king in Mylapore called "Cholaperumal" in some versions and "Kandapparaser" in others, besides many Brahmin families of high position. Several miracles are also narrated.

iii. The Early Mylapore Tradition on St. Thomas

Mylapore at present is one small subdivision of the city of Chennai lying to its south, and partly bordering upon the seacoast of the Bay of Bengal. And Santhome, is a sector of Mylapore, surrounding the tomb of St. Thomas. It is in Santhome that the Bishop of Mylapore. lived from the time that Mylapore was made a diocese in 1606. And Santhome continues to be the headquarters of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore from its inception in 1952. And today Mylapore has a sizeable Christian community and the Christian presence in the locality is certainly far more intense in comparison with the number of Christians inhabiting the place.

a. Early History of Mylapore

Was Mylapore so important that St. Thomas should have landed there when he decided to travel to the *Coromandel* coast from the Malabar Coast? It did not seem to have been a trade centre like Muziris. Then what is it that made *Mylapore* famous?. Most scholars say that it was a temple city where there could have been a Siva temple that attracted many visitors[36] . There is a legend among the Hindus with regard to the name 'Mailappur' or the peacock town. A strong tradition claims that the town was named after Parvathi the consort of Siva who appeared to him once in the

form of a peacock and worshipped him. And it is hence that the name 'mayilai' was given to the town (mayil in Tamil means peacock). This town could have been known for its pristine beauty and for the presence of the most beautiful of birds, the peacocks. Hence the fame of this place could have resulted from the temple factor as well as the presence of numerous peacocks around.

In the 7th century the Tamil seer and poet Thirugnana Sambhandar in his "Thevaram hymns" has written in praise of Siva at Mayilai confirming the fame of God Siva in Mylapore. And two centuries later Sundaramurthy Swamigal has also sung in honour of Siva saying, 'I am a devotee of the Lord of the temple of Mayilai'[37].

It is even said that the present popular Kapaleesvarar temple at Mylapore about a kilometer from the tomb of Thomas could have come up after the shore temple of Siva disappeared due to erosion from the sea, and gradually embellished to the present dimensions.

There are other factors that give importance to Myalpore. Already in the second century A.D., Ptolemy the astronomer and geographer of antiquity has referred to a site known as *Maliarpha* in the Coromandel Coast certainly meaning Mylapore. This town should have been so popular in the early times that it has been called by several names. The popular Ramban Song calls it *Mailepuram.* And the other variants to the name have been, *Malepur, Malpuri, Maylapil, Manarpha, Manaliarpha, Mirapolis, Mirpor, Milipur, Molepur, Meliapor, Mayila, and Meilan*[38].

We had earlier referred to Mylapore as mentioned among some of the Christian writers as Calamina. Pseudo-Sophronius (7th century), St. Isidroe of Seville (7th century), Bar-Hebraeus (13th century) and the Roman Martyrology speak of Calamina as the place where St. Thomas died. As mentioned earlier 'Calamina' could have been a development of 'kallin-mele', that is 'on the stone', in the sense that

Thomas was killed on the hill; and Mylapore could have been large enough even to include the hill on which Thomas was killed (the present St.Thomas Mount), and hence it became known as Calamina, but only in a Christian tradition arising from the West. There is also an opinion that Calamina can also be a corruption of 'Cholamandalam' or 'Coromandel'[39] A life of St. Francis Xavier printed in Rome in 1630 clearly identifies Calamina with Mylapore stating, "The holy man of God Thomas came to preach to the city of Calamina which the people of the place call Meliapore"[40].

An Italian merchant Nichola de Conti (1425-1430) speaks of his arrival in "Malepur", "a maritime city", "situated in the second gulf beyond the Indus "where lay honourably buried" the body of St. Thomas, "in a beautiful church"[41].

b. Tradition of the Tomb of St. Thomas in Mylapore

Before the Portuguese arrived on the scene of the tomb first as pilgrims and later as its custodians, it was a site much venerated by the local population of Christians as well as others. How did they know of the precious contents of the tomb they were venerating? It is true that the *Acts of Thomas does* contain the fact of Thomas' death at the end of his mission in India, and of his burial there. But the tradition did not arise from this book which had its origin in the West and in a language unknown to the people who actually lived around the tomb. There has been an opinion that the tomb which had a Muslim patronage for several years before the Portuguese arrived could have been that of a Muslim holy man[42]. Muslims who are accustomed to honour the tombs of their holy men also did not fail to respect holy men of other faiths. As mentioned earlier Marco Polo, the 13th century European traveler clearly stated that the Saracens respected the Apostle as a prophet and saint, and hence venerated his tomb. And since the earliest times the tradition has been that St. Thomas was not merely a holy man or simply a prophet, but that he died a martyr, killed by the high caste Hindus for his missionary work.

Another obvious argument in favour of the tomb is that a personage of the stature of an Apostle of Jesus, who did devotedly involve himself in a mission following the mandate of Jesus, did meet with his end some time, and was buried somewhere. Beginning with the *Acts of Thomas,* the Fathers of the Church, and many a traveler from Europe have attested in favour of the tomb of the Apostle Thomas in India. And there is no other place in the world which claims to possess his tomb. Even if we accept the idea that the mortal remains or at least the bones of the saint were carried away to Edessa after he had been interred in India, as attested by the Acts *of Thomas,* and thereafter to Chios, and thence to Ortona in 1258, yet the fact that he was buried in Mylapore and that his tomb rests there has not been challenged so far[43].

The early Fathers of the Church like Gregory Nazianzen, St. Ephrem, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Jerome and the like do seem to base their writings on the western traditions on the mission of Thomas which is itself founded on the apocryphal Acts *of Thomas.* They make no references to the Mylapore tradition regarding his death and the presence of his tomb. It is only with St. Isidore of Seville (d. 638 A.D), that a reference is made about the death of the Apostle pierced by a lance. And for the first time Calamina is mentioned as the city in India where the saint was buried with honour. And subsequent to this there have bean many travelers and pilgrims who have made references to the tomb of the Apostle at Mylapore. The Anglo Saxon choncicle, writers and travelers earlier referred to, like Mar Solomon, Marco Polo, Blesed Odoric, Bishop Marignolli, and Nicola di Conti — all of them writing between the 9th and 14th centuries positively mention the fact of the tomb of Thomas at Mylapore.

c. Other Sites related to the Tomb of St. Thomas

The Mylapore tradition regarding the life and death of the Apostle Thomas would be incomplete if we do not include two other sites

connected with the death of the Apostle, held sacred by the local people down the centuries. Both these sites pertain to two hills one small, and hence known as *Chinna Malai* or *Little Mount,* and the other somewhat big, and known as *Periya' Malai* or St. Thomas Mount. It is appropriate that these two hills are connected with the life and particularly the death of the Apostle reflecting as it were, the life and death of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus had withdrawn himself several times during his lifetime to hills around the places of his ministry in order to be close to his Father in prayer; and finally it was on the hill of Calvary that he met with his end thus concluding his redemptive mission. His disciple Thomas would have also sought the nearby hills for his own closeness to God and for his death at the end of his mission here in India. And the two hills related to the ministry of the Apostle were just a few kilometers away from the centre of his activities, namely Mylapore. And interestingly these are the only two hill sites close to Mylapore, now active parish centres in the city of Chennai.

i. Little Mount[44] lying on the banks of the Adyar River to the south of Mylapore is a hillock about 150 feet high. On this hill is a cave which was obviously the attraction for the Apostle Thomas to sit quietly and pray for long hours, a habit which he would have acquired form his Master Jesus himself. In all probability Thomas was withdrawing himself there constantly to pray as well as to hide himself from his enemies, as the hill was also surrounded by an overgrown wilderness. The cave is about 16 feet long, and 15 feet wide, with a height of six feet. There is a narrow aperture to the cave which make entry difficult, and hence concealment easy. The whole site remains today in the same shape as it should have been at the time of St. Thomas. At a later stage an altar was placed at the eastern end of the cave.

There has been a popular tradition about the cave. It seems that the two feet window-like opening of the cave in the southern side, which throws some light into the cave, had a miraculous origin. As

the Apostle was praying his enemies discovered him there and were about to kill him when this opening came about miraculously and he escaped through this aperture. There is a small church at the entrance to the cave obviously built by the Portuguese. The inscription in a marble tablet at the entrance to the cave reads as follows:

"The cave where lay hid persecuted just before being martyred by RAJA MAHADEVAN, king of Mylapore, A.D. 68, THOMAS one of the twelve, the great Apostle of India, the very one who put his finger into the wounds of his Lord and God"

The tradition has been that the Apostle died at some distance from Mylapore, but the body was brought to the house and buried there. It was believed that it was at the cave of the Little Mount that Thomas had died. And it was only a later tradition, that is, after the discovery of the bleeding cross at the Big Mount that the place of the Apostle's death was believed to have occurred near that cross. Since then the tradition has been that St. Thomas was pursued by his enemies from the cave of the Little Mount, and when he reached the Big Mount, he was pierced with a lance and killed.

At Little Mount in a rock adjacent to the cave, people also point out to a spot where there used to be a miraculous spring. There are still obvious signs of such a spring. It seems when the Apostle used to preach from the hill to the crowds they were very thirsty and in need of water to drink. And St.Thomas struck the rock in the manner of the Old Testament Moses and a spring of water gushed out satisfying the thirst of the people.

ii. St. Thomas Mount, a name that has been happily appropriated by the Big Mount some two kilometers to the south of Little Mount, is another site closely related to Mylapore and the tomb of the Apostle Thomas. This site which became the Calvary of Thomas

is about 500 feet high. The tradition is that the saint was pierced to death with a lance as he was deeply immersed in prayer before a stone cross which he himself had carved. And this became the bleeding cross later. It is only this bleeding cross which apparently helped the tradition of Thomas' death on the Big Mount . Otherwise he was believed to have been killed in Little Mount[45].

And after his death, his mortal remains were reverently carried over to Mylapore and laid to rest in the church which the saint had himself built. It is also said that King Mahadevan and his son Vijayan took the initiative to arrange for this respect and honour given to St. Thomas.

Although the name St. Thomas Mount could have been from the time of the British in the area, who seem to have had their garrison there, this hill has had a history closely associated with the Apostle. It is not that he just fled there once to hide himself and then he was killed there. Just as in Little Mount, St. Thomas apparently visited this Big Mount many a times for the purpose of quiet prayer. There is even a tradition that Thomas built a church there as his habit was, and it was this church which the Armenians renovated about the year 530.

And people had associated this hill with the saint from the earliest times to such an extent that a number of Christians particularly from the West settled down around the hill. And hence it came to be known as *parangi malai,* a name that is popular even to this day. 'Parangi' in Tamil is a nickname for the white foreigners. Some Hindus evidently tried to twist the tradition by proposing that this mount was the habitat of a Hindu saint by the name 'Phirangi munivar' and even now make efforts to create discord over it.

iv. The Portuguese and the Mylapore Tradition

We had already noted earlier that the Portuguese first arrived in Malabar in 1500, and it was there that they learnt about Mylapore

and the presence of the Apostle's tomb in that city. There have been some authors who tried to dismiss the entire truth of the tomb at Mylapore as a Portuguese fraud, possibly in their hatred for their overzealous colonizing spirit. Among them there could have certainly been some well-meaning extremists. But the Portuguese did not definitely invent the tomb, but rather they discovered it with great enthusiasm and set about to make it popular thanks to their religious zeal. Martin Gielen speaks of 24 detailed letters and reports which contain a faithful account of what the Portuguese found and heard in Mylapore[46].

a. Portuguese Interest in the Tomb of St. Thomas

The first contact of the Portuguese with the tomb was in 1515 through a certain traveler and pilgrim Duarte Barbosa; the next to visit was one Diogo Fernandes in 1517. And both of them have been profusely impressed about the tomb, and the latter of the two visitors gives a description of the church which housed the tomb as 26 feet long and 17 feet wide. But he sadly admits that this church was practically in ruins. This was obviously the church that had been built by St. Thomas himself. But the grave which was to the right side of the altar was quite intact.

In 1523 the Portuguese felt the need to do some repair works in the church. A certain Manuel de Faria, Agent and Captain of the Fishery and Coromandel Coast officially inaugurated the work and Fr. Antonio Gil was put in charge of the operation. As they opened the foundation of the church they discovered some bones, and they were supposed to have belonged to the first king converted by the saint who was buried near the tomb of Thomas as a slab indicated. And then began the solemn operation of opening the tomb of St. Thomas[47].

"At 1 p.m on a Saturday in the month of July in 1523 during the governorship of Dom Duarte Menezes in Goa they began to open

the tomb of the Apostle. They first dug ten spars and found round the grave plastered walls very well made with bricks embedded in mortar and lime. Having removed the earth there appeared a layer of bricks and mortar, well finished and about two spans deep. After removing this layer they found another layer of bricks similar to the former; at this juncture they stopped and stood still thinking that the grave had come to an end there. Nevertheless, the witness told them to go on with the work and to remove that layer of bricks also and below that they found another layer of loose earth three spans deep; and having removed this earth they found another layer of mortar two spans deep, which was so hard that the iron-bars could not break it. Having, however, laid open this layer of mortar, they found stone slabs fitting each other, of the same size as those in the chapel of the Apostle with no inscription; having removed these slabs they found again a great portion of loose earth. By that time it was nearly midnight and no bones had yet been found. Then the witness told the fatigued workmen to stop and take rest until the following day. On Sunday, early in the morning, they resumed the work and began to dig up nearly four spans of loose earth - and found that the sepulchre walls were well plastered downwards and upwards. At this stage the tomb was sixteen spans deep and they found some sand and quicklime. Shortly afterwards they began to find some bones of the skull (cabeca), then those of the spine (costas) and of the whole body. The witness further stated that at the foot of the tomb stood an earthen vessel that could contain one almude (6 gallons) filled with earth. A spear-head entirely of Malabar iron having the shape of an olive-leaf and struck on a portion of its wooden shaft was also found in the tomb at the place corresponding to the thigh. At last they took out all bones that were much decayed and Fr.Antonio Gil placed them in a small box. The remaining bones and the grave were underneath the foundations of the chapel. And the Father sent for Manuel de Faria, who was at

Pulicat and he came at once bringing with him a china-casket with two locks..."

We may note few historic evidences from the above description of the first excavation of the tomb of Thomas, which seems to say that certain statements of the apocryphal book *Acts of Thomas* are basically correct:

i. The bricks used for the tomb are of an ancient character and give the best testimony. In the year 1945 the Archeological survey of India excavated a Roman warehouse at Arikamedu about 150 kilometers to the south of Mylapore, on the seacoast. This trading station is historically attested as having been built in the first century. The discovery of the bricks used there has thrown much evidence on the tomb of St. Thomas. The size and quality of bricks are nearly the same in both attesting to the fact that the tomb of the saint was built already in the first century, which is not long after the death of the saint in 72 A.D.

ii. The discovery of an earthen vessel or the kalam at the food of the tomb which was filled with earth was entirely in accordance with the declaration made by Bishop Marignoli the papal legate in 1394. He referred to a local tradition that when the saint was buried, the soil which was stained with the blood of the saint was reverently placed in a pot and was also buried along with the body. That seems to have been a great mark of respect to the blood shed by the saint. And hence arose the tradition which lasted even to our own times of pilgrims particularly from Kerala collecting some sand from the tomb and taking it home as a souvenir.

iii. What about the other relics discovered in the tomb? First of all the finding of the spear-head of iron with a shape of an olive leaf struck to a portion of a wooden shaft (only a Portuguese writer could refer to an olive leaf, since olives are not found in India!). Is it not possible that the disciples of Thomas considered the lance that

pierced the saint, as the tradition points out even from the time of the *Acts of Thomas,* was too sacred to be kept with them, and hence buried it along with his body?

iv. The most precious of the excavations were none other than the bones mentioned as of the skull, the spine and the whole body. They could have been some small pieces of them as all that could be carefully retrieved had hardly filled a small chest, 11 x 22 cm. And to what part of the body they belonged to should have been a skillful surmise, considering the period of nearly 15 centuries since the burial had taken place. In all probability, bones from adjacent tombs too (possibly of a disciple of St. Thomas) were also collected into the casket. And it is quite possible that the major part of the bones were already transported to Edessa as told by the *Acts of Thomas.* Is it possible that some zealous friends of the Apostle thought that they would be safe only in a totally Christian context as Edessa then was, rather than in a 'pagan' land. Or it is also possible that St. Thomas himself expressed a desire to be interred in Edessa where he had first preached the Gospel[48].

b. History of the Sacred Remains of St. Thomas

What had happened to the casket of bones? It is said that it was locked and the key sent to the Governor, Don Duarte. Fr. Perumalil[49] narrates a rather sad history about the precious contents of the casket.

