

Emy Merin Joy

**CHRISTIAN MANUSCRIPTS OF KERALA (INDIA): REVISITING
POPULAR HISTORIES OF THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS IN THE
EARLY MODERN PERIOD**

MA Thesis in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Central European University

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by

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(India)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Abstract

The Syrian Christian community of Kerala, India, which claims to be one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, traces its lineage back to the missionary activities of St. Thomas, the apostle, in the first century. Most of the popular histories of the community are varied and manipulated, majorly because of the oblivious of the western as well as Indian scholars about the intercommunal splits and most of them are written based on secondary literature. The popular histories are also heavily biased and erroneously written due to the lack of consultation to the local sources. The local sources written in Syriac and Malayalam, the script being written in diverse local alphabets have been used very little. This study reinterprets the popular histories of the Syrian Christian community by revisiting them through the local sources, specifically using the recently discovered Leiden MSS 1213 and 1214. A textual and comparative analysis of the sources clarifies certain errors and misunderstanding in the popular histories of the community and shows, how histories are manipulated to fulfil the personal motives of the “leaders” of the community in the early modern period. The detailed information about the events after the arrival of Syrian bishops reveals the complex relation between the Syrian bishops, the Syrian Christians, the Portuguese and the Dutch which substantiates the manipulative and polemical nature of church history. This study also presents the problems of translation by examining how certain events in the original text are “re-represented” and “practically” omitted.

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1 Introduction

The Syrian Christians in India are known to be one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, claiming their lineage to the mission of the apostle St. Thomas, in the first century. The popular histories written on the formation and evolution of the church and the community are often biased and polemical. Unaware of the intercommunal strives among Syrian Christians, western scholars often incorporate within the same narrative mutually exclusive stories originating from the apologetic history-writing of antagonistic groups presenting their legendary history as truth. The local sources written in Syriac and Malayalam, the script being written in diverse local alphabets (including Modern Malayalam, *Malayāḷma*, Modern *Grantha* and *Garshuni* Malayalam) have been used very little and without placing them in the appropriate context. Therefore, most of the existing studies on the history of the Indian Syrian Christian community are transmitting rather confusing stories, interspersed with many errors. My research aims at re-interpreting the popular histories of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala by revisiting them through local sources, specifically using the Leiden University Library MSS Oriental 1213 and 1214.¹

Though the language spoken by the community is the vernacular Malayalam, a Dravidian language, they identified themselves as Syrian Christians as they revered Syriac as their liturgical language and, also the language of their theology and elite culture. The Syriac identity attached to the community enabled them to connect with the West Asian mother churches and, the language served as a *lingua franca* for official correspondence with the representatives of those churches.² The European missionaries, especially the Jesuits, used

¹These manuscripts were photographed by István Perczel during a visit in 2012 upon the permission of the Library's staff.

²Istvan Perczel, "Four Apologetic Church Histories," *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 24,(2009): 29a.

Syriac as a tool for their missionary activities from the sixteenth century onwards³. Although the forceful Latinization of the community made them forget their Persian origin to a certain extent, it reinforced their Syriac identity.

The large body of traditions on the history of the community which popularly existed and were transmitted orally from generation to generation over centuries, began to be collected, codified and documented by the Portuguese, Dutch and British scholars. In this process of compilation and documentation, these scholars, while seeking an answer to the vast divergences that they found in the native customs, rituals and practices, started defining and categorizing things in the way they understood them and transmitted a “knowledge system” that suited them best, but often de-linking the historical information from historical reality.⁴ The European scholars attempt to justify major European ecclesiastical positions, while Indian authors, knowing things better, take subtle polemical positions within the communities.⁵ Most importantly, these histories are written on the basis of secondary literature which was written by church historians with little or no field experience and limited linguistic skills. Therefore, the histories which are created turned out to be very problematic and often filled with errors.

Rev. Dr. Placid Podipara, a member of the indigenous Indian religious order, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Rev. Dr. Kurian Kaniyamparambil of the Jacobite Church, were the ones who first attempted to revisit the popular church history based on the local documents. However, a systematic and well-organized study was not conducted due to the lack of access to a wider range of resources.

³ Perczel, “Four Apologetic Church Histories,” 29a.

⁴ Pius Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Rūpathayude Caritrapaścāttalavum Kraistava-kūtaymayude Vērukalam,” [Historical background of the Kothamangalam Diocese and roots of Christian communities), *Anpinte Anpathandu* (Bishop's House: 2007): 70.

⁵ Perczel, “From Written Oral Text to Oral Tradition: Apologetic Church Histories of the Indian Syrian Christians,” *Religions Outside Text*, unpublished conference paper, Käte Hamburger Kolleg, Bochum, June 2013.

1.1 About the Primary Source

MSS Leiden Or. 1213 and 1214, is an East Syrian (Nestorian) Church history written around 1720 and has two versions. Apparently, the original version is in Malayalam, (the local language of Kerala) written in Modern *Grantha* script. However, the original was translated into Syriac by someone who signs as Priest Mattai. I will compare the two versions of the same history and interpret them, to identify the similarities, problems and errors in the translations and to see how the picture gleaned from these texts differs from both the history that is popular in the present-day communities and from the one that is often told in the Western as well as Indian literature. It is only the Syriac version of the manuscript that has been published to date. First a Latin translation thereof was published by J. P.N. Land in 1862.⁶ The Syriac text was published first in 1902, by Samuel Giamil, together with Land's Latin translation.⁷ Land's translation contains many errors.⁸ There is no other translation available of the Syriac text in any modern language, while the Malayalam version has remained untouched.⁹

1.2 The Authorship of the Text

Regarding the authorship of the text, nothing is obvious from the Malayalam text as to who wrote the history. It ends with a request to the Dutch commander of Kochi and to the rulers of the Dutch Republic. In the Syriac version of the letter, the last sentence says: “in the handwriting of Priest Mattai, the wretched, feeble and evil.”¹⁰ In this context, this seems to mean that Priest Mattai was either the Syriac translator, or simply a scribe, but the first

⁶ J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1862), 123-127.

⁷ “Brevis notitia historica circa Ecclesiae Syro-Chaldaeo-Malabaricae statum,” in *Genuinae relationes inter sedem apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldaeorum Ecclesiam: nunc maiori ex parte primum editae, historicisque adnotationibus illustratae*, ed. Samuel Giamil (Rome: Ermanno Loescher et Co., 1902), 552-564.

⁸ Oral information from István Perczel.

⁹ Yet, at present Sarah Knight is writing a Ph.D. thesis on this and related documents at SOAS, London, so there may be some overlap.

¹⁰ In the Syrian Christian tradition, the bishops, patriarchs and priests use such rhetorical phrases to express to some extent their spirituality.

hypothesis is more probable. From this, Giamil erroneously concluded that the author of the history was a certain Jacobite Priest, called Mathew, and this error was transmitted to almost the entire secondary literature dealing with this text.¹¹ There is a Syriac letter written in verse which is preserved together with the main texts, unnoticed by both Land and Giamil. It was addressed to Johann Heinrich Schaaf and written by a certain Priest Zachariah. Whether it belongs to the Church History, is a puzzle to be solved. Johann Heinrich Schaaf was the son of the German Orientalist scholar Karl Schaaf, who taught in Leiden from 1679 to his death in 1729. Besides this note, the main texts, both in Syriac and Malayalam, do not provide any obvious information on the authorship. This history was originally written in Malayalam and then translated to Syriac and sent to Schaaf as he was not able understand Malayalam. Perczel observes that this history was written on behalf of Mar Gabriel, a controversial Syrian bishop who arrived in India in 1705, after having submitted a confession of faith to the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* in Rome in 1704.¹² When he went to India, he presented himself as the Chaldean Metropolitan of Azerbaijan to the Catholic authorities. He also claimed that he was sent by the Pope which was plainly denied by a letter of Cardinal Joseph Sagribanti, whose Syriac text Perczel found in St. Joseph's CMI Monastery in Mannanam. Sagribanti, who was the Prefect of *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* warned the Catholic believers not to obey Mar Gabriel, for he was a pretender.¹³ The general error in the literature, which assigns a Jacobite origin to the Church History, stems from a misconception of the history of the community.

¹¹ Giamil, *op. cit.*, 552, n. 1. The same claim is repeated in Mathias Mundadan, "History of Christianity in India," vol. 1: *From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (up to 1542)* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1984), 74, n. 11. István Perczel, still not knowing about the existence of the Malayalam text, already doubted that Mattai would be the author. Perczel, "Four Apologetic Church Histories," at 191.

¹² Perczel, "Four Apologetic Church Histories," 197.

¹³ Perczel, "Four Apologetic Church Histories," 197.

1.3 The Contents and the Structure

The Malayalam text is entitled “The events that happened to the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*” whereas the Syriac title says, “On the events that happened to the Syrians and their history”.¹⁴ Both the texts narrate the history of the Syrian Christians of India from the first century, starting from the founding traditions of the apostle St. Thomas and his missionary activities in India, following the arrival of the Portuguese and the Jesuit missionaries, and the interdenominational conflicts of the Syrian churches until the eighteenth century. The Syriac text is more elaborate and, therefore, much longer in comparison to the Malayalam text at the beginning, while it shortens the Malayalam at the end.

As I mentioned earlier, the texts start with a reference to the missionary activities of the apostle St. Thomas. The first part of the texts contains the events from the arrival of St. Thomas and the establishment of Christian “churches” in AD 52, until the persecution of Christians by a magician called Māṇikkavācer in Mailapur.¹⁵ Māṇikkavācer is a variant of the Tamil name Māṇikkavācakar. Māṇikkavācakar was a ninth-century *Śaiva* saint, one of the founders of *Śaiva bhakti* (devotion) who, according to tradition, lived in the ninth century and was the son of a minister of a Pāndya king.¹⁶

The second part of the texts imparts information about the origins of the Syrian colonization in India, attributed to the arrival of a merchant, whom the text calls Thomas of Jerusalem, in 345 AD. This is obviously Thomas of Kana, to whom the famous copper-plates,

¹⁴ *Mala* refers to hill, and *ālam* which was transformed from *ālām* refers to the depths of the ocean. So, the word *Malayālam* may refer to the land lying between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. However, later it became the name of the language of the people of Kerala. The same land is called by the Arab name Milibār (better known as Malabar) in the Syriac text.

¹⁵ The churches referred to here are Christian settlements. Mailapur is in the outskirts of present-day Chennai, in Tamil Nadu, India.

¹⁶ On Māṇikkavācakar see K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, 4th edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), 335; Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning Up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (up to 1542)* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1984), 74; R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre-Colonial South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 63; István Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” in *The Syriac World*, ed. Daniel King (London: Routledge, 2018), 664-65.

lost and extant only in a Portuguese translation, were given.¹⁷ This part gives details about the relationship between the Indian Christians and the Catholicos of the East (the Nestorian Catholicos) and also the donations of the *Cēra* king (the *Cēra Kon Perumāl* in the Malayalam and *Cēra Kon* the King of all Milibar in the Syriac) given to the newly arrived community. The text says that, after Thomas of Jerusalem and his companions got welcomed in Kerala, the Catholicos of the East sent metropolitans again and this time from Bagadās (Baghdad) and Ninuve (Nineveh).

The next important event which this history narrates is the coming of two bishops called Mar Shabur and Mar Prōtt accompanied by “someone called Sawriśo,” or, according to the Syriac text, “the glorious Sawriśo”, in 823 AD to Kollam, who received a land grant from the then king *Cakravritti* (*Cakravartti*: Emperor) in the port city of Kollam and built there a market-place (*paṭṭanam*, translated as *mdi<n>tha*, “city” in the Syriac). The local Christian tradition holds that Kollam was founded by the immigrant Syrian community and this has been taken over in many scholarly publications, too.¹⁸ Yet, the Leiden church history in both variants says that the community led by the two bishops and Sawriśo arrived in Kollam, a city that had existed before, where land was donated to them to build a church and a market place. Also, the Portuguese historian Antonio Gouvea writes that they arrived “a few years after the founding of the city of Coulão” (Kollam).¹⁹ This also corresponds to the date of the still extant copper plate grants donated to the community. The founding year of Kollam is definitively 825 AD, whence the Malayalam era, or Kollam era (*Kollavarśam*) begins. The date of the copper plates is 849AD, which suggests that the arrival of Sawriśo’s community should be placed around

¹⁷ The Portuguese translation is contained in a text entitled *Relação sobre a Serra- feito em 1604* [Narrative about Malankara - written in 1604], now British Library, MS Add. 9853. On the Thomas of Kana Copper Plates see most recently, Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 663-665.

¹⁸ See Pius Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Rūpathayude,” 31; Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), 38ff.

¹⁹ Antonio Gouvea, *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Frey Aleixo de Menezes Primaz da India Oriental, Religioso da Orden de S. Agostino* (Coimbra: Officina de Diogo Gomez, 1606), fol. 4v–5r. English translation: Pius Malekandathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar* (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 20-21.

840 AD.²⁰ Pleased by the economic and trade development in Kollam, Ayyaṇ Aṭikal Ṭiruvaṭikaḷ (‘His Highness the Ruler of Ay’), the *utayavar of Vēṇāṭu* (Governor of *Vēṇāṭu*), gave land and other provisions to Maruvān Sapir Īsō in 849 AD for a church and a market-place (*nagaram*) in Kollam, built somewhat earlier.²¹ This grant was recorded on copper plates donated by Ayyaṇ Aṭikal Ṭiruvaṭikaḷ to the *Tarisāppalli*.²²

The most complex and elaborate part of the text is the third part, which narrates the events after the arrival of Portuguese in 1500 AD and their attempts at the Latinization of the community’s customs. It says that, shortly before this time, four bishops from the Syrian (that is, Nestorian) faith, namely Mar Denaha, Mar Yākō, Mar Tōma and Mar Yowālāha had come to *Malayālam*/Milibar. They are known as Mar Denhā, Mar Jacob, Mar Thomas and Mar Yahbalāhā, the authors of the first report from India, written in Syriac, on the arrival of the Portuguese.²³ It also mentions the name of the last Syrian bishop sent by the Catholicos of the East, Mar Abraham who, according to the text, came in 1580s. Yet, this is apparently a scribal error for the 1550s.²⁴ The text then speaks about Dom Aleixo de Menezes, who was the Archbishop of Goa, sent by Pope Clement VIII of Rome, and also the Portuguese vice-roy. Interestingly, the history does not mention the Synod of Diamper of 1599, convened by Aleixo de Menezes, in detail referring by its name. The Synod of Diamper in 1599 AD prohibited not only the Syrian traditions but also the Indian customs of the St. Thomas Christians and wanted

²⁰On this, see Perczel, “Syriac Christianity,” 665.