"After two years, in 1525, Fr. Penteado broke the locks and took out the bones, placed them in a wooden box and deposited it under the altar of the Apostle. It was again taken out and was placed in a big coffer by Miguel Faria, the new Captain of the Coromandel Coast." The relics would have still been resting within the old church. Then began a series of disasters to the town of Mylapore, which by now was known as Sail Thome, since the Christian

interest was mostly around the tomb of St. Thomas. There were constant intrigues among the Portuguese, the French and the British in the area, to possess the area with the connivance of the Indian rulers. Plagues, and famines had also tormented the people of the area [50]. The disasters did not stop with these. There were more of them to come[51].

"In the year 1673 the Mohammedans razed the city pf San Thome, lest the French take possession of it again. And they also razed to the ground the church of St. Thomas, leaving only the walls of the sanctuary, 'which was the very narrow chapel built by St. Thomas himself. On the 15th of December the king of Golconda gave the Portuguese permission to rebuild the city. This church built at that time was most probably the one that was pulled down in 1893 to make room for the present cathedral". And this church constructed by the Portuguese would have been just above the tomb of the Apostle certainly giving prominence to it. And the vast new gothic church which was begun to be built in 1893 and was completed in 1896 was set in such *a* way that it held the tomb in the centre of the transept.

We should still ask the question as to what has happened to the relics in the casket? Had they been also destroyed during the above turmoil? The people around would not have permitted such a catastrophe, having been quite aware of their precious nature. We are told that in the year 1559 the kings of Vijayanagar took away the relics of the Apostle; but having come to know of their sacred character they sent them back immediately. Thereafter it seems half of these relics and the a spear-head were taken away by Fr. Lopo d'Almeida and were given to Bishop Dom Jorge Temudo of Cochin, who was the first Bishop of Cochin, erected as a diocese in 1557. But it is also believed that later these relics were transferred to the church of St. Thomas in Goa, the first diocese of India erected in 1533. But when this church collapsed, the reliquary

was supposedly taken to Corlim and it is now to be found in the church of Ribandar, near Pangim[32].

Unfortunately in the most significant church where rests the tomb of St. Thomas, that is, the Cathedral of St. Thomas, later declared a Basilica by Pope Pius XII in 1954, nothing has remained of the relics except the lance point which is . supposed to have pierced the saint, kept in a monstrance which has served as a reliquary. And it is only quite recently that a relic of the bone of the saint, which was graciously donated by Ortona to the late Archbishop Arul Das James in 1994, finds a venerable place in a monstrance kept in the present museum of the San Thome Cathedral Basilica.

What happened then to the remaining relics of the saint retrieved during the excavation of 1523? They could not have been easily lost given the veneration with which the local Christian community had held them. Are they hidden in some unknown place? Some believe so. But it is also suspected that they were probably dispersed among many churches in Kerala where devotion to St. Thomas was even greater.

As for those remains of the saint supposedly taken over to Edessa in the second century for a resting place among the Christian community there, they too changed places. Edessa became a scene of some bitter fighting and the remains of the Apostle were transferred to the island of Chios off the coast of Asia Minor in 1144 to protect them from desecration. And fearing a Muslim invasion the relics were then transported through a ship in 1258 to the town of Ortona in italy. The relics are said to have arrived there on 6th September 1258, and are. still there. The skull of the saint in particular is still shown and venerated there[53].

We have also some interesting information that as the relics of the saint traveled from Edessa to Chios and then to Ortona, they seem to have visited such places like Jerusalem, Rome and other

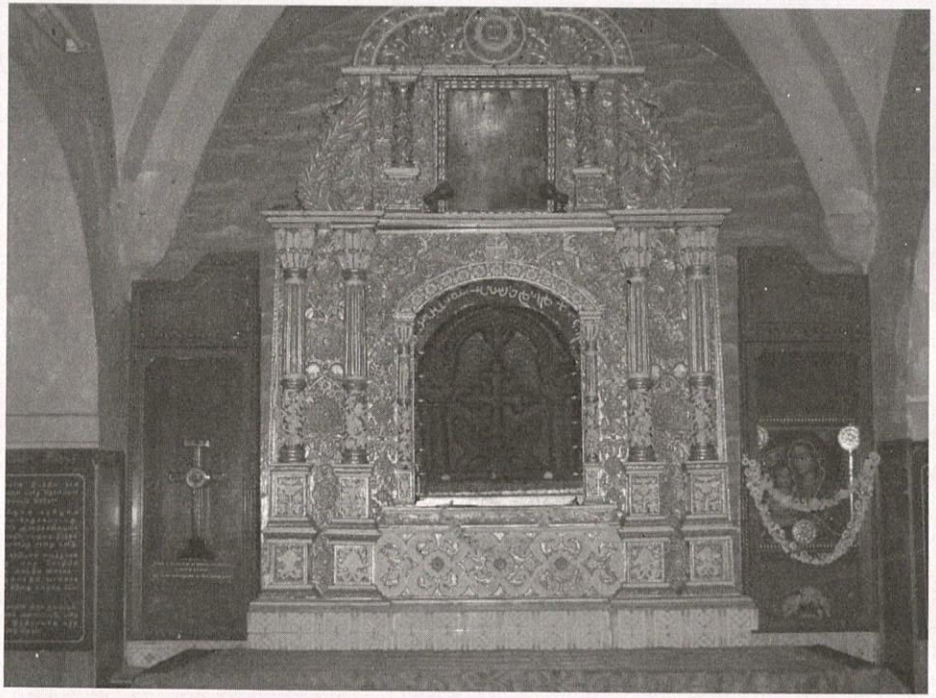
Christian centers in the West. And even of greater interest is that great saints like St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Gaudentius of Brescia, and St. Paulinus of Nola received these relics with great veneration and retained parts of them for their own churches. And it is even related that before the French revolution the church of St. Denis in Paris contained a shrine for a relic on which was the following inscription in Latin:"Hic est manus beati Thomae Apostoli quam misit in latus Domini nostri Jesu Christi" which means, "This is the hand of the Apostle Thomas which he placed in the side of Our Lord Jesus Christ[54].



The Church on St. Thomas Mount, which was built by the Portuguese in 1523 and extended in 1547. Coja Safar, an Armenian, extended it further in 1707.

Part Five

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF MYLAPORE AND MADRAS



The main altar in the Church on St. Thomas Mount. The altar is on the spot where St. Thomas is traditionally known to have been martyred.

Chapter 1

The Church in Mylapore

The arrival of the Portuguese in South India in 1498 (or 1500!) for the purpose of trade certainly gave an impetus to the tradition of St. Thomas in Mylapore. And we have already seen in detail their activities with regard to excavating the tomb and preserving the relics of the saint. Some of them even settled down in the town of Mylapore overcome by a holy sentiment. Within a few years they also made Little Mount and St. Thomas Mount hallowed pilgrim sites. The Portuguese continued their presence in Mylapore with the proclamation of the Gospel. What began as a trade venture by the Portuguese merchants soon became a Christian apostolate with the participation of the civil as well as the ecclesiastical authorities of Portugal.

i. The Padroado Jurisdiction

In the year 1455 Pope Nicholas V had founded what has been known as the Padroado, or 'the right of patronage' that is, a status by which the King of Portugal enjoyed the privilege given by the Church of appropriating to himself the honour of evangelizing, establishing and administering the territories discovered by Portugal. Hence the Christian community of Mylapore and around, as well as other territories like Goa, Cochin, Bombay, etc., came under the jurisdiction of the Latin rite patronized by the King of Portugal.

Such extraordinary privileges, however, were not mere gratuitous favours conceded by the Holy See to the Crown of Portugal. Serious obligations were attached to them. The Royal Patron had the duty to build, and maintain churches, convents, and oratories which might be needed in course of time for pastoral use. He had to provide everything that was necessary for the maintenance of cult and worship. He was also given the privilege of deputing

vicars, rectors, chaplains and other necessary personnel for the spiritual needs of the faithful and to support them with adequate salary.

The first diocese to have been established in India by the Padroado was Goa in the year 1533. A few years later, that is in 1557, Cochin was set up as the second diocese. The Christian community of Mylapore came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Cochin. And on 9th January 1606, the Portuguese Padroado, authorized of course by Pope Paul V erected Mylapore as the third diocese in India. The first Bishop of Mylapore was a certain Portuguese Augustinian monk named Sebastiao de S.Pedro. The new diocese was a suffragen of the Archdiocese of Goa, and its jurisdiction extended to the whole of the Coromandel Coast up to Bengal, including also Orissa, and Pegu in Burma.

It is historically recorded that St. Francis Xavier who arrived in India in 1542 visited the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore in 1545 and spent some months praying there. There is a tradition that it was here that he gained strength to continue his missionary endeavours after constantly praying before the tomb of St. Thomas and before an image of Our Lady which later became known as Our Lady of Mylapore, now kept at an altar near the tomb of the Apostle and still lovingly venerated.

ii. Tomb opened in 1729

The first Bishops of Mylapore were of the Order of St. Augustine, Franciscans, Carmelites, Dominicans or Jesuits[55]. The first diocesan priest appointed as the sixth Bishop of Mylapore was Dom Manuel Sanches Golao (1715 - 1723)

And it was during the time of the 8th Bishop of Mylapore, Dom Jose Pinheiro, that the tomb of St. Thomas was again opened in 1729. He also reported to the Holy See a miracle of a bright and clear light which appeared at that time, testified by seven eye-witnesses.

This is known to us from a letter which he wrote to the Bishop of Verapoly which reads as follows[56]:

"In the month of April of the year 1729, the tomb of St. Thomas was opened in order to distribute earth to the pilgrims. The marble stone having been dug up, we saw a sculptural effigy of St. Thomas representing him dressed in a garment falling down to the heals, holding with his left hand on his breast a book, and blessing with his right. The earth having been dug up to a depth of six Roman feet, there was found a new and a very hard conglomeration, four inches thick and made of mortar and small particles of marble; next there appeared a square marble stone, three feet in dimension, at the corners of which had been cut four small square sepulchers; then, big bricks well joined with mortar were seen under the sand, which was strewn between the stone and the bricks. These bricks having been broken, moveable earth appeared, which occupied as much space as was sufficient for burying a human body, and not more...

On the same 29th day, a bright and clear light appeared and seven eye-witnesses, after having been sworn and examined on the matter, testified to the fact. Whether this be the true sepulchre of St. Thomas, I dare not assert; therefore, I submitted the matter to the Sacred Congregation of Rites".

iii. The Gothic Cathedral over the Tomb

It was during the episcopate of Dom Henry Jospeh Reed da Silva (1886- 1897), the 16th Bishop of Mylapore, that the present magnificent gothic Cathedral was constructed in such a way that the tomb of the Apostle began to hold the central place within it. It was hitherto in a separate chapel outside the church which was actually built in 1523, and became the Cathedral church when Mylapore became a diocese in 1606. But the catholic population increased and the need for a more worthy edifice befitting the sacred tomb that was to be enshrined within it had to be

constructed. The new Cathedral planned would be gothic in style and would be adorned with two spires, the higher one over the facade in front, and a smaller one over the central position of the church to indicate the exact place of the tomb of the Apostle. The day chosen for laying the foundations of the new Cathedral was the 19th February 1893 being the Golden Jubilee day of the Episcopal Consecration of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII[57].

The stately and majestic gothic cathedral was solemnly consecrated on the 1st of April 1896. The Bishop was solemnly received into the new Cathedral and officiated at the first service held in it. The tip of the Cross on the spire is 155 feet from ground or some 180 feet above mean sea level. The consecration of the various parts of the Cathedral took place on subsequent occasions by various dignitaries.

9th May 1896: Consecration of the new bell by the Bishop of Dacca. Captain Power (the architect of the Cathedral) and Mrs. Power stood as sponsors to it and helped to ring the first merry chime from it. At 5 p.m. the relics which were to be placed in the Sepulchre of the altars were solemnly exposed in the Bishop's Chapel followed by the singing of Matins and Lauds.

10th. May: The Cathedral with the High Altar was consecrated by. His Excellency Dom A.S. Valente, Patriarch of the East Indies. The Assisting Bishops were: the Archbishop of Pondicherry, the Bishop of Mylapore, the Bishop of Dacca and Bishop Theophilus Meyer, auxiliary Bishop of Madras. The Prelates consecrated the altars of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Joseph and of the Blessed Sacrament. The altar of SS. Peter and Paul was consecrated by the Bishop of Mylapore on 29th June 1896.

The devotion to Our Lady of Pompei having taken deep root in the Cathedral, the parishioners requested the Bishop of Mylapore to permit the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, at the entrance to the

Cathedral be given to Our Lady of Pompei, and thus the Blessed Sacrament was eventually removed to the altar of the Immaculate Conception, where now the statue of Our Lady of Mylapore is enthroned, as a temporary measure, until a new Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament could be built. This Chapel is now where daily Eucharistic adoration is kept.

iv. A Description of the Cathedral

The St. Thomas Cathedral[58] is the munificent gift of Bishop Dom Henry Joseph Reed da Silva, the Missionary Portuguese Bishop of Mylapore. The sacred edifice has been dedicated to Saint Thomas, because it stands on the site of the traditional grave of that Apostle. The exact spot is pointed out as this grave has been neatly walled out in marble. The Cathedral is a handsome gothic structure. The Bishop spared neither pains nor money in procuring for the people this splendid structure. In the execution of the work the Bishop was fortunate enough to secure the gratuitous services of Capt. J. A. Power, a retired officer of the Royal Engineers and a parishioner of Mylapore, to whom the diocese is in no small measure indebted for the unique architectural grandeur of its Cathedral structure. With a view to fit up the building in keeping with is majestic architecture, the Bishop, at considerable expenses got all the required furniture and fixtures in wood manufactured under his own and the architect's personal supervision by Messrs Oakes & Co.