²¹Perczel, “Syriac Christianity,” 665. *Vēṇāṭu* was a medieval kingdom lying on the south-western region of Kerala with its headquarters at the port of Kollam. See K. N. Ganesh, “Historical Geography of *Natu* in South India with Special Reference to Kerala,” *Indian Historical Review* 36, no. 1 (June 2009): 13. Maruvān Sapir Īsō is the same person, who is mentioned as Sawriśo, in MSS Leiden 1213 and 1214.

²²*Tarisāppalli* is a Persian-Malayalam mixed expression from the Persian word *tārsa* meaning ‘god-fearer’ and *palli* meaning ‘settlement’ or ‘a place of worship’, which would together mean ‘a Christian place of worship’. See Perczel, “Syriac Christianity,” 665. The text of the *Tarisāppalli* plates was newly arranged, transcribed and translated into modern Malayalam by M. R. Raghava Varier and Kesavan Veluthat, *Tarisāppallippaṭṭayam (Caritram)* (Kottayam: *Sahithya Pravarthaka C. S.*, 2013), 109–13. The latest and hitherto best English translation is: M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala* (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972), 91–4. A new English translation by M. R. Raghava Varier and Kesavan Veluthat is forthcoming.

²³See Josephus Simonius Assemani. *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. III/1 (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1725), 589–99.

to conform them to the Roman Catholic customs including their liturgy. However, the text mentions the pro-Latin shift of the Syrian Christians which started to follow the Portuguese archbishop, proclaimed their faith in opposition to the existing Nestorian beliefs because the Archbishop bribed the *Perumpaṭappil Sorūpam* (Kingdom of Cochin) to harass the Syrian Christians who refused to follow the Portuguese.

The text then speaks about the “murder” of Mar Ignatius, a Syrian Metropolitan who came to India in 1653 AD, was captured by the Portuguese from Mailapur and drowned to death. In this, the text follows the popular belief, which is still deeply encrusted in the memory of the community. In fact, this Mar Ignatius was a bishop belonging to the Syrian Catholic community of Aleppo, Mar Aṭtallah, who seems to have pretended that he was the Patriarch of Antioch, traditionally called Mor Ignatius, but under the obedience to the Pope. Mar Aṭtallah was captured and deported to Goa, but the community believed that the Portuguese drowned him in the sea. This event was the immediate cause of the famous *Kūnan* Cross Oath (Bent Cross Oath), a revolt against the Portuguese in 1653 and contributed to the formation of the schism between the Syrian Christians as *puttankūr* (new faction) and *paḷayakūr* (old faction).²⁵

The text then goes on to the details about arrival of Mār Śem‘on , a Syrian bishop, in 1700 AD, who was captured at Surat while going to Kerala and kept under custody in a Capuchin monastery and could not leave without the permission of the Capuchins and other Roman Catholic authorities.²⁶ The text states that he was later deported to Puducherry (Pondicherry) and was imprisoned there.²⁷ There follows the arrival of an important figure, Mar Gabriel, on behalf of whom apparently, of the entire history was written. Mar Gabriel is

²⁵Kūnan Cross Oath happened in Mattanchery, a place near Kochi, Kerala. Details in the next chapter.

²⁶For details see István Perczel and George Kurukkoor: “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century, based on Original Documents,” in Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zur 65. Geburtstag, ed. D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T. Sailors, and A. Toepel (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 121-122, republished in an improved version in Revisiting a Treasure Trove: Perspectives on the Collection at St Kuriakose Elias Chavara Archives and Research Centre ed. J. C. Chennattusserry and Ignatius Payyappilly (Bengaluru: Centre for Publications CHRIST, 2019).

²⁷Pondicherry is in the South-Eastern Cost of India and is, and was, until 1954, a French colony.

an East Syrian bishop who arrived in India in 1705, according to this history. Here, the Malayalam and the Syriac narratives are quite divergent and contain complementary information. Both agree, however, that Mar Gabriel's main justification to create a third party between the *puttankūr* [new faction] and the *paḷayakūr* [old faction] was that both had adopted the Latin custom of priestly celibate. The Malayalam history praises the Dutch authorities for their support provided to Mar Gabriel, the Syriac, which was to be read by the Dutch scholars, ends with a request to the Dutch authorities to side with Mar Gabriel in order to protect the Syrian Christians from the hands of the Portuguese and to help them to return to their previous Syrian tradition and faith. Also, it says that, if the Dutch authorities were to side with Mar Gabriel, he would become capable to extract the entire community of the Indian Syrian Christians from the rule of the "*parangi*", the Franks, which may either mean the Portuguese, or the Catholics in general.

This shows the political aims of Mar Gabriel and his circle in addressing the Dutch authorities via Schaaf. As the head of the other, Jacobite-oriented faction, Mar Thoma IV was in intense correspondence with Schaaf, trying to get the backing of the dominant Dutch colonizers against the Catholics, this was an attempt on the part of Mar Gabriel's party to divert the Dutch attention and possible help from the Mar Thoma faction, trying to prove the legitimacy of the East Syriac tradition, over against the West Syriac one adopted by the Mar Thoma's, on the one hand, and the efficiency of Mar Gabriel in destroying the Catholic hold on the Syrian Christians. However, this attempt was not successful. In 1751, Mor Baselios Shukr'allah, a Jacobite Metropolitan arrived in Kerala on a Dutch ship, and many of the families earlier obedient to Mar Gabriel but dead by then, joined him.

1.4 Methodology

As an initiation to the exercise of handling primary sources systematically, the first thing I did was to translate the manuscripts. Much of the time was invested in the translation of the two texts. As to the Malayalam text, the eighteenth-century Malayalam was first transcribed into modern Malayalam before being translated into English. Reading sessions with Prof. István Perczel have greatly contributed to the precise understanding of both texts. Then, I did a textual analysis of both the texts individually, to understand their respective structure and content. My next task was to compare the two versions of the same history, and I have done a comparative analysis to identify the similarities, problems and errors in translation and how the data received from this history permits a revision of the popular history. This is a thorough philological exercise, which equipped me with the techniques and methodology in handling primary sources.

This thesis contains two analytic chapters, in which the first one attempts to draw insights from the Leiden MSS in comparison with the popular history of the Syrian Christian community. This chapter also identifies some of the historical errors, manipulations and political intentions of the author of this history. The second chapter compares the Syriac text of MS 1213 with the Malayalam text of MS 1214, to see the major differences, errors and misinterpretations made by the Syriac translator.

2 Present Day Memory of the Syrian Christians and New Insights from the Leiden MSS

This chapter revisits the popular history of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala starting from the mission of St. Thomas till the eighteenth century. For this, I will be using the Leiden MS Or. 1214 as my major source. As mentioned previously, this manuscript has never been treated in the scholarly literature, while its translation, the Syriac history of Leiden MS Or. 1213, more often than not, has been improperly treated. So it is important to reconsider the historical events in the light of this new source. I will begin with the mission of St. Thomas.

2.1 The Arrival in India

The founding traditions of the Syrian Christians claim that their ancestors were converted by the Apostle St. Thomas in the first century.²⁸ The earliest reference to the activities of St. Thomas in India are found in the apocryphal *Acts of Judas Thomas* written in Syriac at the beginning of the third century AD. According to this source, St. Thomas came and preached the Gospel in several parts of India, in the Kingdom of Gondophares (Vindafarna), the founder of the Indo-Parthian kingdom, who ruled between c. 19 and 46 AD in the north-western part of the then India (present-day Afghanistan).²⁹ There are various narratives regarding the arrival of St. Thomas in India. Most of them are debatable, however.

²⁸ Pius Malekandathil argues that initially the indigenous Christian community was called St. Thomas Christians and the change in the name from “St. Thomas Christians” to “Syrian Christians” was part of an exercise by the Dutch and the English scholars, who dissociate “St. Thomas” from the community and sought the roots of community in Syriac speaking Christian merchants who settled down in Kerala. See Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Roopathayude,” 70. Perczel considers that the local names are rather Syrian Christians (*Surīyāni Nasrānikkal*) and Christian *Māppillās* (*Nasrāni Māppillammar*), *māppilla* meaning “bridegroom”, the term indicating that the community is issued from the intermarriage of West Asian merchants with the women of indigenous exogamous Indian castes. Moreover, according to Perczel, the term *Surīyāni* itself indicates the Persian origin, as it is a borrowing in Malayalam from the Middle Persian *Soryani*, meaning the Persian Christian community. See Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 165–66.

²⁹ George Nedungatt, *Quest for the Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2008), 117–18.

One such narrative claims that the apostle sailed to the Malabar coast in AD 52, and after a period of heroic evangelising and of the establishment of churches, he travelled east to Mailapur, where he suffered his “bloody and spectacular” martyrdom.³⁰

Most of the traditions maintain that the apostle might have first landed at Malankara near Cranganore, which comprises the strip of land included by the two native States of Travancore, Cochin and a portion of British Malabar.³¹ This internal tradition disseminates a common belief that the apostle came by sea from Arabia, and that he landed on the Malabar Coast which was located close to the historic seaport of Koṭungallūr.³² Nonetheless, the majority of the histories, including oral narratives and folklore, maintains that the initial appearance of Christianity in India was in AD 52 through the conversion activities initiated by St. Thomas, and he is believed to be arrived at Koṭungallūr. Certain indigenous performative events such as *Vīraṭiyān Pāṭṭu* or *Virāṭiyan* Song, performed at Christian festivals by a Hindu caste called *Virāṭiyan*, or *Pānar* (bards, singers) and *Rambān Pāṭṭu*, which is the “Song of the Teacher (Thomas)” recount the arrival of St. Thomas, his missionary activities, miracles and death, which they place in Malankara.³³ The only exception for this traditional belief is the *Mārgamkali Pāṭṭu*. *Mārgamkali Pāṭṭu* (literally translated as Song of the Drama of the Way), which is a historical song and dance drama performed at Christian weddings and other feasts, is yet another art form that retells the story of St. Thomas by setting it in Mailapur.³⁴

³⁰Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 244. Mailapur is situated at the suburbs of present Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, India.

³¹E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas* (Nagercoil: London Mission Press, 1950), 1. Malankara also called as *Māliyamkara*, literally means “the mountainous land,” the region of Western Ghats. Hermann Gundert, *A Malayalam and English Dictionary* (Mangalore: G. Stolz, 1872), 729. Cranganore, currently known as Koṭungallūr, was a leading port and commercial center in ancient and medieval India, associated with the ancient port of Musiris, and located at the delta of Periyar. It is also referred as Shingli, Shinkali or Ginjalek. See Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92. Henceforth I will be using Koṭungallūr.

³²Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings to the Present*, 92.

³³Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 656.

³⁴Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 656. Mailapur is the same as Mylapore.

The Leiden MS 1214, begins with the reference to the arrival of St. Thomas, the apostle “in the year 52 from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁵ Both these histories give details about the arrival of St Thomas in Mailapu where he preached the Gospel and built a church.³⁶ Even though other versions of histories tell stories of St. Thomas arriving at Mailapur, none of them give much details on the establishment of a church there. It was a Christian community rather than a church per se. According to the text, he first came to India and then arrived in Mailapu. In here, the Syriac translation explains Mailapu as a place in India.³⁷ This version also speaks about the missionary activities of St. Thomas at Mailapu where he “preached the gospel to many people made them disciples and he baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” However, as mentioned earlier, the Leiden MS 1214 does not give any details about the building of a church in Mailapu.

Although the popular histories mention the apostle’s arrival at Malankara, the Leiden MS 1214 explains that St. Thomas’ reached in Mailapu first, and later left for Māliyamkara, the mountainous land of the *Cēra* king (*cēraḱon malanadu*) where he preached the Way (the religion) and established churches. It is important to note that the tomb of the apostle was venerated in Mailapur, which was also observed by the traveler Marco Polo in 1293 and this tradition coincides with the early Portuguese records which indicate that the origin of the community was at the Coromandel coast, which was destroyed due to calamities and was not at the Malabar Coast.³⁸ The Leiden MS 1214 also places the original Christian community at

³⁵ Refers to the Leiden Malayalam text, Leiden MS 1214.

³⁶ The manuscript writes the name of the place as Mailapu, which is same as Mailapur and Mypalore. These terms are used interchangeably here.

The Malayalam history says “*mārgam ariyicu paḷḷiyum beycu*,” literally translated as “preached the way and built a church”. Here *palli* could mean a Christian community.

³⁷ The place India in antiquity meant a place from where the spices come and a region which geographically extended from the Arab Peninsula to the real India. See Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 657. Later in the text we see India and *Malayālam* (Malankara) as two different places. Italicized *Malayālam* refers to the name of the place.

³⁸ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 657.

Mailapur instead of the Malabar coast. This leads us to the next major point of contestation in the popular history.

2.2 The Seven Churches and the Conversion of Brahman Families

The popular history narrates that, during his stay in Māliyamkara, the apostle founded seven churches and the names of those churches are Māliyamkara itself, Palayur, Kottakayal (Parur), Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal (Nilakal), and Kurakkeni Kollam (Quilon).³⁹ Dozens of localities are claimed to be the sites of these original apostolic shrines. The foundation accounts about St. Thomas for centuries have maintained that the group has descended from local men of high standing, usually described as members of the elite Keralan *Nambutiri* Brahman caste group, who were converted by St Thomas during his stay in Malabar.⁴⁰

Both the Leiden MSS 1213 and 1214, explain the establishment of only six churches in Malayālam (that is Malankara), namely Māliyamkara, Koṭṭakka, Edappally, Gōkkamangalam, Niranam and Thiruvāmkodu, Mailapu being the seventh, or rather, the first. It is also to be noted that the names of the places where the churches had been established are different in the different traditions. The “concept of seven churches” as being established by St. Thomas cannot be found in written sources before the eighteenth century. But in the oral tradition, the narratives tell about the establishment of seven churches.⁴¹ The Portuguese and the early Dutch sources refer to places such as Diamper, Angamali, Kottayam, Kayamkulam and so on. as centers of Christian concentration but never mention the seven churches. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new set of places appeared as Christian centers but even then there was

³⁹ Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, 15.

⁴⁰ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 245. The terms Malabar, *Malayālam*, and Māliankara are used interchangeably.

⁴¹ Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Roopathayude,” 70.

no mention of the seven churches.⁴² Pius Malekandathil writes on the basis of a Syriac letter written by Mar Thoma IV, in 1721 to the Dutch scholar Karl Schaaf, that the list of churches in the letter mentioned by him are Mailapur, Corignalore (Koṭungallūr), Parakar, Irapelli (Erattupetta)⁴³, Kothamangalam, Niranam and Tirobancore (Tiruvamkotu) and does not contain the name Kokkamangalam. Therefore, he concluded that no such church existed in Kokkamangalam in the eighteenth century. As the Leiden MS 1214 refers to Gōkkamangalam, the argument of Pius Malekandathil is not tenable. Although he considers Kothamangalam as the name of the place instead of Gōkkamangalam, Kothamangalam, in fact, is a much later community, dating to the time of the migration of the Christians toward the mainland. Thus, Mar Thoma must have mentioned Gōkkamangalam/Kōkkamangalam, too.

The names of the places where the churches were established vary across the sources. These churches were Christian settlements around a sanctuary rather than mere church buildings and did not necessarily take an institutionalized form. However, the Leiden manuscripts mention that the apostle had appointed two priests after the establishment of the Christian settlements. No further details about the appointment of the priests or the conversion of Brahman families can be seen in the manuscripts. According to studies conducted by Placid J. Podipara, many St. Thomas Christian families of Kerala still trace the original conversion of their community to the time of the apostle, or to any of a number of migrations which occurred during the many centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498.⁴⁴ According to the popular history, St. Thomas started his missionary activity in Kerala by converting four prominent Brahman families namely, the Sankarapuri, Pakalomattam, Kalli, and Kalliyankal.⁴⁵

⁴² Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Roopathayude,” 70.

⁴³ This is an error of identification here, Irapelly clearly stands for Edapally. There is a *raṭa* historical swift in the Malayalam language, analogous to the process that has led to the pronunciation of the double *rra* as *ṭṭa*.

⁴⁴ Placid J. Podipara, *The Saint Thomas Christians* (Madras: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970); *The Thomas Christians and their Syriac Treasures* (Alleppey: Prakasam Publications, 1974).

⁴⁵ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings to the Present*, 101.

But no such information is available in the Leiden manuscripts about the Brahmins or about the families converted by St. Thomas.

The Leiden MS 1214 further explains that St. Thomas returned to *Pāndinaṭu* and was stabbed to death by a *Kāvyan* (a pagan) while he was preaching the Way.⁴⁶ After the death of the priests in *Hendo*, and in *Malayālam* (Milibar in the Syriac Manuscript), the church was deserted for a long time.⁴⁷ It was during this time that the magician Māṇikkavācer, persecuted the Christians of India (apparently *Pāndinaṭu*) and that he introduced a ban on baptism. The Malayalam manuscript states that

after the death of the priests in India and in *Malayālam*, Māṇikkavācer the magician arose against the Way and the Baptism and also came to Mailapu and performed diverse signs and because he commanded not to baptize and set a ban on it, in those days in which all the chief men and the headmen left the Baptism and believed in Māṇikkavācer, in order not to be shaken and not to leave the Way and the Baptism, the people left *Hendo* and came to *Malayālam*.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note that after Māṇikkavācer imposing a ban on baptism and started persecuting Christians it was the chiefs and headmen who were the first to leave the Way and believe in Māṇikkavācer, but the common people kept their faith and left Mailapur to reach *Malayālam*. Apparently, according to the Leiden manuscript, the persecution of Christians by Māṇikkavācer was the reason for the Christian migration to Kerala. The text states that these

⁴⁶ *Pāndinaṭu/Pāndya naṭu* was the kingdom of the Early Pandya dynasty in Tamil Nadu, which ruled parts of Southern India from around the fourth century until the first half of the sixteenth century CE. They initially ruled their country *Pandya Nadu* from Korkai, a seaport on the southernmost tip of the Indian Peninsula, and in later times moved to Madurai. Pandyas had trade relations as far as Rome. For more details see K. A. Nilakanta Sastry, *The Pandya Kingdom* (London: Luzac and Company, 1929).

⁴⁷ *Hendo* here is the reference to Mailapur. The word Malayalam originated from the words *mala*, meaning “mountain”, and *alam*, meaning “region” and thus translates literally as “the mountainous region.” The term originally referred to the land of the *Cera* dynasty. Since the nineteenth century, Malayalam became the name of its language. In the seventeenth century, a heavy Sanskritisation of the Malayalam language occurred, which has led to the introduction of Modern *Grantha*, to write Malayalam, permitting the distinctive reproduction of Sanskrit sounds. This is attributed to the activity of an influential poet, Tunjettu Ezhutthachan. On the literary activity of Tunjettu Ezhutthachan see Krishna Chaitanyan, *A History of Malayalam Literature* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1971, reprint 1995), 82–88. Ezhutthachan is a caste name and means “schoolmaster.” It is a low caste in Kerala. On the introduction of Modern *Grantha* to write Malayalam by Ezhutthachan, see A. C. Burnell, *South Indian Palaeography* (Mangalore: The Basel Mission Press, 1878, reprint 1994), 35.

⁴⁸ From Leiden MS 1214. The manuscript does not have foliation. The translation of the manuscripts is a joint effort by Prof. István Perczel and me.

people intermarried with the locals according to the custom of the believers. Both the Malayalam and Syriac manuscripts give the precise number of Christian households in *Malayālam* as one hundred sixty, out of which, ninety-six families left the Way in the course of time and sixty-four families remained.

Māṇikkavācer in the Leiden histories corresponds to Māṇikkavācakar, a ninth-century Śaiva saint, poet, and one of the founders of Śaiva *bhakti* (devotion), whose fifty-one hymns entitled *Tiruvacāgam*, (“The Sacred Word”) constitute the eighth volume of the Tamil Śaiva canon of devotional hymns), and was the son of a minister of the Pāndya King.⁴⁹ This suggests that the migration of Christians from Tamil Nadu to Kerala may also be dated to the ninth century with reference to the Leiden manuscripts. Traditionally, Indian Christians were also called Buddhists by Hindu sources and the *bhakti* hagiographic works contain ample information about the violence against the Jains and the Buddhists.⁵⁰ Also, this event happened before the arrival of Thomas of Kana, a merchant, who is believed to have connected the Christians in *Malayālam* to the Church of Persia. The Leiden manuscripts also show that the apostle first came to Mailapur, then to *Malayālam* and returned to Mailapur where he is believed to have been killed.

2.3 The Thomas of Kana Copper Plates

The association of the community to the Church of Persia is related to the arrival of a Persian merchant called Thomas of Kana (*Knāyi Tomman* in Malayalam), in Koṭuṅgallūr. The local tradition has it that Thomas reached Kerala in 345 AD together with seventy two families, received privileges from the local king *Perumāl* and built a church in the land given by the

⁴⁹ See Sastri, *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, 335; Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, 74; Champakalakshmi, *Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre-Colonial South India*, 63; Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 664-65.

⁵⁰ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 665.

local King along with a surrounding Christian settlement there.⁵¹ At present, the date 345 prevails and the majority of the Indian Syrian community is convinced of the validity of this date. This is also reflected in historiography.⁵² This date comes from a Portuguese document, written in 1604 and kept in the British Library, which says that from the death of the Perumal king granting the plates to the time of the composition of the document thousand two hundred and fifty years have elapsed.⁵³ This would give 344 AD for the death of the Perumal and an earlier date for the copper plates but, apparently on this basis, the date 345 AD was conveniently accepted. The earlier Portuguese authors indicated the date the Thomas of Kana mission in the ninth century as we see in the case of Francisco Dionysio, the Jesuit Rector of Cochin, who dated the arrival of Thomas of Kana to precisely the date of the foundation of Kollam: 825.⁵⁴ Dionysio also says that Thomas came after Maruvan Sapir Īśō. The tradition explains that Thomas of Kana came to Kerala with the permission of the Catholicos of the East, taking a few people from Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Nineveh “to provide comfort” to the spiritually impoverished indigenous Christians of Kerala.⁵⁵

The Leiden manuscripts explains a similar story with certain additions

according to the order given by the Catholicos, the metropolitan who was ruling the place called Urahāyi, priests, deacons, Christians along with women and children from Bagadash (Bagdad), Ninuve (Nineveh) and Jerusalem, together with the merchant Thomas, sailed away again, reached *Malayālam* and, in the year 345 of Christ they arrived in Māliyamkara. The sixty four houses of Christians who were in *Malayālam*, coming together, discussed, and went to the then ruling king, the Lord Cerakon Perumāl, met him and, having explained the entire situation in front of his Majesty, his Majesty understood and he designated the country of Koṭungallūr drawing its boundaries, and separated sufficient land for a church (*paḷḷi*) and a market-quarter (*paṭṭanam*) and, having

⁵¹ T.K Joseph demonstrates that the mention of seventy two families or houses comes from a misreading of the phrase *elupattiraṇḍu viṭṭupēru*, seventy two privileges as *vīṭupēru* with an elongated ‘ī’, which means houses. See T. K Joseph, *Malabar Christians and Their Ancient Documents* (Trivandrum: Popular Press, 1929), 13-16; the section on “Thomas of Kana and the Lost Copper plates” in Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 663-665.

⁵² See Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, 70–75.

⁵³ *Relação sobre a Serra feito em 1604*. British Library, Add 9853, ff. 86 (525)–99 (539).

⁵⁴ Francisco Dionysio, “Relatio P. Francisci Dionysii De Christianis S. Thomae Cocini 4 Ianuarii,” 1578, in *Documenta Indica*, vol. 11, ed. Josephus Wicki (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1970), 137. See also Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 91; and Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 665.

⁵⁵ Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

given this, his Majesty the Lord King Cēra Kon was pleased to have written on a copper plate every privilege of close-to-royal status that the *Surīyāni* Christians should enjoy and to administer as long as the sun and the moon would last, and these plates that they bought from him can still be seen.

In addition, this story is about the coming of Thomas of Jerusalem for the second time to Kerala.⁵⁶ He first came to Kerala for trade and also to meet the local Christians as per the order of the catholicos of the East. The manuscripts explain that in his first meeting “he summoned all the Christians from Maliyamkara to Tiruvamkod, met them, spoke to them abundantly and reassured all the sixty-four Christian households that were in *Malayālam*, as his younger and older brothers”. The history shows that Thomas had built a market place and a church on the land given by the king in Koṭuṅgallūr.

However, it is believed that the Thomas of Kana Plates were seen by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century, but by 1603 they had disappeared.⁵⁷ They may have been moved to Portugal, but no trace of them has ever been discovered there. Gouvea talks about this sudden disappearance and the concern which it caused the Christians, not having writings with which to defend themselves before the infidel kings, who keep violating their privileges.⁵⁸ According to the Leiden manuscript, the author testifies that the copper plates were to be seen till the time this history was written, that is, apparently, in the first decades of the eighteenth century. The inference that the plates were not found by the Portuguese is quite possible because according to the Leiden manuscripts, they were with the Syrian Christians in Kerala. Therefore, what seemed as a loss to the Portuguese must have been a gain for the Syrian Christians.

This coincides with the fact that the testimony of the Leiden Malayalam manuscript contains elements that are missing from the extant Portuguese translation of the Thomas of Kana grants. What is Coquaranton in the Portuguese text is given as *rajāvu Cera Kon Perumāl*

⁵⁶ The Leiden manuscripts have the name Thomas of Jerusalem instead of Thomas of Kana.

⁵⁷ Stephen Neill, *History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 388.

⁵⁸ Neill, *History of Christianity in India*, 388.

Tamburān, that is, the king Lord *Cera Kon Perumāl*. It contains the standard formula for the validity of the grant: “as long as the sun and the moon would last”, which is nowhere in the Portuguese text, as well as the statement that the mixed local Christian-Persian Christian community received “close-to-royal privileges”, which they can enjoy and also transmit to others, presumably to their descendants. It also says that a *paḷḷi*, that is, a sanctuary, and a *paṭṭanam* (corresponding to the earlier term *nagaram*), that is, a market quarter around it, was built and even it gives the structure of the market city: “from east to west in south-north direction four hundred seventy-two shops and houses behind the shops were built”. All in all, it seems that the information contained by this text is not based on the Portuguese translation of the lost copper plates, but the copper plates themselves.

2.3.1 The *Tekkumbhāgar* [the Southists] and *Vaṭakkumbhāgar* [the Northists].

The division among the Syrian Christians as *Tekkumbhāgam* [the Southern Side] and *Vaṭakkumbhāgam* [the Northern side] are contested among the scholars. According to tradition, Thomas of Kana, had two wives; the first of them received his northern estates, the second his southern estates; from these two wives have descended respectively the Northists and the Southists.⁵⁹ According to E.M. Philip, although both the sects follow the same religion, acknowledge the same bishop, the same form of worship and the same ritual, they two do not intermarry, and they maintain their distinct social customs.⁶⁰ They lived separately in the southern and the northern streets of *Mahādevarpaṭṭanam*.⁶¹ He further elaborates that the Southists claim that they are the direct lineal descendants of Thomas of Kana and even try to trace their descent by reference to the name of the particular tribe, to which each one of them

⁵⁹ G. M. Rae, *The Syrian Church in India* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1892), 163–64.

⁶⁰ Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, 73.

⁶¹ *Mahādevarpaṭṭanam* is another name for Koṭungallūr.

claims to belong.⁶² The Southists claim that they descend from Thomas of Kana through his Syrian wife and therefore have Semitic blood. The Southists oppose the Northists, which form the major portion of the Syrian community, by stating that they are descendants of Thomas who had mingled with native Christians by intermarriage and also the Northists are the descendants of Thomas by a second wife, who was a local *Nair* woman.⁶³ Though both sects admit that they were converted and accept Thomas of Kana as their forefather and venerate him with a strong filial affection, however they refuse to intermarry among themselves. According to Perczel, the Syriac Christian community is an integral part of the local Indian society, strictly follows caste hierarchy among themselves and is divided into two sub-castes: *Tekkumbhāgam* [the Southern Side] and *Vaṭakkumbhāgam* [the Northern side].⁶⁴

The Leiden manuscripts provide detailed insight into the formation of these terms, which lacks from the popular history of the community. According to the Malayalam manuscript

in the land designated in the country of Koṭungallūr they built a church and from east to west in south-north direction four hundred seventy-two shops and houses behind the shops were built.