The following data as to the building had been kindly provided by Capt. Power. The length of the nave of the Cathedral is 112 feet, and its width 33 feet. Between the nave and the sanctuary there is a transept, 104 feet in length and 25 feet in width. The sanctuary is 62 feet long and 33 feet wide. The nave has two rows of windows 18 at the bottom and 18 at the top. The back wall of the sanctuary has a large three- paneled window of stained glass. The three glass panels contain representations of St. Thomas, and the other apostles, the former placing his finger into the wound in

Christ's side. The window was manufactured by Messrs Mayer & Co. of Munich. On either side of this window there are two other stained-glass windows made at Madras, under Capt. Power's supervision. The Bishop's throne, situated in what was the original sanctuary, is made of wood and is a handsome gothic structure. Now we see St. Thomas himself seated on this throne. The Cathedral steeple stands 155 feet from the ground. Before the sanctuary there is a large gothic arch of 27 feet and 41 feet high. There is also a corresponding arch separating the nave from the transept, which is 36 feet high. On either side of the transept in line with the walls of the nave are two arches 26 feet high. Around all the arches there are vine mouldings in bas-relief. The capitals of all imposts are ornamented with vine leaf in alto relief, designed and carried out by Capt. Power. The height of the nave from the floor to the ceiling is 36 feet, that of the transept 42 feet and that of the sanctuary 41 feet. The verandahs on both sides extending the entire length of the nave are nine feet wide. The facade of the Cathedral has three doors with rectangular mouldings on the top and it is surmounted by two rectangular turrets. The tower, up to the spire contains three stories. The topmost one was constructed to hold a clock while the second is now the belfry.

During the construction of the Cathedral the tomb of the Apostle was not interfered with except that it acquired a central position in the great edifice. But in 1903 in view of the tri-centenary of the erection of the Mylapore diocese, (1606-1906), the tomb was widened towards the west and an open crypt was built. Prior to this arrangement of an open crypt with access from within the church itself, the tomb of the Apostle h'ke any other tomb found in the church, was completely closed and covered with hard flooring.

The description of the open crypt is as follows: It was slightly rectangular in shape about 12 ft x 12 ft., and 7ft 7 inches in depth. It was protected by a brass railing above. A short flight of four

steps led to a small platform from which two flights of six steps one on each side led down to the floor of the crypt. At the eastern extremity was a beautiful marble altar under which was an open grave 6ft x 1 ft and 5ft 9 inches deep.

The new arrangement of an open crypt of the tomb was a great boon to the pilgrims and devotes of St. Thomas. And the Cathedral itself continued to be the pride of Christians as well as non-Christians in the city of Madras. The spire which can be seen from anywhere in the great city became a great landmark.



The Bleeding Cross of St. Thomas' which is on the main altar, in the Church on St. Thomas Mount. This Cross is traditionally known to have been carved by St. Thomas, whose blood fell on it as he was pierced while praying before it.

Chapter 2

The Church in Madras

While the diocese of Mylapore, and the territory towards the south of Mylapore became a flourishing Christian community under the Portuguese Padroado jurisdiction, the nearby town of Madras which had a small-sea port at that time attracted the attention of the East India Company, namely the British merchants in India. The English erected Fort St. George in 1639 thus establishing themselves firmly in Madras as against the Portuguese in the nearby Mylapore. People speaking Telugu language inhabited the territory to the north of Madras and the Jesuits started a Christian mission there in 1601. Around the same time the Capuchins began a mission in Madras, which flourished particularly under a certain Fr. Ephrem. Gradually several conflicts developed between the ecclesiastical authorities of Mylapore and the missionaries attached to the Madras Mission. It is even said that Fr. Ephrem was abducted by the Padroado agents and detained in an inquisitorial jail at Goa for twenty-two months.

i. The Propaganda Jurisdiction

It was at this time that the Propaganda Fidei, that is the Roman Commission founded by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 to look after the interests of worldwide evangelization (now known as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), took the Madras mission under its jurisdiction. Hence the presence of a twofold ecclesiastical territory within a distance of hardly ten kilometers, namely the Padroado jurisdiction of Mylapore and the Propaganda jurisdiction of Madras. In 1707 the Capuchin mission of Madras was raised by the Propaganda to the status of a Prefecture Apostolic with Fr. Ephrem as the first Prefect Apostolic. And as more and more territory came under the authority of the British the

evangelizing mission of the Capuchins too flourished. Conflicts between the two ecclesiastical units also increased in proportion to the rivalries between the British and the Portuguese. There was an Apostolic Visitation from Rome in 1819 to bring about a rapprochement between the warring ecclesiastical factions. But the differences between the Padroado and the Propaganda widened and the growth of the Church was seriously affected. In 1833 Portugal broke her relationship with the Holy See, and in 1834 all Religious Orders were suppressed throughout the Portuguese Empire. And it was in the same year that the Prefecture Apostolic, of Madras was raised to the status of a Vicariate Apostolic with Mgr. Daniel O'Connor of Ireland as the first Vicar Apostolic, who took over the responsibilities of the Capuchin mission.

The differences between the Holy See and the King of Portugal came to an end through a Concordat of 1857 and the Padroado was once again accepted by the Pope. And a subsequent Concordat during the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIII in 1866 reduced the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Goa and the jurisdictions of the dioceses of Mylapore and Cochin were increased. The diocese of Mylapore was extended even up to port of Calcutta to the North East and the port of Tuticorin in the South.

And in the same year, the ecclesiastical unit of Madras was promoted to the status of an Archdiocese by a decree of Pope Leo XIII on 1st September 1886. The Mill Hill Missionaries of England began to work there since 1877. Joseph Colgan a Mill Hill missionary became the first Archbishop of Madras in 1882, and he was followed by Archbishop John Aelan in 1912. It was John Aelan who had taken initiatives with the Jesuits to establish the Loyola College at Madras. He had also founded the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph while he was the Parish Priest of Vepery. After John Aelan had resigned as Archbishop of Madras in 1928, a new era of administration began in the See of Madras.

ii. The Salesians of Don Bosco in Madras

On request from the Propaganda Fide, the first official group of Salesian missionaries arrived in India in 1922 under the leadership of a young and dynamic Salesian priest Fr. Louis Mathias, and they were entrusted with the Apostolic Prefecture of Assam hitherto looked after by the Salvatorian Fathers. Fr. Louis Mathias became the Apostolic Prefect. The Salesian mission began to flourish in the North East during this time. But their presence in the diocese of Mylapore had begun even earlier, that is in 1906. They had been invited by the Bishop of Mylapore who had known Don Bosco personally and had been entrusted with a parish and several youth activities in Thanjavur. They also looked after an orphanage in Mylapore. Around the year 1927 the Salesians took over the mission of North Arcot after having withdrawn themselves from Thanjavur and Mylapore as advised by the Bishop of Mylapore.

But with the resignation of Archbishop Aelan from the See of Madras in 1928 the divine providence began to work in an inscrutable way! The Propaganda Fidei requested the Salesian Congregation to take over the See of Madras and Fr. Eugene Mederlet became the first Salesian Archbishop of Madras and the North Arcot Mission became part of the Archdiocese. After the death of Archbishop Mederlet, in 1935) the dynamic Mgr. Louis Mathias who a year ago had been made Bishop of Shillong was transferred as the Archbishop of Madras, and there commenced a new era in the history of the Church in Madras and Mylapore.

Archbishop Louis Mathias

Archbishop Louis Mathias was a great missionary, an able organizer and a very dynamic personality. Armed with his Episcopal motto "dare and hope" he had an ambitious vision for his new Archdiocese. He was quite aware of the religious as well as the socio-political dimensions of the new region where he had been

called upon to head the Church. The freedom movement against the colonial British rule was making its way. Archbishop Mathias was fully sympathetic to the cause of a free India.

Madras was a city and its problems were totally unlike those faced by the tribal populations in the North East. His leadership as the Archbishop of the city of Madras had to include the social, the intellectual and the moral spheres. The territory of the Archdiocese of Madras included a vast portion of the city of Madras except the southern portion which formed part of the Padroado Diocese of Mylapore, and the whole of the vast North Arcot district, which was very poor and consisted mostly of dalit population. The great Archbishop did evince a keen interest in the uplift of such marginalized sections of society.

One of the first concerns of the new Archbishop was the recruitment of priestly vocations and formation of priests. He felt that he needed more priests and for this purpose he needed a Major Seminary of his own. He acquired a property belonging to the diocese of Mylapore at Poonamallee and on 8th September 1936, the birthday of Our Lady, Sacred Heart Seminary was inaugurated. The Seminary was entrusted to the care of the Salesian Province of Madras who would run it with help from the diocesan clergy of Madras. The dynamism of the great Archbishop paid rich dividends and the Seminary flourished from year to year providing priests not only for Madras but also for many other dioceses all over India. And the seminary now administered by the diocesan clergy has already provided over 1200 priests to work for the Kingdom of God, and the number of students in formation there, resident seminarians as well as non-resident religious has now gone beyond three hundred! The seed planted 68 years ago has become a banyan tree giving shelter to many a priestly vocation!

Archbishop Mathias' enthusiasm and drive led him to organize events befitting the historic See of Madras. He arranged for a

national Eucharistic Congress in the city of Madras, in 1937, as a memorable Christian witness, and the then Chief Minister of Madras, the versatile Rajagopalachariar remarked, "Madras has become Christian"! And several encomiums were showered on Archbishop Mathias for his organizing *capacity.* In 1938 he founded a monthly magazine *Clergy Monthly* that developed itself as an important journal of theological reflection, now known as the Vidyajyothi and admirably managed by the Jesuits from Delhi. The weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese *"The Catholic Leader"* was given a new format and a new name *"The New Leader"* and it has become a vibrant Catholic journal today. And he founded two other magazines for the benefit of the common people, *Catholic Action* in English and *Nallayan* (Good Shepherd) in Tamil. These journals did not have a long life! The Archbishop showed keen interest in education, founding schools within the city of Madras and outside, and encouraging the religious to found more schools.

One great trait of the Archbishop was his rare courage in defending the Church. During a visit of Nikita Kruschev the Communist premier of Russia he showed his displeasure about him by flouting the government order to close the schools in honour of the 'rare' guest! Similarly when the Yugoslav president Tito visited India, the Archbishop denounced him from the pulpit as "a butcher"!

In a rare intervention at the Second Vatican Council in 1962 Archbishop Mathias spoke of the need for the institution of the Opus *S. Pauli Apostoli ad Gentes,* that is, a Pontifical fund for the training and maintenance of Catechists in the third world. And he had himself opened St. Paul's Catechists Training Centre at Poonamallee, and found funds for it.

iii. Archdiocese of Madras Mylapore

The most outstanding event in the Catholic Church of South India, to which Archbishop Mathias may take a legitimate credit was the amalgamation of the two dioceses namely the Archdiocese of

Madras and the diocese of Mylapore. Both had their headquarters in the city of Madras though extending themselves in the rural districts to the west and the south respectively. We had already seen the origin of these two ecclesiastical units but the embarrassment and sometimes even the scandal caused to others by the unavoidable rivalries between the two were a matter of concern. In 1950 there was a happy turn of events when Rome and Portugal came to an agreement by which the Padroado was abolished in the whole of India except in Goa. The last Padroado Bishop Dom Manuel de Guerreiro was reassigned to Nampula in Mozambique in Africa, and Mylapore was left with an Apostolic Administrator Mgr. Francis Carvalho.

Archbishop Louis Mathias seized this opportunity to impress upon Rome the incongruity of the double jurisdiction in the same city, and earnestly sought an amalgamation of both the dioceses under a single jurisdiction with due respect to the long ecclesiastical history of both

The solemn event of the amalgamation came into effect on 13th November 1952, by the Apostolic Constitution *"Exprimaevae Ecclesiae"* which brought about a satisfactory turn of events to all concerned. Two new dioceses namely Vellore and Thanjavur were created dismembering the western and southern portions of the ecclesiastical units of Madras and Mylapore respectively. The remaining territory of Madras and Mylapore were amalgamated as one ecclesiastical unit under the name, Archdiocese of Madras - Mylapore. And the Archbishop of Madras, Mgr. Louis Mathias, was appointed as the first Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore while the Apostolic Administrator of Mylapore, Mgr. Francis Carvalho, was nominated the first Auxiliary Bishop of the same Archdiocese. The twofold nomenclature Madras-Mylapore was adopted for the historical significance of Mylapore, although it was just a tiny portion in the topographical map of the city of Madras

Archbishop Mathias realized the importance of the traditions, which made up the historic diocese of Mylapore. He obtained the permission of the Holy See to make the Cathedral of Mylapore a Basilica. And in 1956 he crowned the ancient statue of Mary venerated as Our Lady of Mylapore, and declared her the official patroness of the newly amalgamated Archdiocese, along with St. Thomas the Apostle. A solemn feast, and divine office was also promulgated in honour of Our Lady of Mylapore. The Church of Our Lady of Angels at Broadway, hitherto the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Madras was declared a Co-Cathedral. Archbishop Louis Mathias continued his tireless efforts in helping the poor and constructing tenements for the pavement dwellers, for which purpose he made a number of visits in Europe and America. The last years of his episcopate were remarkably that of a Good Samaritan.

Archbishop R. Arulappa

After the death of Archbishop Louis Mathias on 3rd August 1965, Mgr. R. Arulappa succeeded him as the first Indian Archbishop of Madras - Mylapore. He was elected Archbishop on 1st February 1966, and ordained on 25th March the same year. An erudite scholar, a zealous pastor, and a holy priest, Archbishop Arulappa the first Indian to take up Episcopal leadership in Mylapore or in the new Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore was a priest of the old Mylapore diocese. He began his Episcopal ministry with a clear vision and a thrust for evangelization particularly in the rural areas. And he proved himself fully true to his motto, *"evangelizare divitias Christi"* that is, "to proclaim the riches of Christ"

Archbishop Arulappa constantly visited the village parishes and encouraged the pastoral as well as the evangelizing activities there. He would spend as many days as needed in these rural missions visiting every nook and corner of the poor villages, getting to know people, celebrating the Eucharist, teaching Catechism and

administering the sacrament of Confirmation. He enjoyed spending long hours teaching Catechism to children as well as illiterate adults. With a view to give a better pastoral care for the people, especially the children and the women, he encouraged the religious congregations of women to open convents in the rural areas in order to work for their social upliftment. It was due to the ardent initiative of Archbishop Arulappa that the St. Paul's Bible Institute at Poonamallee, which grew out of the earlier St. Paul's Catechists' Centre, began to admit Sisters and train them in the knowledge of Bible useful to the ministry of evangelization. The Catholic Information Centre known as the *Arutchudar,* which he began at the Armenian Street near the Catholic Centre, still continues to give opportunity to hundreds of seekers to know Christ and to accept him as their Lord and Saviour.

His extraordinary zeal in the cause of evangelization led Archbishop Arulappa to write a series of tracts and leaflets to explain the truths of faith, which could be understood even by simple people. He was certain that St. Thomas' preaching in Mylapore could have influenced even the great poet Thiruvalluvar, who had lived in Mylapore, and who should have been a contemporary of St. Thomas . With this premise Archbishop Arulappa ventured to give a Christian interpretation to Thirukural, a much admired composition of Thiruvalluvar. In his later years his flair for writing resulted in the publication of nearly a dozen books most of them lives of saints, particularly the contemplative ones. And one cannot forget the pivotal role he played in the interests of the Church in Tamilnadu particularly in the translation of the New Testament and the revision of the Old Testament before the present Common Bible appeared.

Archbishop Arulappa was also a great devotee of the Holy Eucharist and spent long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This was to be a means of bringing consolation and strength to all those who were laden with heavy burdens of life. He

had a special devotion to the Rosary reciting it before the Blessed Sacrament in deep faith and thus enhancing the contemplative dimension of the beads.

After having laboured tirelessly for a period of twenty-one years, with the zeal for the Lord almost consuming him, Archbishop Arulappa retired gracefully in 1987 and still continued with his apostolate of writing until his death in 1996. During his tenure as Archbishop, Dr. Arulappa was assisted by Bishop Michael Augustine as his auxiliary though for a short period of just three years (1978-1981)

Archbishop Casimir Gnanadickam

Archbishop Casimir was a Jesuit who had held several prestigious positions in the Society of Jesus before he became a Bishop. Having gone through the best of education, ecclesiastical as wells secular, at home and abroad, Archbishop Casimir was successively, a professor of Chemistry, Rector and Principal of the prestigious St. Joseph's College at Trichy, Provincial of the Madurai Province, and finally an assistant to the Jesuit General at Rome. He was appointed Archbishop of Madurai, in 1985 and after two years he was elevated as Archbishop of the historic See of Madras-Mylapore.

Archbishop Casimir brought a rich experience to his ministry as Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore in the field of education, administration as well as social consciousness. It was in the last area that he made an indelible mark. He read the signs of the times and was quick to understand the legitimate demands of the poor, particularly the dalits. He showed a keen interest in the education of the dalit children. He initiated a few centers of non-formal education to the dalit youth with a view to train them with some technical qualification. He also encouraged the formation of the Chingleput Rural Development Society (CRDS) to cater to the

social development of the Chingleput district. And it was he who made the initial moves towards the formation of the Chigleput Diocese. Just after six years of his Episcopal ministry an untimely death took Archbishop Casimir away in 1993.

Archbishop Arul Das James

Affable, in temperament, and simple in personality, Archbishop Arul Das James succeeded Dr. Casimir in the apostolic See of St. Thomas on July 31, 1994. He brought along with him a rich pastoral experience having exercised his Episcopal ministry already for 19 years as the Bishop of Ootacamund, a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore.

Archbishop Arul Das James endeared himself soon to everyone - the clergy, the religious as well as the faithful by the personal touch he gave to all his contacts. He cultivated a special relationship with his own close collaborators, the diocesan clergy. He showed himself a compassionate friend to the poor of the Archdiocese, who sought him daily in large numbers. He has been a dynamic pastor, and involved himself tirelessly in the progress of the vast Archdiocese. And one of the earliest achievements of Archbishop Arul Das James has been the establishment of a Community College at Santhome. This employment-oriented institute of higher education has been a big boon for many a youth of the Archdiocese to get educated with the assurance of a job accompanying him. With a particular interest in the poor, particularly the dalits, the Archbishop established several burses for their education.

Behind his simple exterior, Archbishop Arul Das James did enshrine a rare boldness. He showed tact, confidence and courage in the way he disposed himself to take over the diocesan Major Seminary at Poonamallee in 1998, after it had been successfully administered by the Salesian Province of Madras for 62 years. The fact that the Archbishop reposed much trust on his diocesan clergy was itself a

great asset in the effective administration of the seminary by them in the years that followed.

The most memorable event in the history of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, for which Dr. Arul Das James will be remembered and given credit to, is the bifurcation of the Archdiocese. The process of bifurcation was handled patiently, systematically and tactfully for nearly three years and consultations were made at every stage. And the Holy See complied with the process amicably and on 19th July 2002, sixty-two parishes situated in the civil district of Kancheepuram along with the various religious communities and institutions attached to them, were dismembered from the territory of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore and made into the new Diocese of Chingleput. And a son of the Archdiocese, Fr. A. Neethinathan, the Vice-Rector at the Sacred Heart Seminary, was nominated the first Bishop of the new diocese. Significantly, Archbishop Arul Das James paved way for a new diocese, in the golden jubilee year of the amalgamation of the two historic ecclesiastical units of Mylapore and Madras, as the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore. And thus he ensured a conducive development of the Church and a more effective coordination of pastoral concerns. And earlier while celebrating the silver jubilee in of his own Episcopal ordination in 1999, he had the joy of ordaining Bishop Lawrence Pius as his Auxiliary.

Archbishop Arul Das James had the singular joy and privilege of blessing and inaugurating the new basement chapel built around the tomb of St. Thomas on 3rd July 2004. It is to be noted that he performed this happy ceremony seated on his wheel chair as he was already suffering from a malfunctioning of his kidneys as well as a paralysis of his right leg. He died on 30th August 2004.

iv. A Golden Leaf in the Saga of Faith

The gothic Cathedral which has been the pride of everyone in the city of Madras did begin to succumb to the ravages of time. The

great edifice on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, and situated just about 200 feet away from the sea had to weather winds, storms, erosions and pollutions for over a century and more. The sea breeze had its own ill effects on the monument. And over the years the woodwork began to show signs of decay. The slabs on the roof were giving way. Rain water began to seep through. The walls became dotted with scratches. The 107 year old Cathedral badly needed restoration.

Considering the nature of this magnificent structure as ancient as well as sacred and bearing in mind the hallowed nature of the tomb enshrined in it, the restoration had to be done on a serious scale. Experts had to be involved in the entire operation. Scientific precision had to be kept in mind in restoring such pristine monuments. Above all there were also the financial considerations!

Rev. Fr. P. J. Lawrence Raj, a young and dynamic priest of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, a zealous and enterprising pastor, was destined by divine providence to be the parish priest of the reputed Cathedral parish at this time. And he was fully seized with the problem that the Cathedral was facing. And he daringly took up the challenge. He got a competent team from Bomaby, Ravi Gundu Rao associates, specialists in restoring heritage buildings, to make an exhaustive study of the project. And the study only confirmed that the restoration was imperative and the task ahead was to be immediate. The project was entrusted to Ravi Gundu Rao and Associates, along with the Larson and Toubro, the ECC Construction division. The operation 'restoration' got to a happy start on 10th January 2003.

As if by a stroke of inspiration the dynamic Fr. Lawrence Raj was suddenly possessed of a great question with regard to the tomb. Can something be done to the tomb now along with the restoration of the Cathedral? He had been observing that the tomb was not accessible to the pilgrims and devotees during the time of worship

in the Cathedral. He had also been painfully noting that the devotees who wished to spend long and quiet hours before the tomb could not do so, for the exposure it had to everything that was happening in and around the church. The vehicular traffic in the Santhome High Road hardly fifteen feet away from the main door of the Cathedral had grown to a dreadful level and the noise generated made any quiet prayer difficult. Could anything be done to protect the tomb and the devotees around it from the noise pollution? The only alternative would be to construct a crypt for the tomb, and make it a basement chapel which could serve the pilgrims at all hours for their quiet engagement with the tomb, as it is with the tomb of St. Peter in the great Basilica at Rome. It was no doubt an ambitious project and even an atrocious one considering the risks involved in excavations to be made around the tomb, and the damage it might cause to the structure of the Cathedral.

But Fr. Lawrence Raj toyed with the idea for quite some time and consulted with many an engineering expert as to its technological feasibility. Mr. Alex Jacob a renowned structural engineer, played an important role in the process. Fr. Lawrence Raj got a positive nod from them and he finally approached Archbishop Arul Das James for approval. Having understood the calibre of this energetic priest the far-sighted Archbishop gave him the green signal, understanding fully well that this new venture would certainly bring greater veneration to the tomb of the Apostle. Thus began the construction of the basement chapel to enshrine the tomb, certainly a golden leaf in the saga of faith which has involved the great Apostle, St. Thomas.

The work of the basement chapel made its way along with the operation of restoration. The earth around the tomb was carefully excavated and cautiously sorted put. In spite of the dryness all around, water began to ooze through. Walls were carefully raised.

The concrete cover came up in line with the flooring of the church. And gradually the basement, 72 ft x 20ft x 8ft, with a seating capacity for 150 people began to take shape with the tomb prominently situated in the southern end. And a statue of St. Thomas in a lying state was installed over the tomb and it is covered in glass; a marble altar is erected over the statue. The basement extends itself to include the space behind the main altar of the Cathedral to the northern end in order to lend entrance to it from behind the church as well as to serve as a lobby. Access to the basement tomb chapel is through this lobby which in turn contains two passages to the chapel on either side. The lobby itself is 50ft x 20ft and does have some venerable attractions to prepare one for a devotional visit to the chapel of the tomb.

As the work progressed Fr. Lawrence Raj became the focus of criticism from some well-meaning zealots. The archeological department was alerted. Articles for and against were written in the local journals. Some of them contended that the whole operation was a disrespect to the antiquity character of the Cathedral. But all such sentiments were given due consideration and as the work progressed the critics became silent.

The basement chapel was completed and it was inaugurated and blessed on July 3rd 2004, by Archbishop Arul Das James. It was his last engagement before his death on 30th August 2004. He deserved this singular privilege for it was he who encouraged this work.

There is also one more happy addition to the sacred memory of the Apostle, namely a permanent museum to exhibit the precious objects and relics related to the venerable sites related to the sacred tomb. These objects have been retrieved over the years, particularly by Fr. Hosten, a Belgian Jesuit and an archeologist, in the year 1923. It is built over the stairs leading down to the basement chapel. A mini-theater too is attached to the museum and

it will be helpful in screening films on the life and mission of the saint.

As these lines are being written the overall renovation of the Cathedral is in full swing. The exterior has been completed and the huge scaffolding reaching up to the tip of the high steeple has been just removed. The roof in the interior has been totally revamped and has a fresh look. The doors and windows have been spruced up. The new marble flooring is still in the process of being laid. The Cathedral Basilica is gradually putting on a look of grandeur which should have been there a century ago. And the date for the solemn consecration of the renovated Cathedral and the inauguration of the newly constructed museum and mini-theater has also been fixed as 12th December 2004. The Apostolic Nuncio, Most Rev. Pedro Lopez Quintana is to officiate in the grand ceremony with the presence of several high ranking Prelates particularly from Tamilnadu and Kerala. It will certainly be a befitting conclusion to a great work. It will certainly be a new milestone in the great Saga of Faith.

Conclusion

The magnificent Saga of Faith which began in the far away Palestine two thousand years is on its glorious march even to this day. St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ had experienced an exciting discipleship with his Master Jesus Christ. He went through a severe test of faith towards the end, but he soon overcame that awful moment by his total surrender in a profound act of faith, "My Lord and My God"! And that was the staring point of a great saga which led him to India, and particularly to the southern part of this great land. The apocryphal writings have played somewhat of a dependable backdrop to the saga of the Apostle. But the Fathers of the Church picked up the mission of Thomas in India and embellished it with their own faith perspective. The later travelers and tradesmen have furnished us with their

personal testimonials as to the mission of St. Thomas in India and the precious vestiges he had left behind in the sands of time.

The Malabar Coast which became the principal beneficiary of the mission of the Apostle has generously repaid it. Their pride as St. Thomas Christians accompanied by their continued zeal in Christian faith with all its consequences to a continuing mission of the Gospel in India is itself a great expression of splendor in the saga of St. Thomas.

The Mylapore tradition on the martyrdom of St. Thomas on its soil gathered momentum over the years. The Portuguese efforts in making the memory of the saint alive with a focus of faith on the tomb had borne excellent benefits. The Padroado jurisdiction lasting for nearly three centuries and a half had done much for the missionary expansion of the Church. The construction of the majestic gothic Cathedral over the tomb of St. Thomas was a sign of a glorious faith on the martyred saint. The subsequent ecclesiastical administration has been no less committed to the memory of their great Apostle.

And the saga of St. Thomas continues. The Lord has his own ways of raising up personnel to maintain the rhythm of his work. Looking back into the corridors of history can be a great faith experience. Every event in this long saga of our great Apostle can still give us inspiration and courage.

Part Six

APPENDIX



Palayoor Church - Rear view.

Appendix 1

The Ramban Song

The text of the *Ramban* Song already mentioned earlier in this book is being reproduced; here; partly. The Malabar folk tradition is contained in this song which describes the Saga of the Apostle Thomas in a way that had been orally handed over for generations. It could have augmented itself with many additions over the years before it was committed to writing after the Portuguese came to know of it. We find a reference to this song in a report made by Amador Correa, who states that in 1564, the Portuguese Bishop of Cochin accompanied a pilgrimage of the native Christians from Muziris to Parur, and that he was full of praise for the reverent way in which the women and the children performed this song. The rhyme and the rhythm of the original Malayalam is certainly absent in the English rendering as given here.

I will sing of the way in which our holy religion was introduced to Kerala.

The apostle Thomas landed at Maliankara with the merchant Habban.

He performed miracles and in eight months he established the Church of Jesus Christ in that city.

Then he went to Mailepuram (Madras) where he preached the Gospel of the Lord for four and a half months and then took ship for China.

He stayed four and a half months in China and returned to Mailepuram.

After he had been there for about a month, the son-in-law of the Rajah the king of Thiruvanchikulam came to him and begged him to return to Malabar.

They took ship and came to Maliankara where the apostle converted the Rajah and his family, forty Jews and four hundred others in less than six months.

He preached to the people, built a church with a cross, and ordained priests. One of the first whom he consecrated was the Rajah's son-in-law and was called Kepha. Accompanied by Kepha he went to Quilon where he set up a cross and baptized 2400 people.

From Quilon, he went on to Chayal, in the mountains, Stayed there a whole year as he had done in Quilon, Baptized 2800 people and set up a cross.

At the request of the rulers of Tripaleswaram, he returned to that village.

But when he saw that the people had desecrated the cross which he had set up, he cursed that place.

Nonetheless, he remained there for two months.

He once more set up a cross and instructed the people so that they should no longer return to heathendom and ordained as a priest Thomas, one of the leaders who had remained true to his faith.

During these two months that he stayed in Tripaleswaram he strengthened all the Christians in their faith and converted two hundred heathens.

Not far from there, further south, he built the church of Niranam and ordained as priest his first pupil Thomas Maliyekal who had been born there.

Then he went to Kokkamangalam, where he stayed for a year and converted fifteen hundred people, set up a cross and taught the people how they were to worship God.

He again visited Kottakavu Parur, stayed almost a year there and converted 2200 people.

From there he went to Maliankara along the southern road, and was pleasantly surprised to see the flourishing state of the Christian community there.

He stayed there only two weeks and went away to the north, to Palayur,

Where in one month he baptized 1280 people and according to his custom set up a great cross.

Towards the end of the year 59 he returned to Mailepuram.

He went back once more to Malabar and the angels protected him on his journey.

He stayed two months at Maleattur and converted 220 people,

Stayed a whole year at Niranam and was satisfied with the faith of the people and the exemplary life that they led;

He gave communion to those who had not yet received the sacrament.

Then he took his leave of the Christians and told them

That they would never see him again, and set off for the land of the Tamils.

Thomas Rabban and Kepha the son-in-law of the Rajah accompanied him for seven and a half miles and then took their leave of him.

It would be impossible to relate all the wonders which our patron saint

And protector, St. Thomas, performed by making the sign of the cross with the hands that had touched the wounds of the Lord.

He raised 29 dead men to life,

Freed 250 who were possessed by devils,

Healed 330 lepers,

Restored their sight to 250 blind people

And the use of their Limbs to 120 cripples,

And their speech to 20 deaf mutes.

He healed 280 sick people who had been given up by their physicians.

He converted to the Christian faith 17,490 Brahmins;

350 Vaisyas (merchants) and farmers, and 4289 Sudras.

He ordained two bishops and seven priests,

Of whom four were called Rabban

And appointed 21 deacons.

Appendix 2

The Bleeding Cross

One of the most important attractions for pilgrims and tourists, who visit the Mount of St. Thomas, is the so-called Bleeding Cross[39], which adorns the wall behind the altar of the church on the Mount. It is a great stone in which a cross has been carved, of a form and shape which is not known in Europe. It has been named as "the cross of Thomas" or "the Persian Cross".