This description gives a clearer idea about what *Tekkumbhāgam* and *Vaṭakkumbhāgam* might mean for the community. It clearly states that, at that time, there were two arrays of shops and houses of the whole Christians in Kerala facing each other in the North and South direction (Figure 1). As per this text, those who had come along with Thomas of Jerusalem intermarried with the natives, but the popular notion is that, to protect the ‘purity’ of their tradition, they

⁶² The names of the seven tribes E. M. Philip refers to are *Kaji*, *Hadhai*, *Koja*, *Belkoth*, *Kujalik*, *Majamoth* and *Thejamuth*. He himself was a member of the Southists sect, and according to his family traditions he descended from the stock of *Hadhai*. Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, 73. See also Antonio Gouvea, *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Frey Aleixo de Menezes*, fol. 4v; in Pius Malekandathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*, 18–20.

⁶³ Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, 73. *Nair* is a Shudra caste among the four castes in traditional Hindu *Varna* system. In Kerala they were the warrior and landowner caste, and were counted as second to the Brahmins. The kings were coming from among the Nairs, but were given the honour of becoming *kshatrias* by the Brahmins.

⁶⁴ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 653.

abstained from intermarriage. The source also reports that Thomas assured the faith of sixty-four families, which believed in the Christian faith, who were already in Kerala. These Christians, together with those who had come from the outside had received certain privileges from the king and they lived together in the *paṭṭanam* built by Thomas of Jerusalem. From this context, the meaning of the word *paṭṭanam* becomes clear. *Paṭṭanam* is a market- place as well as a residential area where the church built by Thomas of Jerusalem might have occupied the central space. The manuscript provides the exact number of Christians who lived in the *paṭṭanam* as four hundred seventy-two shops and houses altogether. The separation could also be accommodated on the grounds of intermarriage. If we are to rely on E.M. Philip's argument, the Northists form the group who accepted to intermarry with the natives and the Southists became the second group who stayed in their 'racial purity'. But, most probably, all of them intermarried because the Leiden source shows that the Christians were very much worried about the decrease of those who followed true faith in the society.

Figure.1.

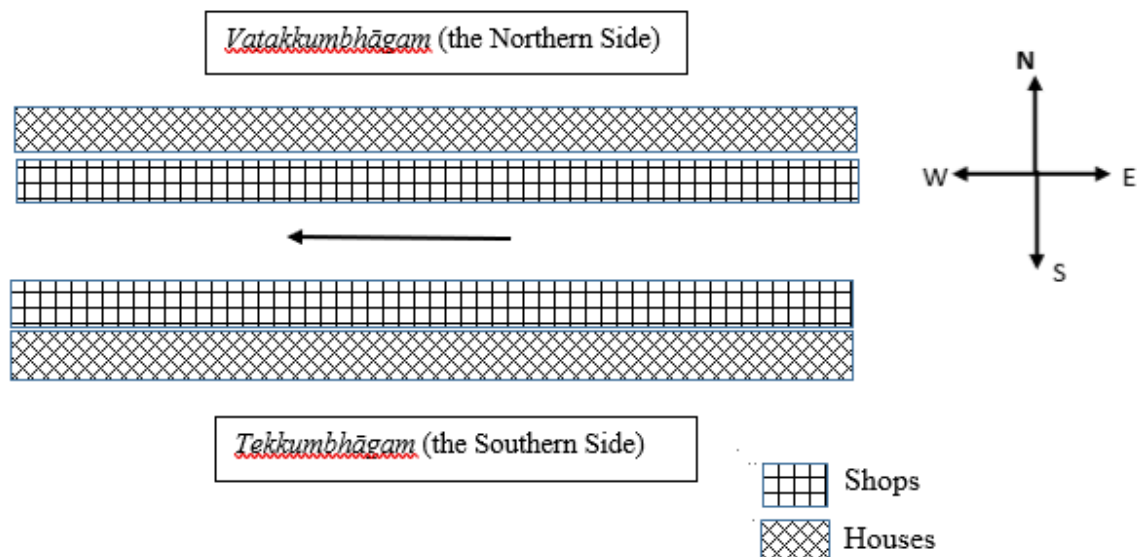


Figure 1. This figure is based on the description in the Leiden MS 1214

2.4 The Missions from the Ninth Century till the Eighteenth Century

2.4.1 The Arrival of Maruvān Sapir Īśo (Mar Sapor)⁶⁵

The second wave of migration from the Middle East in 823 AD, under the Christian leaders Mar Sābor and Mar Prōtt.⁶⁶ According to tradition, they reached the port of Kollam and Kollam developed into a *paṭṭanam* (a market-place or a city) in 825 AD, as a result of their trade.⁶⁷ They received grants from the king which were written on copper plates, that survived until the eighteenth century. The *Tarisāppalli* copper plates of 849 AD, which are the second oldest surviving copper plates in Kerala, contain a royal grant given by Ayyaṇ Aṭikal Ṭiruvāṭikaḷ [His Highness the Ruler of Ay], then governor of *Vēṇāṭu*, a Southern province of the Cēra empire, to the *Tarisāppalli* (the “sanctuary of the god-fearers”: a Christian church).⁶⁸ The grant consists of certain privileges granted to the Christian merchant community of *Tarisāppalli* and to their leader, Maruvān Sapir Īśō.

The Leiden manuscript reports

In those days and in later times, when they lived according to the Way and the customs,⁶⁹ very often from Bagadash and from Ninuveh⁷⁰ and from Jerusalem and from other directions, by the order of the Catholicos of the East, *Suriyāni* high-priests (*melpaṭṭakkār*) came to *Malayālam* and they ruled over the *Suriyānikkar* who were in *Malayālam*. Likewise, later, after some time, after Koṭungallūr was dispersed, in the year 823 of Christ, from Bagadaśi, the *Suriyāni* high-priests Mar Sābor and Mar Prōtt, together with a person called

⁶⁵ Maruvān Sapir Īśo, in popular history is misread as Mar Sabrišo and is identified with one of the bishops Mar Šābūr, based on one of the Portuguese transcriptions of the latter’s name as Mar Sapor. See Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 667.

⁶⁶ Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Rūpathayude,” 31.

⁶⁷ Malekandathil, “Kothamangalam Rūpathayude,” 31.

⁶⁸ *Tarisāppalli* is a Persian-Malayalam mixed expression from the Persian word *tārša* meaning “god-fearer” and *palli* meaning “settlement” or “a place of worship”, which would together mean ‘a Christian place of worship’. See Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 665.

⁶⁹ The Malayalam phrase used here is “*mārgattinotta pōle mariyādayakum vaṇṇam*.” Prof. Susan Thomas explains in a personal communication, *Mariyāda* “can be roughly translated as ‘customary practice,’ while *mārgam* is a way of life, but in a religious sense. In pre-colonial Kerala, there was no concept of an organized religion. People saw religion as *mārgam*, way of life. So, the expression “*mārgattinottapōlē mariyādayakum vaṇṇam*” means “a religious way of life and a customary way of life.” “*Mariyāda*” was a mixture of custom and religion, but it was according to the “*mārgam*.” “*Mariyāda*’s” differed slightly among them according to the “*mārgam*,” but “*mariyāda*” had more of a local practice and context.

⁷⁰ Baghdad and Nineveh.

Sawrīšo, came to Kollam, met the king called *Cakkravṛitti*,⁷¹ made offerings to him, and in Kollam, they built a church (*paḷḷi*) and a market-quarter (*paṭṭanam*).

Although the text claims that there were missionaries coming from Baghdad, Nineveh and Jerusalem to Kerala after Thomas of Kana (345 AD according to this manuscript) and Maruvān Sapir Īśō in the ninth century, we lack evidence to prove this claim. It also mentions the dispersion of the city of Koṭungallūr in 823 AD and it is after the the *Suriyāni* high-priests Mar Śābor and Mar Prott, together with a person called Sawrīšo, came to Kollam. The text explains this as the arrival of three people, identifying Mar Śābor and Mar Prōtt, as Syrian bishops and a companion Sawrīšo. According to the text, all of them together met the king (king of *Venāṭu*), made offerings to him and built a church and a *paṭṭanam*. The history tells that the *paṭṭanam* at Kollam was established by the high-priests (*melpaṭṭakkār*) Mar Śābor, Mar Prōtt and by the merchant Sawrīšo. It does not provide any details regarding the copper plates and privileges received from the king and about the year of establishing the *paṭṭanam*. István Perczel has argued that Maruvān Sapir Īśō came after the founding of Kollam in 825 AD as a new port city, where the king invited foreign merchants and traders including Muslim Arabs, Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews to settle there and therefore most probably, the founding of the church *Tarisāppaḷḷi* is also posterior to 825 AD.⁷² He also reasons that as the Malayalam era begins with the founding of the port city in 825 AD by the emperor Stānu Ravi, it is not connected with to Sapir Īśō himself.⁷³ Therefore, the widespread view that Kollam was founded by Maruvān Sapir Īśō needs to be revised.

2.4.2 The Coming of the Portuguese (the Sixteenth Century)

The history of the St. Thomas Christians in the pre-Portuguese period (between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries) is little known partly due to the lack of evidence but also

⁷¹ *Cakkravṛitti* is the Malayalam term for Emperor. The phrase says: “*Cakkravṛitti enna rājāvine kaṇṭu.*”

⁷² Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 666.

⁷³ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 666.

partly to the fact that the available evidence is not used by the historiography. There are number of documents which have not received sufficient attention due to the reason that the events and social relations testified to by these documents are not part of the identity-constituting historical memory of the community.⁷⁴ The historical documents are abundant with the details of the arrival of the Portuguese who, due to the renewed contacts between the Church of the East and the Indian Syrian community, which started in 1490, found a community with a strong and virulent Syriac elite culture.⁷⁵ During the first half of the sixteenth century the relationship of the Portuguese and the local Christians was characterized by conviviality and a community of interests.

The Leiden MS 1214 sets the period of Franks (*paṛankikal*) arrival around 1500 AD.⁷⁶ It ascertains that even in those times the missionary activities by the Church of the East in Kerala were active. “Franks” means in the general Kerala parlance the Portuguese and more generally the Roman Catholic missionaries. There were four *Surīyāni* high-priests, namely Mar Denaha, Mar Yākō, Mar Tōma and Mar Yowālāha (Mar Denhā, Mar Jacob, Mar Thomas and Mar Yahballāhā), who came together to *Malayālam*, by the order of the Catholicos of the East, ruled over the Christians there and established churches. The presence of these Syrian bishops in India is historically well attested. In 1504, they wrote a Syriac letter to their patriarch, the Catholicos of the East Mar Eliah V, in which they are reporting about their encounter with the Portuguese colony in Cannanore (Kannur) in 1503, when they came to India. This is the first Indian report on the Portuguese colonization.⁷⁷ The manuscript also gives reference to the arrival of Mar Avuṛāhām (Mar Abraham) after these four high-priests had accomplished their

⁷⁴ For the most recent summary of these events, treating little studied documents, see Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 671-78.

⁷⁵ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 675-78.

⁷⁶ Franks are the term used for the Portuguese and in the *Malayālam* they were called “*paṛankikal*.”

⁷⁷ Letter of Mar Thomas, Mar Yahballāhā, Mar Jacob and Mar Denhā to Patriarch Mar Eliah V in Josephus Simonius Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1725), 589-99. Assemani published the Syriac text together with a Latin translation. There is an English translation in Georg Schurhammer, *Orientalia* (Rome-Lisbon: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu-Centro de Estudos Historicos Ultramarinos, 1963), 333-337.

time. In the text, it was in the 1580s (*orāyirattaññutta ěmbatil*) that the *Surīyāni* high-priest called Mar Avurāhām came to *Malayālam*. This is apparently a scribal error, perhaps based on dictation. The original must have been *orāyirattaññutta āmbatil*: the 1550s. In Malayalam, the *ā* sound is often pronounced as *ě*. Therefore, instead of 1550s the scribe might have heard 1580s and he penned it down, erroneously. Mar Abraham came in the 1550s, before 1556, and the precise date is unknown. The Syriac manuscript also, apparently misunderstands even the expression 1580s, and translates: “in the year 1580”, as if it were a precise date.

The Leiden MS 1214 implies that this was the time when the tension between the Portuguese and the local Christians brewed up. In general, it was after the Council of Trent (1545–63) and the creation of the Chaldean Church in union with Rome in 1552, that the tide began to turn against the Indian Syrian Christians. There was increased Portuguese interference into their religious life, and a persecution of the Eastern Syrian/Chaldean prelates who were accused of heresy, while the new, Tridentine, version of Catholicism was imposed.⁷⁸ The manuscript explains that the *Surīyāni* high-priests who came to *Malayālam* at that time by the order of the Catholicos were stopped from entering the region and were secretly tortured and killed by the Franks. They learned that the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam* were perplexed (“*manassu muṭṭu*”: troubled in their minds) because there were no high-priests. It further attests that Mar Abraham, by the grace of God managed to escape from their hands and ruled in *Malayālam* righteously. Mar Abraham established several churches until he accomplished his time.