According to Indian tradition it was made by St. Thomas himself. This is in accordance with the view that Thomas was a carpenter, a stonemason or simply a builder by trade, as we found it stated earlier in the *Acts of Thomas*. To carve out and set up such a cross would have been a delightful pastime for Thomas, when he chose and laid out a place for the faithful to come and worship. Similar crosses are found in several places where Thomas is said to have preached, as in Socotra and Kerala.

In Christian tradition, the cross once a sign of cruel punishment had become a symbol of redemption thanks to Jesus' crucifixion and death on it. The cross has become an important element in our Liturgy. And St. Thomas who was quite aware of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross knew its value for Christian worship.

It is still said of the cross kept in the main altar of the church in St. Thomas Mount, that he was assassinated as he was kneeling before it in deep prayer and that his blood poured out over it. A monument came up in the place where the cross was found. And the Portuguese who found it in its present site laid the foundations of for a new church around it in 1547.

Let us follow the report made by Bishop Frei Andre de Santos Maria of Cochin, under whose jurisdiction the territory of Mylapore

once had been, before it became a separate diocese: "This stone is as big as a mill-stone and was lying with the cross carved on it turned down, and the reverse upwards. As the whole appearance of the stone on the reverse was rough and unpolished, it looked just a rough stone lying about. Those who were digging the foundations were about to leave it there without taking much notice of it. But moved by God, they turned it face upwards and noticed the beautiful cross carved on it with an inscription around it. There was a streak of blood on one side of the cross, and the blood looked to be so fresh, as if it had been shed at that very moment. In the course of time the blood went on disappearing, but the cross continued to exude water as if like a sweat and people have been wiping it away. Even now the cross has traces of what had once been there, not withstanding that already fifty years had elapsed since the stone was discovered and placed there on the altar".

The miraculous sweating of the stone is said to have taken place for the first time during a Mass on 18th December, 1558, the feast of the Expectation of our Lady. It occurred at the singing of the Gospel. After that the sweating took place every year, then every two or three years, and then after a long period. The last sweating took place in 1704. The stone took on a dark colour, and gave off so much water that handkerchiefs could be moistened with it. For this and other reasons it was given the Latin name Crux Mirabilis, the miraculous cross.

Already then several Protestants seem to have challenged the veracity of the miracle of the sweating cross. Fr. Tachard, S.J., wrote in 1711: "Several Protestants, not being able to deny what they saw with their own eyes, examined the altar and its surroundings within and without. They even climbed on the top of the church on that side and examined it carefully to see if there was any trickery by which the credulity of the people was being imposed upon them. But after much useless search they were

forced to admit that there was nothing normal in that event, but that it was something divine and extraordinary. They were certain of what they saw but they were not converted"[60].

Can this sweating stone have a natural explanation? At a time when even the miracles narrated in the Gospels are critically evaluated, it is good that this miracle too is respectfully examined further. The matter grows even more mysterious if we turn our attention to the inscription on the stone. The inscription is in very ancient characters which no one can decipher. The king of Portugal seems to have pressed for someone to be found who could do so. Finally an old Brahmin was discovered, who was prepared to make an attempt. At first he refused to go up to the altar to read the inscription, but at length he yielded to the pressure put upon him. He made a fine rigmarole of it! Each sign was, so he claimed, supposed to represent ten, fifteen or twenty words, as the hieroglyphs of the Egyptians taught. His translation is said to have read thus:

In the time of the law of Sagamo, a man of God, Thomas, was sent to this part of the world by the son of God, whose pupil he was, to bring the knowledge of God to the people. He built a temple there, performed miracles, and was finally martyred by a lance, thrown by a Brahmin when he was on his knees in prayer. The cross was coloured by the blood of the saint, as a memory of him[61].

It is very doubtful if the Brahmin really gave such a translation, which is also in conflict with the Indian tradition chat Thomas himself made the cross and the inscription on it. In any case, before the translation reached Europe, it had already undergone so many changes that we can no longer recognize this reading in it. In 1667 Athanasius Kircher gave a version, attributed to the Brahmin, which differs completely from the translation which we have cited earlier.

There has been some further study made on the inscription on the cross on St. Thomas Mount; studies have also been comparing this cross with the similar crosses found in Kerala. The result has been that they were all just imitations of the original cross on the Mount, which has been made by the person of St. Thomas himself[62].

Appendix 3

Our Lady of Mylapore

Closely connected with the history of the Cathedral in San Thome is the great devotion, from ancient times, to Our Lady of Mylapore[63].

Is it a mere coincidence that the Image of Our Lady (of Mylapore) venerated in the Cathedral-Basilica of St. Thomas at Mylapore should be intimately connected with the tomb of St. Thomas, the Apostle, near which it has been for more than 400 years?

St.John Damascene, who died in the year 749, is known for his defense of the veneration of images. He records that, according to an ancient tradition, at the time of the death of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, who had been preaching in different parts of the world, assembled to be present at her last moments of life. They had a vision of the angels and heard them singing. After her death, the Apostles gave her burial and the singing continued for three consecutive days. After the singing ceased, Thomas, who was not with the other Apostles arrived and was anxious to see the sacred remains of Mary. In the presence of the assembled Apostles, the sepulchre of Our Lady was opened, but to their great consternation, they found that the grave was empty. Thus Thomas' late arrival led the apostles to believe in the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven.

It would seem, therefore, that this close association of her Image with the tomb of the apostle may signify Our Lady's predilection for this "Doubting Thomas", who on a previous memorable occasion was chosen to confirm the fact of Christ's Resurrection. Thomas at the sepulchre of Our Lady and a prominent the image of Our Lady at the sepulchre of St. Thomas does not seem just a mere coincidence! In fact in the two other shrines of St. Thomas, not too

far from Mylapore, namely Little Mount and St. Thomas Mount there is also this very significant coincidence; in the former it is Our Lady of Health who is venerated very much even to this day; and in the latter it is Our Lady of Expectation.

According to a Syrian tradition, St.Thomas received Our Lady's girdle after her Assumption. And this girdle is connected with some local legends, as recorded by Bishop John de Marignolli, who was in Mylapore for about four days in 1349. A wondrously large log came floating from Ceylon to Mylapore, which the King with his elephants and men could not drag it ashore. St. Thomas with his girdle dragged it to the place where he built his own church and where he was later buried. Was that the girdle that belonged to Our Lady that was given to him after her Assumption?

It is said that in Westminster Abbey, England, there is a girdle of St. Thomas. Was this girdle taken from Mylapore, when King Alfred the Great sent his Embassy to Mylapore in 883 A.D. in fulfillment of a vow that he made to St.Thomas?

The Image of Our Lady of Mylapore was also very closely connected with St. Francis Xavier, the second Apostle of India, who at the beginning of May 1545 made a pilgrimage on foot from Nagapatam to the sepulchre of St. Thomas at Mylapore. He spent about four months there, in continual prayer. He was imploring God, through the intercession of Mary and St. Thomas, to be pleased to make known to him, whether it was his divine will that he should go to the Far East or not, for the mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

During his stay at Mylapore, St. Francis Xavier was the guest of the Vicar, Father Gaspar Coelho, who later vouched for the fact that Xavier spent his nights in prayer before the Queen of the Angels, imploring her protection against the demons who, furious with the saintly pilgrim priest for securing thousands of their would-be victims used to beat him during the dark hours of his nights of prayer.

The image of wood three feet high, represents Our Lady seated on a throne, her hands joined in prayer and her eyes piously cast down. She wears a long-sleeved robe; a veil covers her head falling upon her shoulders in the form of a long mantle. Below the veil the edge of a second head-covering is to be seen, passing around the neck and continuing almost to the waist. But the mantle and the veil are gilded; the second head-covering is white, constituting a delicate frame for the beautifully carved features. Mouth, nose and eyes are finely fashioned and are of exquisite beauty. The whole statue reveals western workmanship, and can be safely assumed to have been brought by the Portuguese. It was probably brought by Fr.Gaspar Coelho in 1543, when he came here as a Parish Priest, for there are no records of it before his arrival. It is not only the oldest, but also by far the most beautiful statue of Our Lady. There is a similar statue which is also very historical, known as Our Lady, Mother of God, in the Church of Saligao in the Archdiocese of Goa, but the statue of Mylapore far exceeds it in beauty. When one kneels before it, one instinctively feels drawn to prolong one's prayers.

It is from the time of the arrival of St. Francis Xavier at Mylapore in 1545 that this Image has become famous and has been held in great veneration and devotion by all the people, as the process for the Canonization of St. Francis Xavier testifies.



Processional Golden cross - Palayoor

Appendix 4

Ancient Church at St. Thomas Mount

The ancient Church on St. Thomas Mount had been a landmark to mariners for more than four hundred years. In the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Portuguese and the Armenian ships and vessels in the Bay of Bengal sighted the church, the sailors offered their thanksgiving prayers for their safe voyage and then saluted from their artillery. The church on the hill has been in undisturbed possession of the diocese of Myalapore for more than 400 years. It later became the property of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore and since 2003 of the diocese of Chingleput.

The name of the hill before the arrival of the Portuguese is not known. The Bishop of Cochin, Dom Frey Andre da Santa Maria, in a record left in 1600, mentions that the Mount was called by some "Monte de Nossa Senhora" (Mount of Our Lady) while others called it "Monte Grande" (Great Mount) to differentiate it from the other one, called "Little Mount".

The vernacular name came in this Way. The hill was a grant to the Church by the Kings of Bisnagar (Vijayanagar). Their imperial language being Telugu, they called it "Fringy Condah", Condah in Telugu meaning hill. The is a reference to Fringy Condah in the Mackenzie Manuscripts, now at the India Office in London. The Tamilians called it Firingi Malai; 'malai' in Tamil means hill. We have now to find the meaning of the word "Fringy" or "Firingy". Some historians have translated it as "Franks" while others as "Europeans". That the word is now taken to mean "Europeans", may be true, but it was not the original meaning of the word. The famous Arab historian Zinadin in his "Historia dos Portugueses do Malabar" offers the clue. He tells us that the Arabs called the Portuguese by the name of "Frangues"; and this word became Fringy and Firingi. Hence the name of the hill given by the imperial

Court of Vijayanagar - "Fringy Condah" - probably in 1749 when the village around was ceded to the East India Company.

The British however, when they transferred their Garrison to that place called it "St.Thomas Mount". And so it is known now. Many Portuguese families had already settled at the foot of the hill from 1523.

Who built the Church?

Fr.Gaspar Coelho, Vicar of St.Thomas' Church in Mylapore recorded in 1543 that Diego Fernandes, a Portuguese, arrived in Mylapore for the first time in 1517. And it was he who built on the top of the hill in the year 1523 a small Oratory over the foundations of a very ancient Church. The same Bishop mentions that already at that time the place was famous as a centre of pilgrimage.

Thus we see that the Mount was famous and much frequented already before the Portuguese commenced any religious activity there. As the Oratory of Diego Fernandes (which was dedicated to the Mother of God) was very small and the number of pilgrims was increasing, Fr. Gaspar Coelho, Vicar of San Thome, thought it necessary to build a bigger church. On the 23rd March 1547 the foundations were dug and in the same year a church was built. This Church was known as the Church of Our Lady of the Mount, and soon it was called the Church of Our Lady of Expectation, the titular feast being always celebrated on the 18th December. The arch that separates the sanctuary from the body of the church bears the title of the Church in Portuguese, "Senhora da Expectacao", "Our Lady of Expectation".

The "Monte Grande", or as we now call it "St. Thomas Mount", was from 1523 part and parcel of the Parish of San Thome. How long did it continue under the long jurisdiction of the Vicar of San Thome? We cannot give the year, but can definitely say that it must have continued till at least 1561, for in this year Fr.Gaspar Coelho,

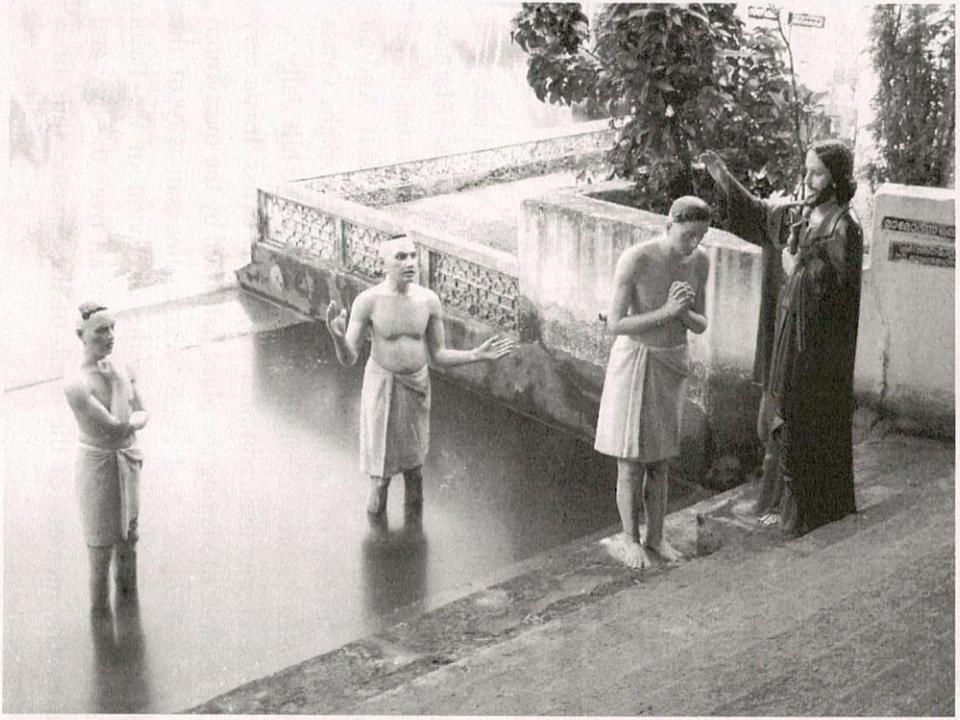
as Vicar of the place got an interpretation of the inscription on the Bleeding Cross on the Mount and sent it to the Bishop of Cochin, who in the following year sent it to Portugal to Cardinal Dom Henrique.

St.Thomas Mount became an independent parish some time after 1561. The Church of Our Lady of Expectation suffered much damage during the invasion of Hyder Ali, and it was repaired twice or even more. Fr.Manuel Barradas, S.J., writing in 1562 records that Fr.Gasper Coelho, who discovered the Bleeding Cross of the Mount and built the Church on the top of the hill in 1547, was buried in this Church.

The Hill church has been the official Parish Church in the locality for many years. However, from 1887 St. Patrick's Church at the foot of the Hill has been used as the Parish Church, being more convenient for the growing population.

After St. Thomas Mount became part of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, the dynamic Archbishop Louis Mathias constructed a Calvary reminding the faithful of the fact that it was this mount which was the Calvary of St. Thomas himself. And all along the steps leading to the top of the hill, stations of the Cross have been erected. Scores of pilgrims climb up to the hill daily as they meditate and pray the traditional way of the Cross. It is a very meaningful manner of visiting the place hallowed by the martyrdom of the Apostle Thomas. And every year a diocesan way of the Cross led by the Bishop himself in the afternoon of the Palm Sunday attracts thousands of devotees from all over the city and the suburbs. The memory of the death of the Apostle thus finds ample expressions.

And we may also proudly state that the Pope John Paul II was himself a pilgrim on St. Thomas Mount when he visited Chennai on 5th February 2004. And from the top of the hill, he blessed the large concourse of people gathered all along its slope, thus bringing great honour to the memory of the Apostle.