2.4.3 The Synod of Diamper (1599 AD)

The attempts, commonly called ‘Latinization,’ led to the famous, or ill-famous, Synod of Diamper (1599), which decreed the ‘purging and burning’ of the Syriac ‘Nestorian’ books

⁷⁸ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 655.

and which interrupted the links of the Indian Christians with the Chaldean Patriarchal see of Babylon, by imposing on them the authority of Jesuit bishops and archbishops, which lasted until the Dutch conquest (8 January 1663).⁷⁹ However, the Syrian Christians refused to obey the Portuguese, who were trying to destroy their faith and their culture. The Syrian Christians covertly managed to hide or to copy their manuscripts regardless of the prohibitions. The Leiden manuscript makes extremely hostile comments about the Portuguese and elaborately describes the Portuguese attempts to change the local traditions of the Christians and impose customs and practices of the Latin church. Many a time, the Portuguese were called the “fraudulent Franks” and “injurious Franks”. Even though the Leiden manuscript does not mention by name the Synod of Diamper, it refers to the series of events that had happened as a result of the Synod. The text says that

by the order of the Roman Pope, Alleśa a Frankish bishop who was Viceroy of the Fort (*koṭṭekkabīśeri*⁸⁰) and <arch>bishop, after he came to *Malayālam*, tried by all means to convert the *Surīyānikkar* who were in *Malayālam*. Learning that this was not possible, he gave thirty thousand *kāśu* contributed by people (or: money contributed by thirty thousand people?) to the *Pērumpaṭappil Sōrupam* (the Kingdom of Cochin⁸¹), so that for three entire years the *Surīyānikkar* in the land of *Pērumpaṭappu* were tormented and their minds were tormented so that their minds become weakened and,⁸² for this reason, the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam* obeyed the Frankish bishop. In this way, they joined the Franks, and continued like this for some time, and they changed the customs and all the regular order of the *Surīyānikkar* and put an end to the marriage of the priests.⁸³

⁷⁹ Radu Mustăţă, *Sermon on Saint Thomas, the Beloved Apostle: A Syriac Catholic Panegyric from the Seventeenth Century Malabar*, (forthcoming), 3.

⁸⁰ The expression is most probably a compound of *koṭṭekkel*, “in the Fort” and *bīśeri*, the Malayalam transcription of the Portuguese *vice-rei*. The Portuguese vice-roy, and so also Aleixo de Menezes, had his see in Goa.

⁸¹ *Pērumpaṭappil Sōrupam*, “the Real Image of *Pērumpaṭappu*” is the name of the Cochin kingdom. *Pērumpaṭappu* is a village in Malappuram district, near Ponnani, in central Kerala. According to tradition, the Cochin royal family originated from there, before they were forced to transfer the capital of their kingdom to the south, first to Cranganore and, then, to Cochin, as the Zamorin of Calicut occupied their lands, later also subduing Cochin, which regained its independence only due to its alliance with the Portuguese against the Zamorin. The Syriac translates *Pērumpaṭappu Sōrupam* as “the King of Cochin” using the European terminology.

⁸² “*porutikeṭu varutti manassumutticcatu*”: a complex expression meaning literally: “their lives were disturbed their minds weakened”.

⁸³ *Mariyādayum kramanṇalokkēyum*: literally: “the customary practices and the successions/orders.” The Syriac translates the entire expression as “the good customs.”

This account quite visibly elucidates the efforts of the Portuguese bishop Aleixo de Menezes (referred as Alleśa here) who convened the Synod of Diamper in 1599, which prohibited not only the Syrian traditions but also the Indian customs of the St. Thomas Christians and wanted to conform them to the Roman Catholic customs including their liturgy. According to the manuscript, when the initial efforts to convert the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam* went futile, the bishop bribed the Kingdom (that is, the king) of Cochin, so that he ordered to torture the native Christians who refused to join the Franks for three years but later they succeeded in making the *Surīyānikkar* to join them. What is striking here is that more than physical torture, the Franks tried to change the customs and all the regular order/successions (*marīyādayum kramāṇṇalokkēyum*) of the community, among which, the ban on marriage is indeed important. I assumed that “successions” refers here to the disturbance in the social order of the community, which was based on the aristocratic leadership of the priestly families, much similar to the way the Brahmins were leading the Hindu community. Priesthood was hereditary in the priestly families. *Vamśāvalikal* and *purānas* (lineage histories and historical legends) show that there was a tradition of exercising hereditary authority within certain elite families, through which *kattanars* (priests) or *mettrāns*,⁸⁴ (bishops or elders) descended from one generation to the next, with nephew succeeding uncle (mother’s brother) in unbroken lineages of inherited positions.⁸⁵ As a result, by preventing the succession of the priestly function, the Portuguese were upsetting the entire social order of the community.

2.4.4 The *Kūnan* Cross Oath (1653 AD)

As already mentioned above, according to the Leiden MS 1214, after Mar Abraham, who was the last Chaldean Syrian Metropolitan of the St. Thomas Christians, died in 1597, the

⁸⁴ *Mettrān*, from the Syriac *meṭrān* (ܡܬܪܐܢ) is a contracted form of Metropolitan (*Mītrapolitā*), a bishop of high rank, second only to the Patriarch.

⁸⁵ See Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings to the Present*, 101.

Portuguese prevented the appointment of another Syrian bishops. This is apparently true, because there is almost a hundred years gap between the arrival of Mar Abraham and the coming of Mor Gregorios Abd'al-Jalīl, the next missionary who reached Kerala in 1665. The Leiden manuscript explicates a major event in the history of Syrian Christians in India after fifty-five years from the death of Mar Abraham.⁸⁶ This may be because that was the time when the torment by the Portuguese severely increased and the church did not have a Syrian Metropolitan to take care of it. It relates that

by the order of the Catholicos, a *Surīyāni* high-priest, called Mar Ginattīs, who came to *Malayālam*, was caught and brought from Mailapu to the Fort by the injurious Franks and was drowned in the sea, and because this became known to all of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*, then the *Surīyānikkar* living in *Malayālam* altogether gathered in a *yōgam*⁸⁷ at the church of *Maṭṭāmcēri* and decided that ‘from now onwards forever, for the times of the generations to come we would not join either in good or bad terms with the injurious Franks,’ and they made an oath. All of them together wrote and sealed a letter and they dispersed.

In fact, this Mar Ginattīs is Mar A^ctallah, who was a bishop belonging to the Syrian Catholic community of Aleppo and seemed to have pretended to be the Patriarch of Antioch when in fact he was under the obedience to the Pope. Contrary to the popular history, Mar A^ctallah was captured and deported to Goa, but the community believed that the Portuguese drowned him in the sea. This event was the immediate cause of the famous *Kūnan* Cross Oath, a revolt against the Portuguese in 1653. All the Christians in Kerala who were forced to join the Franks under harassment, learning that their “*Surīyāni*” bishop was murdered by the Franks (they thought that he was murdered), gathered together in a *yōgam* in the church of *Maṭṭāmcēri*, and made an oath that, “from now onwards forever, for the times of the generations to come we would not join either in good or bad terms with the injurious Franks” and they also signed

⁸⁶ That is in 1652, the year of arrival of Mar A^ctallah. The Oath took place in January 1653. This will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

⁸⁷ The *yōgam* is the meeting of the body that administers the Christian community of a parish or a larger entity.

an agreement on the same.⁸⁸ The term *yōgam* means here the general *yōgam* representing the entire community. However, “*Surīyānikkar* living in *Malayāḷam* altogether” means all the representatives, that is, members of the aristocratic and priestly families. According to tradition, as they were many in number, they tied a rope to the cross, which made the cross to lean, and took the Oath. Hence the name *Kūnan Kuriśu Satyam*.⁸⁹ This event contributed to the formation of the schism between the Syrian Christians as *puttankūr* (new faction) and *paḷayakūr* (old faction).

According to the Leiden manuscript, even though the majority of the *Surīyānikkar* living in *Malayāḷam* participated in the Oath and showed their anguish to the Franks, the Frankish bishop, Giuseppe Maria Sebastiani O.C.D., who was in Koṭungallūr, secretly wrote letters to the priests and to other Christians along with expensive clothes and ornaments to bribe them.⁹⁰ Some of them accepted these “complimentary gifts” and in secret went to visit the bishop and received money and concern. As this was going on, all the supposedly firm churchmen of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayāḷam* started obeying the Frankish bishop. However, the Franks and those *Surīyānikkar* who joined the Franks along with them, bribed the chieftains of each kingdom and tortured those *Surīyānikkar* who refused to join them, and forced the resisting people to join the Franks. Apparently, that is how the schism formed, unlike the binary imagination in the popular history, as an immediate split after the Oath, so that those who revolted against the Portuguese ecclesiastical oppression and again sought the links with the Eastern church came to be known as *puttankūr*, known as the Jacobite faction later and those who supported the Portuguese were called *paḷayakūr*, which later became the Syro-Malabar Church. This is a popular error perpetuated by much of the literature, including European as

⁸⁸ *Maṭṭāmcēri* now spelled Mattancherry, is a place near Fort Cochin, on the Cochin Island. Now it is part of Cochin.

⁸⁹ *Kūnan* means bent or hunchback *Kuriśu* is the Cross and *Satyam* means the truth. *Satyam ceyyuka* is the phrase for “to make an Oath.”

⁹⁰ Giuseppe Maria Sebastiani OCD was the apostolic commissary to India in 1656-58 and vicar apostolic of India between 1658 and 1663.

well as Indian. In fact, *paḷayakūr* are those who did not join the Mar Thoma and wanted to be in the Catholic Church. Yet, they were also revolting against the Latin bishops and wanted back the old Chaldean jurisdiction and the old customs. Therefore, Mar Gabriel could split many from the Catholics. The separation was a gradual and complex process.

2.5 The Syrian Missionaries and the Dutch

In 1663, the Dutch conquered Cochin and the Malabar Coast, which marked the end of the Portuguese rule in India, only Goa remaining under Portuguese rule. At that moment, a priest named Mar Parambil Cāndi Kuriētu (Alexandre de Campos) was consecrated as rival bishop for the Roman Catholics, and eventually the community split into two.⁹¹ In 1665, Mor Gregorios Abd'al-Jalīl, a Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) bishop arrived in North Paravur, north of Kochi, and people who opposed the decrees of the Synod of Diamper accepted him as their bishop. This slowly led to the split of the community into the *Puttankūr* [the New Faction], those who gradually, through a long and quite contradictory process, adopted the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite, or Miaphysite) faith and the concomitant West Syriac liturgical practices, versus the *Paḷayakūr* [the Old Faction], those who persevered in the East Syriac liturgical customs and the Chaldean allegiance, which, in those times they could only do by accepting – at least formally – the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the jurisdiction of the Latin archbishops.⁹² However, this split had not led to a de facto division of the communities until the end of the 17th century. The sharing of the same altar and other church premises reduced the tensions to a certain extent.⁹³

⁹¹ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India,” 688.

⁹² Perczel, “From Written Oral Text to Oral Tradition: Apologetic Church Histories of the Indian Syrian Christians.”

⁹³ Susan Thomas, “The Parting of Ways: Ripples of the Oath of Coonan Cross,” *Oriens Christianus* (2007): 206.

For the Syrian Christians in India, who resisted against the Portuguese, the Dutch acted as their saviours. The Leiden manuscript explains the role of the Dutch to eliminate the Franks from Malayalam as follows

by the good will of the Lord, who is accessible to everyone, by the order of the Compagnie (*kumbanni*) that established justice and righteousness and followed the Lord's commandments and who ruled the country according to the will of the Lord, a respected Admiral (*amarāl*) came to *Malayālam*.⁹⁴ However, like Īso Bar Nōn⁹⁵, who chased the pagans from the land of *Kinān* by the order of the Lord, similarly, the respected Admiral chased away from Fort Cochin the Franks who were more fraudulent than the pagans and, then, from every fort. Because of this, from then until today, the poor *Surīyānikkar* happily praise the Lord. Because of that, from that day until the present day, by the order of the Catholicos of the East, *Surīyāni* high priests continued to come to *Malayālam* without any interruption.

Certainly, the text backs and appreciates the efforts made by the Dutch to “save” the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*. It was the Dutch East Indian Company, which appointed an admiral in Kerala and the admiral, with the support of the Company chased away the “Franks who were more fraudulent than the pagans” from Cochin and Malabar. The text compares this act of chasing away the Portuguese with the allegory of the story of Joshua in the Bible, who conquered, the land of Caanan by defeating the pagans. The text did not hesitate to declare the Portuguese as more fraudulent than the pagans and it shows no sympathy to them. It acknowledges and appreciates the exertions of the Dutch in saving the *Surīyānikkar* and states that they will be obligated to the Dutch forever. The text also says that since the Dutch took over the power, there was no interruptions in the relation between the Catholicos of the East and the Syrian Christians in Kerala.

The last part of the text treats the arrival of Mār Śem‘on in 1700 AD (he actually came in 1701 AD) and the controversial bishop Mar Gabriel. Mār Śem‘on is a personality who carried multiple identities and details about him are found in the documents preserved in the

⁹⁴ *Kumbanni* is the Malayalam transcript of the (Vereenigde Oostindische) Compagnie, the Dutch East Indian Company, whose fleet conquered in the mid-seventeenth century the Indian Ocean outposts of the Portuguese, namely Sri Lanka in 1640, Melaka in 1641, and the Malabar Coast in 1661. *Amarāl* is the Malayalam transcript of the Dutch Admiraal.

⁹⁵ Īso Bar Nōn, meaning Īso, the son of Nōn, who is Joshua.

archives of the *De Propoganda Fide*. These documents reveal his first identity in the history as one of the signatories of a letter of Mar Eliah IX Yohannan Marogin (1662-1700), Patriarch of the Church of the East, to Pope Clement IX.⁹⁶ Mār Šem‘on then found as a Nestorian bishop, who is faithful to his Patriarch Mar Eliah IX in Diyarbakir.⁹⁷ Joseph of Amid, Metropolitan of Diyarbakir, who was in opposition with the Patriarch as well as Mār Šem‘on, was excommunicated from the Assyrian church after signing a Catholic confession and became the Chaldaean Patriarch of Diyarbakir.⁹⁸ The documents testify that Mār Šem‘on later went in acquaintance with the same Joseph (after he became Uniate Patriarch of Diyarbakir) and he consecrated Mār Šem‘on as Bishop of Mardin in 1683. However, according to Joseph, Mār Šem‘on went back to Eliah IX and the latter sent him to Jerusalem.⁹⁹ Mār Šem‘on’s presidency over the Jerusalem church became even more disastrous than that of Mardin, so much so that finally he was constrained to sell the church of Jerusalem to the Franciscans, after which he went to Rome without any permission from Joseph.¹⁰⁰ In 1690, Mār Šem‘on is found in Rome, serving Eliah IX in making peace with Roman Church, and he maintains a recommendation letter of Joseph I attesting, Mār Šem‘on is his bishop and of the Franciscan Guardian of Jerusalem, attesting that for many years he had abjured Nestorianism and lived as a good Catholic.¹⁰¹ However, the peace-making attempts failed in 1696 when the *Propaganda Congregation de facto* rejected the confession of faith submitted by Eliah IX in 1694.¹⁰² Apparently, it was impossible for him to remain in Rome and therefore he went to Spain and, then, to Portugal, from where he sailed to Goa. When he was about to land at Goa, the

⁹⁶ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303.

⁹⁷ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303.

⁹⁸ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303. For details see Samuel Giamil, *Genuinae relationes inter Sedem Apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldaeorum Ecclesiam* (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1902), 540, cited also by Albert Lampart, *Ein Märtyrer der Union mit Rom: Joseph I (1681-1696), Patriarch der Chaldäer* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1966), 113.

⁹⁹ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303.

¹⁰⁰ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303.

¹⁰¹ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 304.

¹⁰² Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 303.

Portuguese authorities became alarmed because of the presence of a Middle-Eastern (Chaldean) bishop and immediately put him on another Portuguese ship that was going to carry him back to the West.¹⁰³ However, as the ship landed in Surat, Mār Šem‘on was able to escape and took refuge in the Capuchin monastery, where he also found some acquaintances from Diyarbakir and from there he was deported to Pondicherry.¹⁰⁴

The Leiden MS 1214 recounts the story of Mār Šem‘on as follows

by the order of the Catholicos of the East, there came to *Malayālam* the *Šurīyāni* Mār Šem‘on, and his letter sent from *Dūrat* (Surat), but the Carmelite *pāṭiri*’s caught and made someone to read it (*karummiletti pāṭirimār piṭiccu vāyipicarīñṇu*) and the Carmelite *pāṭiri*’s and the *pāṭiri*’s of Sampaḷūr together decided that, in order to catch the *Šurīyāni mettrān*, they ordered to guard the way in which he was coming.¹⁰⁵ He was found and was taken to Fort Pondicherry (*Puticcerikoṭṭa*) and was in arrest there.¹⁰⁶

According to this text, Mār Šem‘on while coming to *Malayālam*, by the order of the Catholicos of the East, was caught in Surat, in Gujarat. He sent letters to the *Šurīyānikkar* but those letters never reached them because the Carmelite *pāṭiri*’s caught those letters and they learned about the mission of the Syrian bishop. In this text, Mār Šem‘on is presented as a victim of Portuguese assault who came to save the *Šurīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*. Although the Portuguese caught him, we learn from other sources that, they used him to consecrate (under strict conditions) a non- Padroado bishop, s Angelo Francisco, learning that Mār Šem‘on was

¹⁰³ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 306.

¹⁰⁴ Perczel and Kurukkoor, “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” 306.

¹⁰⁵ *Karummiletti* is the Malayalam transcript for the Latin and Italian Carmelita. *Pāṭiri* in Malayalam is derived from the Portuguese *padre* (father) and means a Latin priest, as distinguished from *kattanār*, a Syrian Christian priest. To Sampaḷūr, in Ambazhakad near Thrissur, was the Jesuit seminary transferred after the Dutch conquest of Cochin and the seashore in 1663 from Vaipikotta in Chendamangalam, where it was originally placed. Sampaḷūr is ‘the city of Saint Paul’, a name given by the Jesuits. Sampaḷūr is in the mainland, where the Dutch could not easily reach. The *pāṭiri*’s of Sampaḷūr are the Jesuits. *Mettrān*, from the Syriac *meṭrān* (ܡܬܪܐܢ) is a contracted form of Metropolitan (*Mīṭropolitā*), a bishop of high rank, second only to the Patriarch.

¹⁰⁶ For the Syriac text of Mar Shem‘on’s letter sent from Surat to the Christians in Malankara and its English translation, see István Perczel and George Kurukkoor: “A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century,” republished in *Revisiting a Treasure Trove: Perspectives on the Collection at St Kuriakose Elias Chavara Archives and Research Centre*, ed. J. C. Chennattuserry and Ignatius Payyappilly (Bengaluru: Centre for Publications CHRIST, 2019), 111-131.

the only catholic bishop around.¹⁰⁷ It was after the consecration that he was deported to Pondicherry.

At the end of the Leiden MS 1214, appears Mar Gabriel, the bishop for whose justification this history is being told, who is a controversial East Syrian bishop who arrived in 1705. Mar Gabriel, Nestorian Metropolitan of Azerbaijan, who projected himself as a Catholic before the Catholics and a dissident before the *puttankūr*, played an important role in minimizing tension between them.¹⁰⁸ According to Malekandathil, the fact that he was using the East Syrian liturgy, facilitated a healthy atmosphere between the *puttankūr* and *paḷayakūr*. The manuscript gives an account of his efforts as follows

the *mettrān* Mār Gowriyel reached *Malayāḷam* upon the order of the Catholicos of the East, he realized that a large number of the *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the Franks and were following the Frankish customs and all the priests of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayāḷam*, and of those *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the Franks, did not follow the *Surīyāni* customs, such as the marriage, and that day by day the number of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayāḷam* was decreasing, and he was heartbroken (*manassukedayi*).¹⁰⁹ So, as to separate from the Franks the *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the fraudulent Franks, having convinced (*pāṭṭilvarutti*) forty-two *paḷlikār*, after that, the *pāṭiri*'s of Sampaḷūr together with the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s, made an effort and from this, twenty *paḷlikār* were convinced to return to their previous state.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Perczel and Kurukkoor, "A Malayalam Church History from the Eighteenth Century," 307.

¹⁰⁸ Malekandathil, "Kothamangalam Roopathayude," 87.

¹⁰⁹ Mār Gowriyel is Mar Gabriel himself. Another, later Church history, contained in MS Bodleian Oriental 667, ff. 21r-25r, published by François Nau, "Deux notices relatives au Malabar," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, vol. 17 (1912): 74-99. The English translation in István Perczel, "Language of Religion, Language of People, Languages of the Documents: The Legendary History of the Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala," *Language of Religion—Language of the People: Medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, in ed. Ernst Bremer et.al, *Mitarbeit Studien 2*, (Munich: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 2006): 425-428, places Mar Gabriel's arrival to 1708. For the correct date see Cyril Malancharuvil, *The Syro-Malankara Church* (Alwaye, 1973) quoted by Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 2 (Bangalore: Church Association of India, 1988), 104. Yet, several studies on Indian Christian history give the date; Andrews Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church* (Kottayam: Pontifical Institute of Religious Studies, 1987), 182. In his earlier publications István Perczel also accepted the erroneous date: István Perczel, "Have the Flames of Diamper Destroyed All the Old Manuscripts of the Saint Thomas Christians?" in *Festschrift Jacob Thekeparampil – The Harp 20* (2006): 95, but corrected the date in "Four Apologetic Church Histories from India," 197.

¹¹⁰ The *paḷlikāran* (plural: *paḷlikār*) are the officers governing the church communities, apparently the heads of the church councils. In fact, they are mentioned under the name *Palliyār* on the *Tarissāppaḷli* copper plates: "If they (the *Ilava*'s and the *Vannan*'s: members of low-caste communities, who were given to the Christian merchants) commit any offence whatsoever, the *Palliyār* alone shall enquire into them." Translation is available in M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 91-92. Here the *Palliyār* seems to indicate a body of persons governing the *Tarissāppaḷli*.

The Leiden MS 1214 postulates the secret agenda of Mar Gabriel that, if the Dutch authorities were to side with him, he would become capable to extract the entire community of the Indian Syrian Christians from the rule of the Franks, which may either mean the Portuguese, or the Catholics in general. This shows the political aims of Mar Gabriel and his circle in addressing the Dutch authorities via Schaaf. As the head of the other, Jacobite-oriented, faction, Mar Thoma IV was in intense correspondence with Schaaf, trying to get the backing of the dominant Dutch colonizers against the Catholics, this was an attempt on the part of Mar Gabriel's party to divert the Dutch attention and possible help from the Mar Thoma faction, trying to prove the legitimacy of the East Syriac tradition, over against the West Syriac one adopted by the Mar Thoma's, on the one hand, and the efficiency of Mar Gabriel in destroying the Catholic hold on the Syrian Christians.

The concise expression “did not follow the *Suriyāni* customs, such as the marriage” seems to mean the following: When Mar Gabriel arrived in India, he saw that many from among the Catholic *paḷayakūr* faction abstained from marriage – these are those who became monks and nuns –, while as far as the priests of the two factions are concerned, both the priests of the Catholic *paḷayakūr* faction and the priests of the *puttankūr* faction following the Mar Thoma Metropolitans are abstaining from marriage. And the text says that because of this practice of celibacy the number of the *Suriyānikkar* was decreasing. This seems to indicate that the Mar Thoma faction was also keeping the custom of the priestly celibacy, which was introduced already at the Synod of Angamaly in 1583, held by Mar Abraham and Alessandro Valignano SJ. This is more explicitly explained by the Syriac translation. Apparently, Mar Gabriel's great weapon was the “re-introduction of Syriac customs”, that is, the marriage of the priests and he came as a competitor to Mar Thoma IV. Another thing that we know about Mar Gabriel is that he was using both leavened and unleavened bread for the liturgy.

The text emphasizes the role of Mar Gabriel and despite of his efforts to convert the whole *Surīyānikkar* back to the Syrian tradition, the *pāṭiri*'s of Sampaḷūr (Jesuite priests) together with the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s, continued to get back those who were vulnerable.

The manuscript ends with a very interesting conclusion which says

in these times, now, the help of the respected Compagnie (*kumbaṇṇi*) is with this poor *Surīyānikkaran* high-priest Mār Gowriyel and the Commodore (*kumadoṛa*) is also supporting him, and because they were supporting the foreigners, with the grace of the Lord who is accessible for everyone the respected Commodore showed his goodwill and, because of this, it is assured that all the Christians (*nasrāṇikal*) in *Malayālam*, will be separated again from the Franks and will live according to the *Surīyāni* customs as *Surīyānikkar*, as they had been before. All this truth shall be known to the Commodore who is close to Christ and to the respected Body and all the respected Masters who are close to Christ, and may they protect in their goodwill the *Surīyānikkar*.

As mentioned above, the *kumbaṇṇi* is the Dutch East India Company, which was ruling the Indian acquisitions of the Dutch in those times. The *kumadoṛa* is the Commodore, the Dutch Commander of Cochin. "The respected Body and all the respected Masters" are most probably the Dutch estates and the regents, as we are in the Second Stadtholder-less Period of the Dutch republic. Thus, the author of the history was apparently aware of the political system in the Netherlands. All these disappear in the Syriac translation, which speaks about a "king ruling *Hendo* and *Milibar*".

The intention of writing this history is evident from the concluding line. It is obvious that Mar Gabriel wants to please the Dutch authority and expects to get their assistance and support in ruling the *Surīyānikkar*. He emphasizes the fact that, if it had not been with the help of the Dutch, he could not have helped the *Surīyānikkar* to restore their *Surīyāni* customs and way of life by eliminating the Portuguese. Knowing the camaraderie between the Dutch and Mar Thoma IV, who was in opposition with Mar Gabriel, he very much knew the importance of impressing the Dutch in achieving his place in the community. Mar Gabriel expects that he may continuously receive the Dutch political support to the *Surīyānikkar* Community as well as to himself.

This history which is written on behalf of Mar Gabriel, shows his political motive of pleasing the Dutch authority to support him and help him carrying out the “responsibilities” towards the Syrian Christians in India. As we have seen, the history is constructed and represented in a way that it favors Mar Gabriel to defend his position in front of the Dutch officials. It is apparent from the text that Mar Gabriel was aware of the fact that the Dutch were supporting Mar Thoma IV, who was in opposition to Mar Gabriel.

3 Problems of Translation: A Comparison between the Malayalam and the Syriac Manuscripts

This chapter compares the Leiden Syriac MS 1213 with the Malayalam MS 1214, to show how events, people, and situations get mistranslated, misinterpreted and misunderstood while translating the text. Definitively, Malayalam is the original language in which the history was written, and the Malayalam text was translated into Syriac so that Schaaf could read it, as he did not know Malayalam.

The Syriac text is more elaborate at the beginning and longer in comparison to the Malayalam text. Moreover, much element of drama and imagination is added to the Syriac translation. However, as the Syriac text had to fit the same place as the Malayalam in the second roll, this has led to the omission of historical narratives and to an abbreviation of those mentioned in the last part of the story. At the first glance, the precision and factual clarity which the Malayalam text carries is absent from the Syriac text to a great extent. The Syriac manuscript ends with the concluding note: “The handwriting of the Syrian Priest Mattai, wretched, poor and evil. Amen.” This has created in the literature, which hitherto had ignored the Malayalam text, a confusion about the author of the text as we have already seen in the introduction. Be this as it may, priest Mattai has had an authorial contribution. He has added to the “entertainment” aspect of the text through his style of translation, similes, scriptural allusions and dramatic developments. Let us begin with the title.

The title of the Malayalam text is “The Events that Happened to the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*” and that of the Syriac is “The Events that Happened to the Syrians and Their History”. The alteration begins with the title itself. The translator has omitted the name of the place, *Malayālam*, in which the events were happening, and he made it as an account of their general history which is different from the Malayalam title. The Malayalam text speaks about the foundation of a church/community in Mailapu, where St. Thomas is supposed to have

arrived first. It says “Mār Tōma Ślīhā came to Mailapu, he preached the Way and he built a church/community there.” However, the Syriac text does not provide any such details on the establishment of the church in Mailapu. It rather says that the apostle “preached the gospel to many people, made them disciples and he baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This statement is a quotation from the bible, Mt 28:19: “Go you therefore, make all the nations disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” This biblical reference is missing from the Malayalam text and an addition of the Syriac translator. Another reference from the bible can be seen in the context of establishment of church in Maliāmkara by the apostle. Though in the Malayalam text, it just says that the apostle established six churches and consecrated two priests where as in the Syriac, it specifically mentions that in Maliāmkara, he built an altar to the Lord and consecrated two priests. This is also a phrase taken from the bible, Gen 12:8: “and there he built an altar to the Lord.”

In the Syriac text the name of the places where the churches were built after reaching Milibar (Malabar) as well as other Indian names are transcribed according to the rules of the *Garshuni* Malayalam script, which was considered an extension of the Syriac alphabet by the Indian users as well. The Syriac text provides a precise account of ninety-two years in the history during which the community in “*Hendo* and *Malayālam* was a widow without priests”. As I mentioned earlier, the translator uses a very figurative language while translating and sometimes it becomes dramatic and goes much beyond the original facts. The Malayalam text has nothing similar either on the number of years or about the “widowhood” of the community.