The Tank of the old Hindu Temple at Palayoor, where according to tradition, St. Thomas met the challenge of the Brahmins.

Appendix 5

Shrine of St. Thomas at Little Mount

This holy shrine may be said to have had its origin in about the year 68 A.D., according to one tradition, when the Holy Apostle received the first stroke of Martyrdom. Tradition confirms this, and the ancient writers, from the first century onwards give testimony to this fact. This place was precious in the sight of those who had a great devotion towards St. Thomas. This unfailing veneration was rooted in the heart of the ancient Rajahs and great men of this country. In fact it is recorded that before the Portuguese held sway over this part of the country the early Rajahs and Nawabs of the place were sympathetic protectors of this Holy Shrine.

The Portuguese first settled in the neighbourhood of Little Mount in 1503 when a certain Albuquerque founded a settlement at Mylapore. At that period the whole of this part of the country was subject to the Hindu King of Vijayanagar whose capital after 1556 was at Chandragiri.

About the year 1551, Little Mount, which was till then only a steep rocky elevation, began to be cleared and leveled for the convenience of the pilgrims. The fact is stated on a big stone, which has been fixed at the top of the steps towards the north of the hill. The Church of Our Lady at the entrance to the cave was built that year and given to the Portuguese Jesuits. These then built the small hermitage which is on the top of the rock. There could have been another church built on the top, the Church of the Resurrection, where the cross engraved on the rock is now to be found,

There are two other important sites at Little Mount. One is the cave and the other the miraculous spring. Of the cave it has been written as follows: One enters it with some difficulty through a crevice in the rock. It has not been thought fit to embellish this

entrance, or even to change anything in the whole cave, because it is believed that St. Thomas often retired into this solitary place to pray. The later missionaries have put up an altar at the eastern end of the cave. There is a tradition among the people that a sort of window on the southern end of about 2 feet, which throws a very dim light into the cave, was miraculously made and that it was through this opening that St. Thomas escaped when the enemies came to attack him.

Of the miraculous spring the record is as follows: This is called St. Thomas' fountain. There is a rather common tradition in the country that the Holy Apostle who lived at Little Mount, being moved to see that the people who came in crowds to hear his preaching suffered much from thirst, as water could be had only at a great distance in the plain, knelt in prayer on the highest part of the hill, struck the rock with his stick, and instantly there gushed forth a spring of clear water, which cured the sick when they drank of it trusting in the intercession of the saint. There is a stream which now runs at the foot of Little Mount which is understood to have been formed only at the beginning of last century. It was created by the overflowing and bursting of a distant tank owing to heavy rain. This formed the little canal which in times of drought contains salty water, because at 2 leagues from Little Mount it communicates with the sea.

Coming back to the spring of water miraculously made by St. Thomas, it has been said that when some heretical women threw some dirt over it due to their anger against the saint, the water seemed to have receded immediately. But the women died that very day of an extraordinary punishment for their audacity. The water is continually being taken and drunk. Christians affirm that it produces sudden cures even to the present day

On the occasion of the 19th centenary of St. Thomas in 1972, a big circular church was built and consecrated, for the benefit of the increasing number of parishioners and pilgrims.

Appendix 6

The Portrait of Our Lady by St. Luke

In the church on St. Thomas Mount we find on the altar an oil painting of the Madonna on wood. The tradition since a long time has been that this picture was painted by the Evangelist St. Luke and that St. Thomas brought it here with him. Mr. J. J. Cotton in his famous "Tombs and Inscriptions in the Madras Presidency" (Government publication) records: "This is a picture painted by St. Luke, who was an artist. The Virgin died when St. Thomas was away and on his return he had the tomb opened, in order that he might once more look upon her. It was found that the body had been miraculously removed and St. Thomas was so distressed that St. Luke offered to paint him a portrait of the Virgin as a consolation. This St. Thomas carried about with him in all his wanderings". The painting became famous from the year 1559, after the Portuguese took possession of the shrine on the Mount.

There is also an interesting story narrated about this picture. One of the Portuguese residents of Mylapore betrayed the other Portuguese by falsely reporting to the Court of the Emperor of Vijayanagar that they were very rich and in possession of much gold and silver. The Emperor sent an army of 400,000 against just a small number of Portuguese that were settled in Mylapore. They ransacked the church of St. Thomas and the houses of the residents and found that they had nothing. The Emperor was enraged and ordered the capture of the one who had betrayed them. He ran away in the direction of Nagapatam but the elephants were sent to catch him. One of the elephants caught the man and killed him. Thereupon the Emperor ordered that the coffer with some Relics of St. Thomas and the picture of Our Lady mentioned above be taken to his royal Court at Chandragiri along with 31 noble Portuguese as captives. That same night Our Lady appeared

to the Queen and revealed that her husband would be killed in the battle he was raging and that the Kingdom of Vijayanagar would fall. From that time the decadence of the Kingdom started and it was taken up in parts by various other rulers. The Emperor however, ordered that the picture of Our Lady be returned in a palanquin to St. Thomas Mount from where it was taken and the relics in the coffer be returned to San Thome (Mylapore).

The Portrait

We had already seen the original legend as to how the painting of Luke came into the possession of St. Thomas the Apostle[64]. But how come that it was Luke who painted the picture of Mary and not any other Evangelist like John or Mathew who should have known Mary even better. We may adduce reasons for the tradition that it was Luke who was attributed with this painting. In the first place it was only Luke who exhibited some artistic characteristics about him in the way he has made certain descriptions in his Gospel. His description of the gracious and compassionate Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15), his portrayal of the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and his narration of the sentiments of Mary at the Annunciation clearly show us the artist in the person of Luke. He had shown a special love for Mary in the way he has brought in a number of events about her around the infancy stories of Jesus. Luke's writing on the infancy of Jesus is remarkable, and even long, compared with the other Evangelists. (Lk 1-2). There is an emotional touch about Mary's relationship with the baby Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Under such circumstances it was quite easy for a tradition to develop that a picture of the infant Jesus and a deeply reflective Mary clinging to each other is from none other than the Evangelist Luke.

The figure of Mary in the above mentioned painting, eyes cast down, a countenance of total surrender, and hands firmly clasped to the child Jesus remind us of these texts in the Gospel of Luke.

The first, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38); and the second, "But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19), which is repeated as, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51).



Entrance to Boattukulam at Palayoor. St. Thomas came here in a country boat. A huge 50 feet statue of St. Thomas, erected recently, can also be seen.

Appendix 7

The Legend af the Tree Trunk

Tradition has been that St. Thomas built two churches one in Mylapore where he was buried later, and the other some distant away from it, that is on the present St. Thomas Mount. The latter building was known to the Syrians as Beth Thuma, the house of Thomas, the word 'beth' meaning 'house' in Hebrew and used much as we speak of a church as a 'house of God'.

There is a remarkable legend attached to the building of the church in Mylapore. The wood was taken from a tree trunk, washed up on the shore. It was so huge that it provided all the timber required. In itself, this is of course by no means a miraculous event. In every district by the sea, the inhabitants look out for driftwood and other materials, grateful for such gifts of God. It seems a similar event occurred in 1583 when the Jesuits in Madras were building a church. They could not proceed with the roof, since they did not have any beams of sufficient length. When they had begun to make a thatched roof, a tree trunk, long enough for the necessary beams was washed up near to the church.

It is interesting to trace how the popular imagination has embellished this story of the tree trunk and handed it down in ever more exaggerated versions. We shall give the story in its fullest form, as a typical example of what is usually described as a legend or folklore. The exaggeration has been laid on so thickly that we may assume that the most skilful popular storytellers did their best with it. Perhaps there is some sort of popular humour at the bottom of it, which has not been recognized as such by scholars in their studies.

St. Thomas went with several companions to Ceylon known as Taprobane in ancient times (now Sri Lanka), where according to

popular belief, the earthly paradise existed, for such was the beauty of this island. And there St. Thomas had a great tree felled, and dragged to the shore by his girdle. When they reached the sea, Thomas said to the tree trunk, "Go now and wait for us in the city of Mirapolis (Mylapore)". When the huge tree was washed up on the shore there, the king ordered his entire army to drag it, but ten thousand men were not able to pull it out. And Thomas came near riding on an ass, and called out: "Do not touch the tree trunk, for it belongs to me!" " How," the king asked, "can you prove that this tree is yours?". The Apostle untied his belt which he had around his waist, told his companions to fasten it around the tree, and then he hauled the tree up with ease. And the king was aghast with admiration, and gave the saint all the land he could ride round. Thomas had beams sawn from the timber and made from them the pillars, roof, doors and window-frames of the church he wished to build. But when he came to pay the men for their work he had no money left.

The Christians of that place where afraid, for they were poor and could not help the Apostle. Thomas however told them: "Have faith in God. He has given us the timber. He will also provide the money which we need to pay the labourers." The apostle had all the sawdust collected in a great heap, made the sign of the cross over it, and said to the Christians, "My children take this and sow it over the land that the Rajah has given to our church!" The sawdust germinated and grew into a magnificent forest which soon covered the land. Thomas had the trees felled, sold the wood and paid the contractors and their workmen.

Just as every legend has some definite event at its core, so too this story is based on the building of a church or chapel by Thomas. The original church was demolished and replaced by a new building on the same site, on several occasions. The wood from this tree was preserved with great reverence in a separate building. This timber

was still present at the site in 1545, when St. Francis Xavier visited Mylapore and was given a crucifix made from it. The doors of the church, too, held together in an iron framework, were still said to be of the original timber.



Front view of the Palayoor Church.

Appendix 8

The Cathedral Museum

Museums are a great means of learning. They help us to enter into the past and become aware of history and thus widen our knowledge. The Cathedral museum contains a number of objects like ancient stone inscriptions, sculptures, coins and paintings related to the history of the mission of St. Thomas in Mylapore and its neighbourhood. A careful glance at these ancient objects does indeed stimulate our curiosity and help our reflection. We give below a list of objects which are kept for public view in the Museum of the Cathedral just above the entrance to the crypt chapel of the tomb of St. Thomas. We are greatly indebted to Fr. Hosten, S.J., a Belgian Jesuit who gathered most of these exhibits now in the museum in 1923[65]

1. CARVED STONES

These were gathered by Fr. Hosten, from excavations made mainly around the Cathedral. Studied in conjunction with the other artistically carved stones from within the Cathedral, these appear to be the remnants from the ancient buildings in the campus of Cathedral.

St. Gregory Bishop of Tours (France) in 590 A.D., records the following with regard to the tomb of St. Thomas in his book on the 'Glory of the Martyrs':

"His holy remains, after a long interval of time, were removed to the city of Edessa in Syria and interred there. In that part of India where they rested, stands a monastery and a church of striking dimensions, elaborately adorned and designed..."

One may perhaps reasonably surmise that some of these huge stone pillars and other carved stones and lintels may have belonged

originally to the monastery and the 'church of striking dimensions' of which St. Gregory speaks above.

2. THE LARGE STONE BASIN

The large shallow stone basin, with a 'rope' border on the rim, seems to have stood on a masonry platform on the southern side of the Cathedral in 1921. Earlier it seems to have been in the grounds of what is now St. Thomas Junior Seminary, just opposite to the Cathedral..

What was this 'basin' used for? It is difficult to say.

When the Portuguese first came to Mylapore there seems to have stood in front of the still extant older church near St. Thomas' tomb two holy water stoups. Is this basin one of them? Was the bottom knocked out to serve as a holder for growing ornamental plants? Such seems to have been the use of this stoup since 1921. Or is it an ancient baptismal font which met with a similar fate i.e. the bottom knocked away at a later time!

3. A STONE RECEPTACLE

With two small bulging pillars ending in Ionic volutes at the top. Note the scallop shell at the top, under the curved curling ribbing. It comes from the Cathedral grounds. It is not clear as to what this was used for. Does the shell at the top perhaps hint that it was used to keep articles necessary for baptism? Fr. Hosten says that no one at the time of his gathering these antiquities remembered this 'box' having been used in the old Cathedral.

4. A MONOGRAM CARVED & MOUNTED.

This is the monogram of the Society of Jesus, I H S which means Jesus. This was found at the entrance of the old parish house in the premises now called 'Dhyana Ashram, Mylapore'. It could have been a Jesuit residence even from the beginning of 16th century,

with such distinguished persons like St. Francis Xavier and Fr. Robert de Nobili inhabiting there.

5. TWO MEDALLIONS

One at each extremity of a long stone (probably a door lintel). It is in two pieces, i.e. broken but fit into each other, thus making it clear that it was one stone. This stone was formerly in the Cathedral grounds.

The two medallions face each other. The one at right (as one faces the stone) has obviously a diadem on the head, which would mean that the figure represents a king. The diadem does not appear to be Indian, but Persian. The cut and rope-like treatment of the beard also gives the king a Persian or Assyrian appearance.

The figure on the left has a fillet ornament round the head which falls in curls at the back of the head. This fillet was of old and distinctive mark of kings and princes as seen on Bactrian and Indo-Parthian coins.

Medallions on stone representing historical persons in kingly or princely attire seem practically unknown in India. Are we standing before foreign architectural influences?

Whom do these two figures represent? It is difficult to say for certain. It would depend on the answer to the question, as to who made it. By non-Christians or Christians, and when? These questions cannot be answered with any certainty. If the medallions were made by non-Christians at Mylapore, they might refer to a bit of political history of the place in the early centuries and represent two kings of the Parthian dynasty, since the medallions are of that style.

If they were made by Christians (of the first or second century) they may represent king Gondophares and his brother Gad, with whom the apostolate of St. Thomas is connected.

Another supposition is that the two figures represent the king of the place where St. Thomas was killed i.e. of Mylapore itself. The name of this king is said to have been Mazdai or Misdai, (Persianized from Vasudev!) which is a Persian or Parthian name. This King's son Uzanes (also Persianized from the local Vijayan!)) is said to have been baptized by St. Thomas.

A Jacobite Calendar says: Tesri (Octorber) 6th day: the Crowning of Thomas the Apostle and of the King of India and Misdeus and of his son John or Johannes (Uzanes?) and ten others.

This may be confirmed by the Catalogue of Library of Vatican Codices collected by Assemani, a noted historian. (Bible, Vatic. Codicum, Mss. Cetal 11-266). In this case, the stone-medallions seem to be connected with St. Thomas.

6. CROSS BETWEEN TWO PEACOCKS

At the entrance to what was once the Parish Priest's private garden, in the premises of the present Dhyana Ashram there was a gateway with stone pilasters and a lintel. On the inner surface of the lintel we see a Cross on a Calvary between two peacocks and OR either side we see three eight-petaled roses. Although the peacock was a common Christian decoration in the West from the earliest times (cf. painting representing 'paradise' at the end of 3rd century A.D., in the Catacomb of Callixtus, and a fresco in the Catacomb of St. Priscilla, 'Clothing a Virgin Dedicated to God'). But to us it has a special interest as it seems to link Christ and his Cross in the peacock town, Mylai (Mylapore).

Note the big stone lying near it is a tombstone, incompletely carved; another one similar to it near the southern window is also a tombstone.

THE MAP: Note the map of India is dated 1519, i.e. before the Portuguese arrived in Mylapore.

At the end of the arrow note the words in Latin: 'Hic Sepultus est Sanctus Thomas', i.e. Here is St. Thomas buried. This is not a negligible testimony, regarding the Tomb of St. Thomas in the present Cathedral.

7. TAMIL INSCRIPTION FROM 12TH CENTURY

This was found in the San Thome Cathedral opposite to the present north-west verandah. The department of Epigraphy, Madras, examined it in 1923 and placed it in the 12th century A.D. i.e. Raja Vikram Chola's time. It registers a gift of land tax free for the burning of a lamp, at night, before the idol of Nataraja, Hindu deity.