Regarding the split in the community after the persecution of Christians and their arrival in *Malayālam*, the Malayalam text reasons that “because of the lack of priests and because there was no increase in the number of those who were aware of the truth, and because some of them were with the *Kāvyar* (the pagans) out of one hundred and sixty families who were

counted as Christians (*Nasrānis*) who lived in *Malayālam* in those days, ninety-six families left the Way and sixty-four remained.” This could mean that the ninety-six families re-converted and returned to the pagans by leaving the Way. However, the Syriac explains the split as a division between those who believed in the orthodox faith and those who did not. While the meaning is apparently the same, only the Malayalam makes clear the real content of the split.

The Syriac text says the following

The hundred and sixty true Christian households that remained in Malabar passed much time in this condition of being without priests and without directors and were divided among them because some people, that is, men from among them, became unbelievers in the orthodox faith, while others did not. Now, those who became unbelievers, were ninety-six houses, while those, who stayed in the orthodox faith, were sixty-four houses.

While the Malayalam text makes it clear that the ninety-six houses that split from the community became Hindus, the Syriac text translates the Malayalam term “*mārgam*,” which means “Way,” as “orthodox faith,” by which he might mean those who believe in the orthodox faith, that is to say, the Christians.

The next part of the text, which constitutes the vision of the Metropolitan of Urhāy and the arrival of Thomas of Jerusalem, is rich with imagination, drama and dialogues. The Malayalam text at this point is very precise and more factual. This is the Malayalam text.

In those times, as a high-priest ruling in the kingdom called Urhāyi had seen a vision in his night dream, for this reason, according to the order of the Catholicos of the East, a trader who was living in Jerusalem, a Christian called Thomas, because of his trade and because, if there were Christians in *Malayālam*, he would have met them, came by a ship and, having reached *Malayālam*, he summoned all the Christians from Maliyamkara to Tiruvamkod, met them, spoke to them abundantly and reassured all the sixty-four Christian households that were in *Malayālam*, as his younger and older brothers, and again, boarded the ship, went away and reaching Jerusalem, he arrived. Then he reached where the Catholicos was dwelling and, after informing him about all the circumstances, according to the order given by the Catholicos, the metropolitan who was ruling the place called Urahāyi, priests, deacons, Christians along with women and children from Bagdash (Bagdad), Ninuve (Nineveh) and Jerusalem, together with the merchant Thomas, sailed away again, reached *Malayālam* and, in the year 345 of Christ they arrived in Māliyamkara.

The Syriac translation is as follows

Then, in that time, there appeared to the Metropolitan of Urhāy a vision during the night, during dawn. He rose and went to the Catholicos of the East and he related to him the vision that he saw. Then, when the Catholicos had heard this, he sent his envoys to all the churches, monasteries and cities of his jurisdiction, and they led them to him. When much crowd has gathered, together with their bishops and their merchants, and he [that is, the Catholicos] narrated before them all that the bishop had seen and that they spoke to him, then, there rose one of them, namely the merchant Thomas of Jerusalem. Then, he responded and said: “Behold, the fame of Milibar and of *Hendo* had been known to me from earlier times, from foreign lands and people.” Then, when the Catholicos heard his response, he rose from his place, he approached him, he hugged him and kissed him, and said to him: “I ask from you, my son and my beloved, to go to Milibar and meet the inhabitants of that land and relate to me the events that happened to them there.” In those very days Thomas of Jerusalem left and came to Milibar and reached Māliyāmkarā and met there the Thomas Christians and they comforted each other to a great extent. Then, the Christians related to him the events that had happened to them. When Thomas heard about those events, he confirmed them and encouraged them with sweet words. Then, immediately, he boarded the ship, and went to his place. After he reached his place, he approached the Catholicos, and told him: “Behold, I have seen with my eyes the Thomas Christians and we spoke to each other, and we got greatly comforted by each other, and I left them in hope and returned.” Hearing this, the Catholicos spoke to him and said: “Even if I am to place my soul for their sake, I would do it! But I beg from you to let me know whatever I should do that is needed for those children of mine!” Then, he [Thomas] let the Catholicos know whatever was needed for those brethren who were in Milibar. Then, after not much time, but still in those days, by means of the power of our worshipped Lord and of the order of the Catholicos of the East, the merchant Thomas of Jerusalem left again and, together with him, also the bishop who saw the vision and, together with them, presbyters and deacons and also men and women, boys and girls from Jerusalem, and from Bagdash and from Nineveh. They boarded a ship, came to Milibar and reached Māliyāmkarā in the year three hundred and forty-five of our Lord.

The translator of the Syriac text added an element that was lacking from the Malayalam: the drama. These elaborate and imaginary details of the events serve the purpose of entertaining the reader rather than providing facts. The expression “and they comforted each other” is again taken from the bible, Rom 1:12: “That I may be comforted together with you” and this usage in the translated text is a contribution of Priest Mattai.

When Thomas of Jerusalem came back to Malabar and met the king *Cēra Kon Perumāl* together with the sixty- four families who were there in *Malayālam*, according to the Malayalam manuscript, the king

designated the country of Koṭungallur drawing its boundaries, and separated sufficient land for a church (*paḷḷi*) and a market-quarter (*paṭṭanam*) and, having given this, his Majesty the Lord King Cēra Kon was pleased to have written on a copper plate every privilege of close-to-royal status that the Surīyāni Christians should enjoy and to administer as long as the sun and the moon would last, and these plates that they bought from him can still be seen.

In fact, the Syriac translation took the “luxury” of making the king grant as much land as the Christians asked for. There are no precise details of the measure of the land given but it says:

[...] he gave them a land as large and extended as they wanted. He also gave them all the royal privileges, as they are written in brass plates. Behold, until today, these plates are with us.

Thus, the privileges mentioned in the Malayalam text as “close-to-royal status”¹ got translated into “royal privileges” in the Syriac. While, once again, this is meant to be a faithful translation, it makes it doubtful here whether the King actually granted them royal status. If we were to believe the Malayalam text, it could mean that the King actually granted to Thomas of Jerusalem the administrative privileges close to royal status and might not necessarily the royal status per se. Similarly, the Syriac manuscript also says that, when the Syrian bishops Mar Šabbūr and Mar Proṭ along with “the glorious Sawrīšō” met the King in 823 AD, they were also granted enormous land as they wished.

The Syriac text also uses abusive terms referring to the Portuguese in particular, and the Catholics in general, such as “the perfidious Franks”, “enemies of the Exalted”, and “the murderous Franks.” The Syriac also exaggerates an error concerning the year of the arrival of Mar Abraham. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the Malayalam text, “it was in the years of the 1580s (*orāyirattaññutta ěmbatil*) that the *Surīyāni* high-priest called Mar Avurāhām came to *Malayāḷam*.” The year 1580 is apparently a scribal error here, which perhaps happened while dictating the events to a scribe. The original must have been

¹ “*rājāvinnaṭutta padavikal*”

orāyirattaññutta āmbatil: the 1550s. In Malayalam, the “ā” sound is often pronounced as “ē”. Mar Abraham came to Kerala at his young age, sometime in the 1550s, before 1556, and the precise date is unknown. He died in 1597. The Syriac translator has apparently misunderstood even the expression 1580s, and translated: “in the year 1580”, in the assumption that this was the precise date.

The translator, for the purpose of making the Syriac text more interesting to read, has added certain biblical similes to the translation. For instance, in the context when Mar Abraham escaped from the hands of the Franks when they attempted to kill him, the Syriac text says: “it was in fear and trembling that he made this diocese grow”. The expression “fear and trembling” is Pauline: See 1 Cor 2:3: which says, “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling”; 2 Cor 7:15: “[...] how with fear and trembling ye received him”; Eph 6:5: “with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart”; Phil 2:12: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This expression is missing from the Malayalam text and is purely an invention of the translator. Most probably Priest Mattai, thought of 1 Cor 2:3, and applied it to Mar Abraham’s fear from the Portuguese and he used it as an allegory.

The Syriac text says that after the death of Mar Abraham, there was an interruption in the coming of Syrian bishops to Malabar for fifty-two years. In the Syriac text the number of years is precisely given as fifty-two, which is not there in the Malayalam text. Mar Abraham died in 1597 and fifty-two years from that counts as 1649. Apparently, this is about Mar A^ctallah, who came to India in 1653. However, Mar A^ctallah has never reached Malabar, as he was caught by the Portuguese and, according to the local beliefs, drowned in the Cochin Bay (an untrue story). In the Malayalam text, it is only mentioned that the Portuguese prevented the arrival of Syrian bishops after the death of Mar Abraham. This fifty-two years of absence of Syrian bishops is again mentioned in the Syriac text as the gap before the arrival of Patriarch Ignatius (Mar A^ctallah). Instead of the fifty-two years of the Syriac, counted from the death of

Mar Abraham, the Malayalam text speaks about a gap of fifty-five years before the arrival of Mar Ignatius (A^ctallah) in Mailapu, which happened in August 1652. If we count back fifty-five years from 1652, we get 1597, that is, the year of death of Mar Abraham (died in January), so this should be the counting of the original Malayalam history. Apparently, the fifty-two years in the Syriac text is an independent and rather imprecise elaboration on the part of the translator. One possible explanation is that he took erroneously 1599, the year of the council of Diamper (held in June 1599) as being also the year of death of Mar Abraham. .

The Syriac manuscript mentions the Synod of Diamper, without the name of the Roman Catholic bishop who had convened it, namely Aleixo de Menezes, as “the Franks have changed the good manners of the Syrians and forbade the marriage of the priests and the deacons and taught a new and abominable religion.” Here, *tawdiṭā* is the term used in the Syriac text, which literally means “confession,” but it is also the word used for “religion” in general. Here, it means the entire complex of faith and liturgy, corresponding to the Malayalam term “*mārgam*”. There is no correspondent to this in the Malayalam texts, which only speaks about the customs, the “*mariyāda*”. However, both texts emphasize the ban on the marriage of the priests and deacons.

The split in the community between the *puttankūr* [new faction] and *paḷayakūr* [old faction], after the *Kūnan* Cross Oath in 1653 is narrated as follows in the Syriac text:

[...] the Syrians separated from the Franks, and in a few years the Syrians gained force, from that time the *bišop* of the Franks began to send to the Syrian priests precious gifts and to write them letters in secret. Then, some of the Syrian priests accepted the gifts in secret and in the night went to the *bišop* of the Franks, while others did not accept and did not go. While this situation lasted for a short time, some of the priests stumbled and joined the *bišop*, while others did not. Then, there occurred a split among the Syrians and they formed two sides. After that, the Franks were having power over the Syrians, because half of the Syrians [adhered to the Franks]² and because the Franks gave bribes to the kings and the chieftains, so that they torment the Syrians.

² This is written above the line in the manuscript.

The split among the Syrians which formed the two sides refers to the story of Mar Cāndi Parampil, aka Alexandre de Campos, being consecrated Vicar Apostolic for the Syrian Christians of India in 1663, which resulted in a secession of the majority of the Syrian Christians from Mar Thoma I's faction. The description of the split is more elaborate in the Syriac than in the Malayalam. It is clear in the text that after the Oath, all the Syrians objected the Franks and later, when the Franks bribed some of the priests and Syrians, there formed the split between those who wished to adhere to the Franks and those who opposed them.

Next, the Syriac text emphasizes the role of the Dutch admiral and Mar Gabriel in saving the Syrians in India from the hands of the Portuguese. Without any hesitation, the text credits the Dutch admiral with being “a believer and a just judge and the ruler of all *Hendo* and *Milibar*” who “chased away all the Franks from *Qoqśin*³ and all the cities that are around *Hendo*” so that, because of this, the Syrian bishops could come to India again like it was before. Nonetheless, it seems that the Malayalam text has more clarity regarding the administrative structure of the Dutch. In the Malayalam text, the author says that the admiral is coming to *Malayālam* by the order of the Dutch East Indian Company (*kumbanni*) whereas the Syriac completely omits the reference to the Company.

Also, the text does not name the Syrian bishops who came after but says that “the Syrians are adhering to the Syrian Fathers (*awwāhātā suryōyē*) who come from Jerusalem, from Nineveh, from Bagdaś and from other places by means of the order of the Catholicos of the East, while the Franks are adhering to the Frankish bishops who come from Rome and from other places by means of the order of the Pope of Rome.” The Syrian bishop who came from Jerusalem after the split of the two factions, is Mor Gregorios Abd'al-Jalīl, abbot of Saint Mark's monastery in Jerusalem, in 1665. The other Syrian missionaries were Mor Baselios

³ *Qoqśin* is the Garshuni Malayalam transcription of the Portuguese name Cochin, in Malayalam *Pērumpaṭappu*.

Yaldo and Mor Iyovannis Hidayat'allah, who came from Mosul (here Nineveh) and arrived in India in 1685. Both missions were sent by Moran Mor Ignatius Abd al-Masih, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Patriarch. The next Syrian bishop to come was Mar Śem'on of Ada, sent by the Catholicos Patriarch of Bagdad (here Bagdaś) and who arrived in 1701. In fact, there is an astonishing solidarity expressed in all the documents of those times between the Chaldean Syrian and Jacobite Syrian Churches against the colonial, Latinizing powers and an astonishing indifference toward the divergent dogmatic positions of those Churches. It should also be noted that there is no mention about Mar Śem'on of Ada, in the Syriac text whereas the Malayalam text speaks about his arrival in India prior to that of Mar Gabriel.

Towards the end of the text, the translator omits many facts that are present in the Malayalam manuscript, such as all the details on Mar Śem'on and the reference to the Dutch East India Company. Apparently, this happens because he is limited by the size of the paper and he wanted to fill the roll, just as the Malayalam text fills the other roll. However, as Priest Mattai went into more details at the beginning, there did not remain enough room for translating the end. Therefore, he resumed it in his own words which has led to quite considerable differences between the two texts.