The stone is only a fragment. Did the rest of the fragment refer to a similar gift for providing some revenue to the church which may have been nearby? We know that the ancient kings were not adverse to granting gifts even to sacred shrines other than Hindu..

8. A SANSKRIT INSCRIPTION (12th century A.D.)

In Grantha characters.

This stone was found some 100 yards to the west of the Cathedral. It has not been clearly interpreted.

9. ANCIENT STONE

It has not been identified.

10. A TAMIL INSCRIPTION

Fragment of a Tamil Inscription of the 12th century. It was found on a block of granite, to the right of the last step leading to the main door of the old San Thome Seminary, now San Thome Hr. Sec. School. It seems to refer to a temple in Mylapore, dedicated to a Jain saint. The writing on the stone has not been identified.

11. THE STONES WITH CROSSES (figure 9)

Each of these six stones has a cross sculpted over it, equal armed, containing within it a smaller, equal-armed incised cross. There is a rope border around the cross.

These stones were also found in the Cathedral grounds. Old residents of Mylapore seem to have told Fr. Hosten, (who salvaged these old relics from the excavations he made around the cathedral) that they stood formerly outside the old Cathedral in what was a burial ground, to the north of the present Cathedral. It may be safely supposed that these rosses are a pre-Portuguese work.

An Armenian Priest residing in the present Armenian Church (Armenian Street, Madras) is understood to have told Fr. Hosten in 1923, that it was an Armenian practice to put crosses of stone in the walls of houses and churches.

12. INSCRIPTION ABOUT A BENEFACTOR

Rev. Fr. Hosten tells us that on the 1st February 1923, the Archaeological Department, Southern Circle, found a slab of granite about 36 inches long and 24 inches wide bearing a Portuguese inscription, while digging a trench in front of the Southern Verandah of the San Thome Cathedral, near the Baptistry. It is a mark of gratitude to someone who had been a benefactor of the old Cathedral.

The inscription reads:

'Aqi jaz Va/sco Roiz C/avaleiro da Casa d/el Rei Nos/o Snor, qu/e fez esta c/apella e to/da esta fr/ontaria (a) o longo da (r) va'.

Line (l) AQUAZVA

Line (2) SCOROIZC

Line (3) AVALEIRO

Line (4) DACASAD

Line (5) ELREINOS

Line (6) OSNOROV Translation:

Line (7) EFEZESTAC

Line (8) APELLAETO *'Here lies Vasco Roiz, Knight of the*

Line (9) DAESTAFR *King, our Lord's household, who made*

Line (10) ONTARIAO *this Chapel and the whole of this*

Line (11) LONGODA *facade along the street'.*

Line (12) (R) VA

'Roiz' is the short of 'Rodrigues'. In line 12, only the upper parts of the last two letters could be distinguished as the stone is chipped off below. They are in all probability VA. As these are the last letters of the word, the first is in all likelihood 'R' for then it forms the word 'RVA' (street) which seems the only suitable word in the context.

Which facade did the good Knight build? The tombstone of Cav. Vasca Roiz was found on the site of the Southern Porch of the Old Cathedral. This was pulled down in 1982.

The tombstone, unfortunately is undated. Fr. Hosten thought the stone must be anterior to A.D. 1600. He says, 'The word referred to must be the rebuilding of the church for the first time in 1521-1523 by the Portuguese'. This does not seem likely as there is no record of Vasco Roiz having come to India before 1558 A.D., and it could not have been after 1600 A.D., as no improvements or alterations were made, after that date till the church was finally pulled down in 1892.

When did Cav. Vasco Roiz come to India? If he were a Knight of the Royal Household, his name should have been recorded, at least in the genealogical history of the Royal Household!

13. RECORD ON THE "BLEEDING CROSS" OF ST. THOMAS MOUNT

CO MO



ES TA

EM MEMORIA DA CRUS Q' AQUI SE ACHOU
FOR REVEL ACAO CO HU VAZO CHEO DE
TERA. NO ANNO DE 1596

The full inscription for easy reading:

COMO ESTA EM MEMORIA DA CRUS Q' AQUI SE ACHOU CO HU VAZO CHEO DE TERA. NO ANO DE 1596.

In current Portuguese:

COMO ESTA E' EM MEMORIA DA CRUZ QUE AQUI SE ACHOU FOR REVELACAO COM UM VAZO CHEIO DE TERRA. NO ANO DE 1596.

English Rendering:

HOW THIS STONE IS IN MEMORY OF THE CROSS WHICH WAS FOUND HERE BY REVELATION ALONG WITH A VASE FULL OF EARTH. IN THE YEAR 1596.

This Stone was discovered in 1954 by the late Chancellor Msgr. Pereira de Andrade, in the compound of the present St. Patrick's Church. His comment on this discovery is as follows:

'The stone must have originally been on the wall of the sanctuary of the Hill Church, St. Thomas Mount, as it is a record of the finding of the stone, i.e., the Sweating Cross. How did this stone find its place in the campus of St. Patrick's Church? The original

oratory on the hill was built in 1523; and the church was constructed in 1547, when the other stone with the cross was discovered. The Church seems to have suffered much damage and rebuilt in 1636. In1635 Dr. Constantino Sardinha Rangel, administrator of the Diocese of Mylapore completely repaired and renovated the church with contributions from the people. In about 1781 a big battle was fought there during the invasion of Hyder Ali. Perhaps when the church was destroyed, the stone disappeared and some good soul must have removed it to the church below. The date on the stone is 1596. We know that the Bishop of Cochin, Dom Frey Andrey de Santa Maria has left us a record of the sweating or bleeding stone. The Bishop had come to San Thome in 1596 on a Pastoral Visit. On this occasion he must have ordered the stone with the inscription of 1596 to be placed for a future memory of the finding of the sweating or bleeding stone.

14. THE GLORY OF MARY MOTHER OF GOD

IN A TRIANGULAR STONE, MARY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IS ALREADY PRAISED EVEN TWO CENTURIES BEFORE THIS TRUTH WAS OFFICIALLY PROCLAIMED.

The base of the stone is 26 inches and the sides measure 27 inches. The inscription reads, "LOWADA SEIA A PVRISSIMA CONCEICAO'. (Praised be the most pure conception!). This expression can refer only to the Virgin Mary whom, we believe, God made pure (free from original sin), from the moment of her birth.

SCRIPT: The script is not modern Portuguese. In the first word, the 3rd letter V is used for 'U' and joined on to the 4th letter '*V*'; also in the 4lh word, 'V' is used instead of 'U'. Again 'I' is used instead of 'J' in the 2nd word.

In modern Portuguese, it should be, 'LOUVADA SEJA A PURISSIMA CONCEICAO'.

THE DESIGN: The design is neatly carved and seems to be Indian.

In the centre, there is a medallion which bears what appears to be an image of a bearded man wearing a tunic sitting cross-legged. To some he looks as if he is standing behind a pulpit. He appears to wear a cap and a low crown. He seems to have long hair which can be seen to the right of his head. The left-hand holds a cross while the right-hand is raised in benediction.

This stone was got in 1935 from one M. Daniels, 'Blue Wave', No.29-Doming Lane, about half a mile to the South East of San Thome Cathedral. Daniels found it in 1916 while digging the foundations for his house and as it seemed to have the image of a saint, he built it into the wall of his parlour which served also as the family oratory. It is interesting to note that the place of the discovery is very near to the spot where once stood the South Gate of the Portuguese Citadel. Ho did it get there?

We read in Portuguese history that the 8th Duke of Braganza having liberated Portugal from Spanish domination ascended the throne of Portugal as Dom Joao IV (John IV) in 1646. This monarch, we presume, had a very great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, for on the 24th March 1646, he publicly dedicated Portugal and its conquests to the Blessed Virgin under the glorious mystery of the Immaculate Conception, declaring her to be the Patroness and Protectress of his realm. (Cf. Gabtnete Historico, IV, III a, 115).

On the 26th March 1646 he summoned the Courts or Councils of the 'Three Estates of the Realm' (what we would call now-a-days his Parliament, the Council of the Lords, the Clergy and the People), and took an oath that he would defend his belief in the Immaculate Conception even at the risk of his life.

The same oath was taken by all the members of his Parliament. Soon the Bishops, Universities, Religious Orders and congregations in the Kingdom followed suit ('Mitras Lusitanas, Vol.1., 2nd Ed., P. 148. de Nazare).

In 1647, in Goa, Archbishop Marteres ordered the same oath to be taken by the Chapter of the Cathedral and all the parishes under his jurisdiction. There were imposing celebrations all over Goa in connection with this event which are recorded in a book entitled 'Relacao das festas quando se Jurou a Conceicao na India, 1647, 4, by Fr. Goncalo de S. Jose.

By a Royal letter of the 30th June 1654 an inscription declaring the Immaculate Virgin, Patroness, was ordered to be put up at the entrance of all cities and towns in Portugal and in her dominions abroad. (Boletim do Governo, 1865, No.75). It was only in 1656 that these inscriptions were put up in Goa, Diu and Chaul. (Oriente Portugueses, Vol.1, 1904, p. 61S).

Pope Clement X who watched the events in Portugal with tacit approval, confirmed the action of Dom Joao IV on the 8th May 1671 by the Brief 'Eximia dilectissimi'.

The election of the Virgin Mary under the title of 'The Immaculate Conception' as Patroness of Portugal, therefore, received the official approval of the Vatican.

The Triangular Stone seems to be a commemoration stone of the pious King's action put into the Southern Gate of the Citadel of San Thome. It must have been installed in 1656 when, the inscriptions were put up in Goa, Diu, Chaul or perhaps at the latest, in 1657.

What is of abiding interest for us of San Thome is the inscription. For it proves that nearly 300 years before the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, this belief was cherished and this devotion nurtured in San Thome, Madras. The dogma was defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

15. THE CHAIR

The Chair with the Episcopal coat of arms dates from the year 1611 A.D., and was used by the first Bishop of Mylapore, Dom Frey Sebastiao de S. Pedro, an Augustinian monk, who was appointed on 9.1.1606. The coat-of arms includes a double-eagled image, with wings on spread, which has been held as the symbol of the Augustinians i.e. the order founded by the great St. Augustine Bishop of Hippo, in the 6th Century AD.

Why this double-eagled image was adopted as symbol of Augustinians, is not clear. The eagle is said to be a bird which flies very high in the sky. This 'very high' has been figuratively applied to a person who in his mind and thinking 'flies' as it were very high, that is, capable of expressing lofty thoughts especially about God and divine realities. St. John the Apostle is thus represented as an 'Eagle' because in his prologue of the Gospel, unlike other evangelists, he went up straight to God Himself to express the existence of the Word (Christ) as being one with God.

St. Augustine is considered as one of the greatest doctors of the Church. May be the Order which he founded wanted to glorify him and his great writings and symbolized him as a double eagle! But this is a mere guess!

16. A DOUBLE FIGURE SCULPTURE

i. St. Thomas on one side.

This 'double figured' Massive pedestal, seems to have been, at one time, (it is difficult to fix the period) in the open air somewhere, and the local Christians seem to have been in the habit of pouring oil on the head of the two figures as a mark of their reverence.

Whom do these figures represent? Friar Paulinus, in his book 'Christian Oriental India', printed in Rome in 1794, says that this

stone was found near the tomb of St. Thomas and describes one of the figures as St. Thomas, 'dressed in a garment falling down to the heels, holding in his left hand on his breast a book, and with the right hand in the pose of blessing or teaching'.

In 1729, the then Bishop of Mylapore Dom Joseph Pinheiro writes, in exactly the same strain, to the Bishop of Verapoly.

The figure seems to wear a girdle, part of which falls in front, below the knee, and a stole-like vesture winding round the left hand. The book held in the hand may be taken as an indication that the figure represents an Apostle; for the apostles in olden times, both in the Greek and Latin Church were usually represented with a book. The 'girdle' worn seems to identify him as St. Thomas. Both Syrian and local traditions have it that St. Thomas received our Lady's girdle after her Assumption.

This connection of the girdle with our Lady seems to have been taken for granted by Christians of Mylapore, all along the centuries. Thus we find Bishop John de Marignolli (about 1349 A.D) recording it. It is also connected with the legend of the dragging of a huge log from the sea to the shore, which could not be moved even by elephants: St. Thomas is said to have used this girdle in order to pull it ashore.

ii. A King or another Apostle on the other side.

The Christians seem to identify it with Kandappa Raja (Gondophares?) the supposed King of Mylapore whom St. Thomas may have converted. The figure is obviously bearded: it seems to have also a girdle around the waist; a loose garment (shown by the triple wavy line in the background) which reappears around the left arm, down the left hip and up the right hip; it hangs loose in front above the knees.

What appears to be like a top-knot may perhaps be an aureole (thus placed for the sake of perspective) because there is a grove all

round the outer border. The left heel is raised as in an act of walking, while the right foot rests on the ground.

The left hand seems to hold a book or some instrument. If it is a book, the figure may represent an Apostle too! Perhaps St. Bartholomew who is said to have brought to India St. Mathew's Gospel, written in Hebrew!

Two Apostles of India, though the apostolate of St. Bartholomew in India is not yet proved as much as that of St. Thomas. It is rather significant that the new 'divine office' (after Vatican II) has this note on 24th August, the feast ;of St. Bartholomew: 'after the Lord's ascension tradition has it that he preached the Gospel in India and there suffered martyrdom'. In fact Kalyan a place near Bombay is often said to be the place of his martyrdom. This double-figure in stone is said to have been discovered somewhere near the tomb of St. Thomas when it was dug up in 1729. This is what Bishop Pinheiro (above mentioned) writes in his letter to the Bishop of Verepoly. It is said that originally this stone was kept in the open.

It is also known that when the Portuguese opened it in 1521-1523 it was not found there. How or when did it get there? A most probable explanation is that when the Christians were driven from Mylapore (by Muslims?) some time between 1430 and 1500 or at an earlier date it was buried not exactly in the tomb, but rather somewhere near it!

This figure of St. Thomas (& St. Bartholomew) seems to testify to the cult of the Apostle even before the Portuguese came to India.

The date of the stone image, perhaps middle of the 7th Century A.D.

17. ST. THOMAS' COINS

Gratia de Sa, Governor of the State of Goa, ordered that in memory of St. Thomas special coins be minted in Goa in 1548. They were

known as 'Santhomes'. On one side there was the effigy of St. Thomas with a carpenter's rule on his shoulder and on the reverse the Royal Portuguese Arms. In the beginning they were of gold. Similar silver coins were minted between 1551 *and* 1554- A collection of coins was seen in the Exhibition of National Industry held in 1861. In this collection one gold 'Santhome' was exhibited, (cf. Resumo Historico da Vida de S. Francisco Xavier, by Filipe Nery Xavier, 1861).

Travernier, who was in Goa and Mylapore, gives us the picture of one of these 'Santhomes' minted in 1660.



Kodungalloor - Azhicode Mar Thoma Alayam. The spot where St. Thomas first set his foot from the boat is adorned as "Marthoma Gate".

The Two Large Pictures on Wall

i. St. Francis Xavier driving away his enemies.

St. Francis Xavier often visited Mylapore and prayed at the Tomb of St. Thomas, as well as near the image of Our Lady (later known as Our Lady of Mylapore). Once he stayed about 4 months with the Parish Priest, in his house (which today corresponds to the Sacristy of the Cathedral) and used to go to the Tomb and pray there daily, even at night. These two Apostles linked in this way are called the Apostles of India.

The picture above depicts the driving away of enemies who had decided to kill him. Here is a brief account which is said to have happened in a town near Kottar:

When a tribe of savages and public robbers, having plundered many other places, made inroads into Travancore (Kottar was a part of Travancore!), St. Francis Xavier marched up to the enemy, with a crucifix in his hand, at the head pf a small group of fervent Christians, and with a commanding air, bade them, in the name of living God, not to pass further, but to return the way they came. His words cast such a terror into the minds of the leaders who were at the head of the barbarians, that they stood some time dumbfounded and motionless; and then they panicked, and quit the country.

ii. The Log of Wood

Now the 'forest tree of an unmeasured size' or the great 'log' plays an important part in the local legends of Mylapore and helps to identify the place; for it is said, that it blocked up the river and no human force could move it, until the Apostle drew it after him by means of his girdle. The king thereupon gave him leave to make his chapel of the same piece of wood.

This legend of the log is related by Bishop John de Marignolli (about 1349). In course of time a monastery was added to the Church, built with the same wood and the spot came to be known among the Persian and Arab traders as Bethumah, the House of Thomas. (Beth in Hebrew being house)

End Notes

[1] R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John,* Vol 1, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966, P.424

[2] E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha,* Vol 1., SCM Press, London, 1975, P. 307-308; J.D. Turner, *Book of Thomas the Contender,* in D.N.Friedman (ed), Anchor Bible Dictionary, Doubleday, NY 1992 Vol. 6., P. 529-530

[3] Marvyn Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas* (Interpretation by Harold Blood), HarperSanFrancisco, NY., 1992 contains a critical edition of the Coptic text.

[4] E. Hennecke, *The Infancy Story of Thomas,* in New Testament Apocrypha, Vol 1, SCM Press, London 1975, p. 388-401; Heart, W.J., *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas,* in Anchor Bible Dictionary, *cit.,* p. 540-44

[5] Thompson, D.A., *The Apocalypse of Thomas,* in Anchor Bible Dicionary, cit., p. 534; for the text see E. Hennecke, *Apocalypse of Thomas,* in New Testament Apocrypha, *cit.,* p. 798-803

[6] Attridge, H.W., *Acts of Thomas,* in Anchor Bible Dictionary, *cit.,* p. 531-534; for the text, E. Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, Vol 2., cit., p. 426-531.

[7] For details about the historic dimensions of Gudnaphar, I depend on the writings of J.N.Fraquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in India,* in Jacob Vellian (ed., Syrian Church Series, vol 1., Kottayam, 1972 p.34-35; see also, A.C.Perumalil, *The Apostles in India,* Patna, 1971, p. 67-69.

[8] *V.C.George, Apostolate and Martrydom of St. Thomas,* Ernakulam. 1964, P. 49, gives elaborate descriptions as to the closeness of Mazdai or Mahaveva to Vasudeva a South Indian king.

He quotes the French scholar M. Sylvin Levi to support his assertion. He is sure that behind some Syrian or Iranian names we should see many a South Indian personality in the second part of Thomas' apostolate in *the Acts of Thomas.*

[9] J. Kolangaden, *The Historicity of Apostle Thomas,* Trichur, 1993, p.2O

[10] There are also scholars and archeologists who take a more skeptical view as to the reliability of the *Acts of Thomas,* in spite of the popularity that the books of this type enjoyed in the early Church. And this particular book had been translated into various languages like Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Ethiopic. Cf. L.M.Pylee, *St. Thomas Christians and the Archdiocese of Verapoly,* Ernakulam, 1977, p.3off.

[11] A.C.Perumalil, cit., p. 172-179 discuses this aspect and the refusal of a few British scholars to accept that Thomas ever went to Punjab, or to the north western parts of India.

[12] V.C.George,cit., p. 49-50; also, Zaleski, *The Apostle St. Thomas in India,* Mangalore, 1912, p. 141ff.

[13] Ibidem, p. 51

[14] I do not claim to have gone into primary sources while compiling this section. I have relied much on scholars like A.C. Perumalil, *cit.,p* 55-62, who has extensively quoted the primary sources; and R. Arulappa, who as parish priest of St. Thomas' Cathedral and later as Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore wrote several pamphlets in Tamil and English with a pastoral content to make the apostolate of St. Thomas known.

[15] V.C.George, *Apostolate and Martyrdom of St.Thomas,* 'Ernakulam, 1964, p. 6

[16] R. Arulappa, *Did Thomas Come to India?,* a pamphlet published in 1985

[17]H. Hosten, *Antiquities form Santhome and Mylapore,* Diocese of Mylapore, 1936, p. 305-314 contains a detailed discussion on the name'Calamina'.

[18]J. Kolangaden, *cit.,* p. 37

[19]J. Kolangaden, *cit.,* p. 12:

[20]A.C.Perumalil, *cit.,* p.78. This traveler from Venice who could have been a merchant as well as a missionary could have been a constant visitor to the East and would have called up at the Indian ports more than once.

[21]A.C. Perumalil, *cit.,* p. 74 22 Ibidem, p. 87

[23]Ibidem, p. 72

[24]Ibidem p.72

[25]L.M.Pylee, *cit.,* p. 23-24

[26] The Catholic Directory of India, 1998, p. 29.

[27] A.C. Perumalil, *cit.,* p. 90, 92

[28] J.Kurikilamkatt, "The First Port of Disembarkation of the Apostle Thomas in India According to the Acts *of Thomas",* in *Ephrem's Theological Journal,* March 2004, p. 3-20, where the author discusses Barygaza in the Gujarat, in the West Coast of India as a great trade centre; he is of the opinion that Sandruch-Andrapolis of the Acts *of Thomas* may be the ancient port city of Barygaza.

[29] Ibidem, p. 26-27.

[30] L.M.Pylee, *cit,* p. 34-35.

[31] Ibidem, p. 36-37 asserts that these songs were regularly used on various religious and social occasions. And we may generally

believe that as in most oral traditions they could have gathered fresh impetus and new ideas with the enthusiasm which they normally generate; see also, A.C.Perumalil, *cit.,* p. 94.

[32] Ibidem, p. 96

[33] Ibidem, p. 97 34 V.C.George, *cit,* p.55-56

[35] A.M.Mundaden, "Traditions of St. Thomas and the Tomb of Mylapore" in K.J.John, *Christian Heritage of Kerala,* Cochin, 1981, p. 22

[36] B.A.Figredo, *Voices from the Dust,* Madras, 1953, p. 4. He suggests that the Siva temple could have been near the sea shore close to where the tomb of Thomas is.

[37] Ibidem, p.

[38] M. Gielan, St. *Thomas the Apostle of India,* Kottayam, 1990, p. 169. This scholar even refers to a letter of Pope John XXII dated March 31, 1330 from Avignon referring to a city called Molephatam, alluding apparently to St. Thomas the Apostle in India.

[39] P.J.Podipara, *The Thomas Christians,* Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1970, p.27

[40] Ibdiem, p. 27

[41] Ibidem, p. 24

[41] A.M.Mundanden, cit., p. 24 discusses this issue raised by on T.K.Joseph and disproves it.

[43] A.C.Perumalil, ci., p. 90-91 states, "Was the body (bones) taken to Edessa in the first century as hinted by the Acts? We are not sure. For, the Acts are a mere fiction; and as a fiction the statement of the Acts cannot be taken seriously unless corroborated by other evidence. There is no other evidence to

assert or to deny that the bones were taken to Edessa in the first century"

[44] See the Appendix on historical sketches on the existing churches in Little Mount and St. Thomas Mount

[45] See the Appendix for a longer note on the 'Bleeding Cross'

[46] M. Gielan, cit., p. 182. This Dutch author seems to have spent nearly 10 years in visiting various libraries in Europe researching on St. Thomas.

[47] A.C.Perumalil, cit., conveys to us a graphic description of this process which is worth quoting for our readers. The author has taken the account from some earlier text of N. Figueiredo, St. *Thomas the Apostle in Mylapore: Three Documents: His tomb, His Relics and Stone Cross,* Mylapore (?)

[48] M. Gielan, cit., p. 188. The author says that it was from Edessa that many of the Apostle's missionary journeys started, and that St. Thomas was continuously linked with the Christian community at Edessa and hence this singular privilege for that place. The author also gives a Syrian tradition that it was the merchant khaban (or Habban) who took the relics to Edessa.

[49] A.C.Perumalil, cit., p. 86-87

[50] M. Gielan, cit., p.189

[51] A.C.Perumalil, cit., p.87

[52] Ibidem, p.87

[53] M. Gielan, cit., p. 190; also V.C.George, cit., p. 90-91, ho keeps to the idea that the relics were actually stolen from Mylapore to Edessa by 'one of the brethren'. But he also feels that it was not done by a single individual but by a well-meaning group knowing the links the saint had with Edessa.

[54] Ibidem, p. 190

[55] For a detailed list see R. Arulappa, *An Outline of- the History of the Archdiocese of Madras and Mylapore,* San Thome, Madras, 1986., p. 3 - 15.

[56] Ibidem, p. 8-9

[57] Ibidem, p 131-136 gives a graphic description of the Cathedral.

[58] Ibidem, p. 135-136.

[59] The account I have presented is a recasting of the ones from M. Gielan, cit., p. 190ff., and R. Arulappa, cit., p.159ff

[60] For more details see R. Arulappa, cit., p. 162

[61] M. Gielan, cif., p. 192
[61] Ibidem, p.193-195

[63] R. Arulappa, cit., p. 126-132 gives a longer write up on Our Lady of Mylapore. He also gives the various sworn depositions on the devotion of St. Francis Xavier to Our Lady near the tomb of St. Thomas.

[64] M. Gielan, cit., p. 196-208 has a long discussion on the portrait. He is concerned not so much by the painting which has very little historic probability, bur rather on the fact that the Apostle Thomas has been credited with the possession of such a picture. He also discusses the issue of the character of Luke which gave a content to the beginnings of Christian art.

[65] This write up on the Cathedral museum and the various exhibits there, are all taken from the research conducted by Fr. Hosten, S.J., in 1923, and later published in detail in his book *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore* in 1936. Many of these photographs have also been exhibited in the Vatican Museum in 1925.

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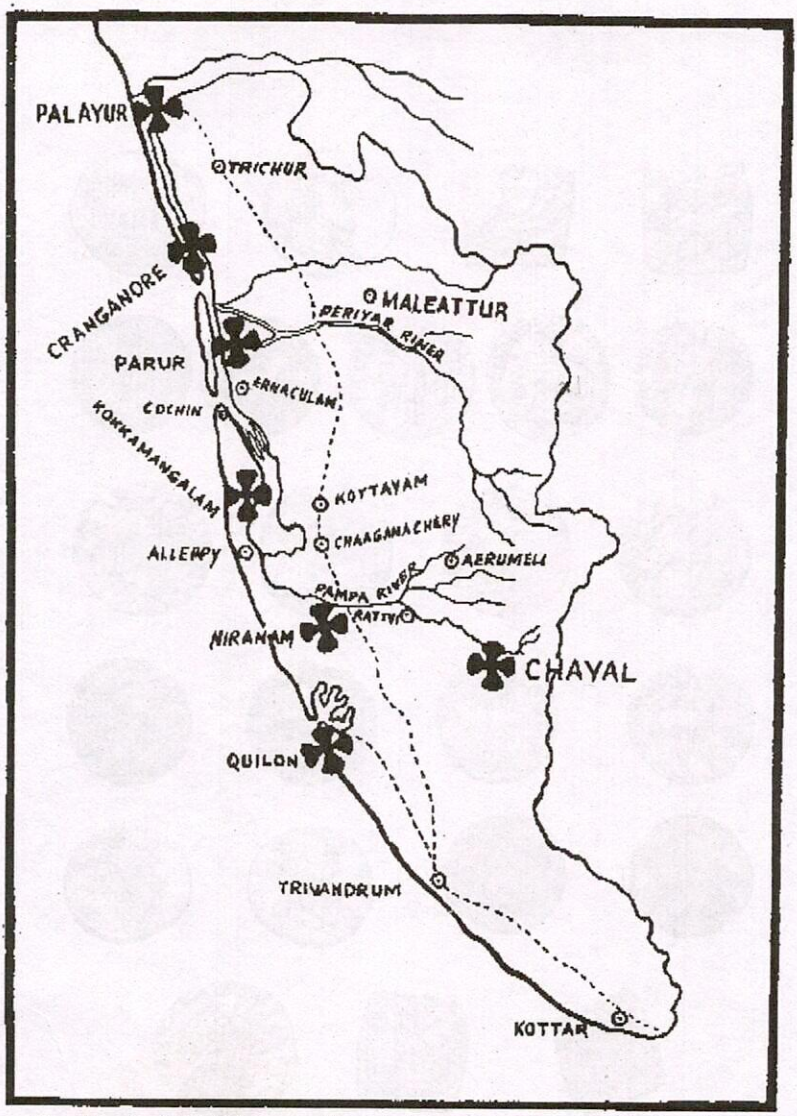
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Ancient Stone Image of St. Thomas, found under the marble stone on the tomb, when it was dug up in 1729.



The Land of Malabar on the South-western coast of India. Seven Churches traditionally established by St. Thomas are marked by Crosses.



Coins of King Gondophares discovered in the 19th century, in the Northwestern parts of India. Gondophares is traditionally acknowledged as a convert of St. Thomas.

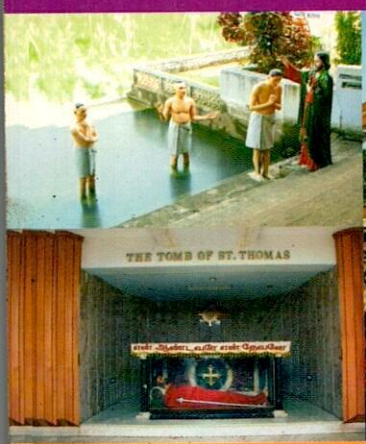
A SAGA OF FAITH-ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE OF INDIA

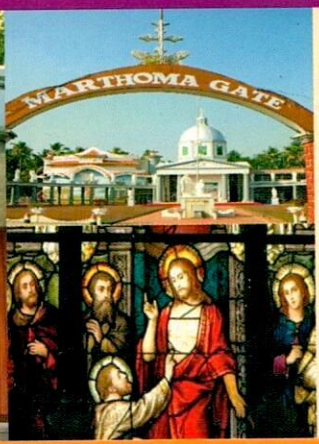
S.J. ANTHONYSAMY

A SAGA OF FAITH is the story of St.Thomas the Apostle of India. His mission in Kerala and Mylapore has been the beginning of Christianity in this land. The valiant character that he was, during his discipleship with Jesus, has stood by him in his difficult mission. Every event in this long saga of our great Apostle can still give us inspiration and courage to continue the same mission keeping to the signs of the times.

I am sure this good handbook will be extremely useful for pilgrims and those who wish to know more of St Thomas' life and his apostolic mission.

Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence Pius D. Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore









" A Saga of Faith" by Fr. S.J.Anthonysamy is a tribute to the deep faith and courage of St. Thomas within a theological and historic perspective. The reader is left with abiding admiration and adoration of Jesus Christ who chose such an apostle"

Dr. Philomena Reddy, Former Vice-Chancellor, Women's University, Tirupathi. A.P



Fr. S.J. Anthonysamy has a Masters in History a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture and a Doctorate in Biblical Theology. He has taught at the Department of Christian Studies at the University of Madras and at the Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, Chennai.

Disciples Of St. Thomas

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