The Syriac explains in detail the presence and role of Mar Gabriel as a mediator between the New Faction and the Old Faction. As the Syriac provides more details, it gives us a clearer picture about his role in the Syrian community. The text narrates

In the year thousand seven hundred and five, there came the Syrian Metropolitan Mār Gawriyel upon the order of the catholicos of the East, and saw the two sides and that there were many Syrians who were joining the Franks and that they are pursuing all the abominable customs of the Franks and are not preserving their foundation and their root and that both the priests of the Syrians and the priests of those Syrians who are joining the Franks are not taking wives unlike their forefathers, the Syrian priests were doing, because they had reneged on the lawful marriage for the priests of the two sides and that, therefore, from those days and beyond, all those Syrians of Milibar would be joining the Franks who are machinating day and night. Because of all this, this Syrian *Metrān* Mār Gawriyel did not join the Syrians who are of his flesh, nor the Syrians who are joining the Franks, but became so to say in the middle, in order to divert the

Syrians from joining the Franks. For this reason, many Syrian people joined him from both sides, namely from the side that has joined the Franks forty-four churches.

This text explains that Mar Gabriel was upset with the forced changes in the Syrian community because of which he refused to join a side. It further justifies his ambiguous position by explaining that, it was because the Syrians (including those who refused the Portuguese) failed to preserve their foundation and their root by accepting the ban on marriage of priests set by the Portuguese, that Mar Gabriel took the intermediate position even though he knew that the Syrians were of his own flesh. The text further defends him by arguing that his intermediate position in the community would help to divert the Syrians from joining the Franks. The Syriac text attests that his attempt was successful, and he could gather forty-four churches from the Roman Catholic side, in which twenty churches went back to the Franks as a result of the “perfidy and the machinations of the Carmelites and the *Sampallu* (the Jesuits).”

This apologetic tone of the text is most probably due to the fact that, Mar Gabriel and his party knew well that there was a very good relationship between Mar Thoma IV, the leader of the *puttankūr*, and the Dutch authorities. So, Mar Gabriel’s position, evidently motivated by the fact that he belonged to the Nestorian Catholicos of the East, while the Mar Thoma party had joined the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox jurisdiction, needed a justification. This justification was found in his opposition to the priestly celibacy, which, apparently, was practiced by the *puttankūr*, too, and in his middle position between the two factions, resulting in the joining of forty-two *paḷayakūr* communities. The text purposefully passes under silence the number of communities that have separated from the Mar Thoma faction, to join Mar Gabriel.

The Syriac text ends as follows

However, know, Oh, illustrious and blessed Lords, that if in this time the mighty Commodore and the blessed King of all *Hendo* and Milibar were to help this poor Syrian, then both sides would return to the Syrian-ness, and the perfidious Franks would not sway power over *Hendo* for the ages of ages.

The Syriac text concludes that it is only with the help of the Commodore and “the King” that the “poor Syrian”, Mar Gabriel could bring back the Syrian traditions and customs. It seems that he himself has taken over the responsibility of returning “to the Syrian-ness” the community but that is possible only through the support of the Dutch. The whole text does not mention Mar Thoma IV, who was in opposition to Mar Gabriel. The reference to the King is mysterious here. The text is addressed to the Dutch officers and there cannot be a King in Holland at that time because, by then, Netherlands had become a republic without even the traditional office of “stadtholder” being filled.⁴ It is apparent in the Malayalam text that, the “Respected Body” most probably means the States General (*Staten-Generaal*), the supreme governing body of the Republic of the Netherlands and the “Respected Masters” are apparently office-bearers, perhaps the Regents in general. The Syriac text seems to have misunderstood the whole context. One possibility is that Priest Mattai did not understand the reference to the Compagnie (*kumbanni*) in the Malayalam text and thought it was a king. Another possibility is that he simply was not able to translate *kumbanni* into Syriac, so, given that the Compagnie ruled India, he thought it proper to translate its name as *malikā*, king. Otherwise, he understands the admiral (*amarāl*) and the Commodore (*kumadora*) correctly, and only the Compagnie is absent. Therefore, the probability is that Priest Mattai misunderstood Compagnie as the ruler of India and Malabar and translated it as the King of all *Hendo* and Milibar.

Although the Syriac text is more dramatic and elaborate than the Malayalam text, the translation does justice to the original with regards to the facts to a certain extent, with the exception of omitting the details on Mar Śem’on and the reference to the Dutch East India Company as he the translator was running out of space to write.

⁴ Perczel, “Four Apologetic Church Histories,” 198.

4 Conclusion

Histories are often told and re-told. Many a time the popular histories and beliefs of a community may not correspond to the available historical evidences and proofs. In this particular case of the histories of the Syrian Christian community in India, as we have seen, depending on the communal strives, the histories are constructed and manipulated. With regards to the scholarship, oblivious of the intercommunal strives, western as well as Indian scholars often incorporate within the same narrative mutually exclusive stories originating from the apologetic history-writing of antagonistic groups presenting their legendary history as truth. Therefore, most of the existing studies on the history of the Indian Syrian Christian community are transmitting rather confusing stories, interspersed with many errors.

Although many studies have been conducted on the history of the community, most of them are based on secondary literature written by western scholars and local scholars without using primary sources. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit the existing popular narratives of the community by using the local sources. The recently discovered local sources definitely have the potential for re-writing the existing history of the Syrian Christian community in India.

We have seen how a history written on behalf a Nestorian bishop to an orientalist scholar re-interpreted the history of the community for his personal motive. Although the Leiden manuscripts have political intentions, it helped us to analyze and compare historical events to the existing popular narrative. The text shed light on the narrative of the persecution of Christians by Māṇikkavācer by connecting it with the arrival of Thomas of Kana. The history further clarifies the formation of *Tekkumbhāgam* (the Southern Side) and *Vaṭakkumbhāgam* (the Northern side) and the reasons for the separation which were hitherto quite obscure for the larger scholarship. The texts give insights into the missions of Syrian bishops and the struggles of these missionaries to preserve the customs and practices of the community.

Although this history is manipulated and biased, as all apologetic Church histories are, it helps us to understand the intercommunal and political atmosphere of the Syrian Christian church till the eighteenth century. It reveals the connections between the Christian communities, Syrian missionaries, the King of Cochin, the Portuguese and the Dutch. The history treats the Portuguese – sometimes confused with the Roman Catholics – with little sympathy and often abuses them for persecuting the Christians. The text never forgets to credit the Dutch and the Respected Body (that is, the Dutch Republic) in protecting the community from the Portuguese and also in preserving their customs.

In the Syriac version of the history, we have observed certain scribal errors and mistranslations. However, this version has the added value of being a more entertaining text, although to the detriment of the historical information. We have also seen that, per consequence, the text had to skip some events towards the end, as it was elaborated in the beginning with the addition of imaginary events and dramatic narration. However, without any doubt, this revision of popular history is a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship on the history of the Syrian Christian community in India.

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6 Glossary

In this section, I will classify those words in the Malayalam version, which have been adopted from foreign languages.

6.1 Words from Dutch

<i>Amarāl</i>	- Admiral, from the Dutch <i>admiraal</i> .
<i>Kumadora</i>	- Commodore, from the Dutch <i>commodore</i> .
<i>Kumbaṇṇi</i>	-The Dutch East Indian Company, <i>Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie</i> .
<i>Viśuppu</i>	- Bishop, from the Dutch <i>bischoop</i> .

6.2 Words from Latin and Italian

<i>Karummiletti</i>	- Carmelite, from the term <i>Carmelita</i> .
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6.3 Words from Persian

<i>Suriyāni, Suriyānikkar</i>	- The Christian ethnicity of Sasanian Empire, derived from the term <i>Soryāni</i> . In the local context, they are the Syrian Christian population in India.
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6.4 Words from Portuguese

<i>Biśeri</i>	- Portuguese <i>vice-rei</i> , the Viceroy.
<i>Pātiri</i>	- Derived from <i>padre</i> (father) and meaning a Latin priest, as distinguished from <i>paṭṭakkāran</i> , a Syrian Christian priest.

Sampaḷūkkaru Pātirimar

- The Jesuits. Sampaḷūr is a place near Thrissur, which means “the city of Saint Paul”, a name given by the Jesuits. The *pāṭiri*’s of Sampaḷūr are the Jesuits.

6.5 Words from Syriac

Episqōpā

- Bishop, from *episqōpā* (ܐܦܝܨܩܦܐ)

Kātōlikkā

- Catholicos (ܕܟܬܘܠܝܩܐ)

Māmmōdīssā

- Baptism, from *ma^cmodiṭā* (ܡܐܥܡܕܝܬܐ)

Mettrān

- From *meṭrān* (ܡܝܬܪܐܢ), which is a contracted form of Metropolitan (*miṭropolitā*) (ܡܝܬܪܐܡܢܐ), a bishop of high rank, second only to the Patriarch.

Mišiha

- Christ, from *M-śihā* (ܡܫܝܚܐ)

Pāpādarōmi

- The Pope of Rome, from *Papa da-R[h]ōmi*

[ܩܦܐ ܕܐܪܡܝܐ]

Parankikal

- Term used for referring to the Portuguese, called Franks, coming either from the Syriac *prangāyē* (ܦܪܢܓܝܐ) itself perhaps from the Arabic *firangi*. By extension, it means the foreign Roman Catholic missionaries in general.

Ślīhā

- Apostle, from *śliḥā* (ܫܠܝܚܐ)

6.6 Malayalam - Syriac Equivalencies

Members of the Persian Church of the East (Suriyānikkar) — Syrians (*Suryoyē*)

The mountainous land of the *Cēra* king (cērakon malanadu) — *Milibar*

The Land of the Pandyas (<i>Pandya nadu</i>)	– <i>Mailappu</i>
A pagan (<i>kaviyen</i>)	– the pagans who were infidels (<i>ḥanpē ditayhun [h]waw kapporē</i>)
The Way and the Baptism (<i>marggattoṭum māmodīsāyoṭum</i>)	– The true faith (<i>haymānūtā daśrārā</i>)
<i>Malayālam</i>	– <i>Milibar</i>
The king then ruling <i>Malayālam</i> , the Lord <i>Cēra Kon Perumāl</i> (<i>annu Malayālam bhālunna rajāvu Cerakon Perumāl</i>)	– Cerakon, the king of all Milibar (<i>Ṣerakon malkā[h] d-kulō[h] Milibar</i>)
Church/sanctuary (<i>paḷḷi</i>)	– church (<i>edṭā</i>)
Market-quarter (<i>paṭṭanam</i>)	– city (<i>m-di[n]ṭā</i>)
According to the Way and the customs (<i>margattinottapōlē mariyādayakum vannam</i>)	– according to justice (<i>a[y]k zedqā</i>)
High-priests belonging to the Persian Church (<i>surīyānikkārāya melppaṭṭakkār</i>)	– Syrian Fathers (<i>abbāhātā suryāyē</i>)
‘The one turning the circle [of becoming]’/Ruler of the world – traditional title of the Emperor (<i>Cakkravṛtti</i>)	– <i>Cakkirvīrti</i> (<i>Ṣakkirbīrti</i> – the Syriac characters are used according to the <i>Garshuni</i> Malayalam pronunciation rules) – in both the Malayalam and the Syriac, this title has become a personal name.
Franks (<i>paṛankikal</i>)	– perfidious Franks (<i>prangāyē n-kilē</i>), murderous Franks (<i>prangāyē qāṭōlē</i>) – in both cases this means either the Portuguese or the Roman Catholic missionaries.
Alleśa, a Frankish bishop who was Viceroy of the Fort and <arch>bishop (<i>koṭṭekkabīśariyum biśuppum āyi Alleśa enna paṛanki viśuppu</i>)	– a certain Frankish bishop (<i>episqōpā ḥad prangāyā</i>)

- Thirty thousand *kāśu* contributed by people
- Pērumpaṭappu*)
- The true Image of *Pērumpaṭappu* (*Pērumpaṭappil Sōrupam*)
- They changed the customs and all the regular order (*mariyādayum kramaṇṇalokkēyum*) of the *Surīyānikkar* and put an end to the marriage of the priests
- By the order of the Compagnie (*kumbanni*) that established justice and righteousness and followed the Lord's commandments and who ruled the country according to the will of the Lord, a respected Admiral (*amarāl*) came to *Malayālam*
- Heads of the Church councils (*paḷḷikār*)
- The *pāṭiri*'s of Sampaḷūr together with the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s
- All this truth shall be known to the Commodore who is close to Christ and to the Respected Body and all the Respected Masters who are close to Christ and may they protect in their goodwill the *Surīyānikkar*
- a bribe of thirty thousand double coins of gold
 - Cochin (*Qoqśin* – with Garshuni Malayalam spelling
 - King of Cochin (*malkā d-Qoqśin*)
 - The Franks have changed the good manners (*‘ayādē ṭābē*) of the Syrians and forbade the marriage of the priests and the deacons and taught a new and abominable religion (*tawdiṭā ḥdaṭā wan-didtā*)
 - there came an *Amarāl* who was believer and a just judge and the ruler of all *Hendo* and Milibar
 - churches (*edātā*)
 - the Carmelites and the *Sampallu*
 - However, know, o, illustrious and blessed Lords, that if in this time the mighty Commodore and the blessed King of all *Hendo* and Milibar were to help this poor Syrian, then both sides would return to the Syrian-ness, and the perfidious Franks would not sway power over *Hendo* for the ages of ages.

7 Appendices

7.1 The Translation of the Leiden MS Or. 1214 (Malayalam Version)

The events that happened to the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*

In the year fifty-two at the time of the Miśiha, Mar Thoma Ślīhā came to Mailappu, he preached the Way and he built a church/community there. After that, he left and reached Māliyamkara having arrived in the mountainous land of the *Cēra* king (*cēraḥon malanādu*) and he preached the way. In Maliyamkara, Kottakka, Edappally, Gokkamangalam, Niranam and Thiruvamkoddu he established a church and, having appointed two priests, he returned back to the Land of the Pandyas (*Pandinādināṭṭil*) and was stabbed to death by the hand of a *Kāviyen* (pagan) while spreading the message of the Way. In this way, reaching a time after the Apostle Mar Thoma has accomplished his time (that is, died), and after the death of the priests in India and in *Malayālam*, there arose against the Way and the Baptism *Māṇikkavācer* the magician and also came to *Mailappu* and performed diverse signs and because he commanded not to baptize and set a ban on it, in those days in which all the chief men and the headmen left the Baptism and believed in *Māṇikkavācer*, in order not to be shaken and not to leave the Way and the Baptism, the people left India and came to *Malayālam*. Those who were already in *Malayālam* and those who came from India became related to each other. Therefore, because of the lack of priests and because there was no increase in the number of those who were aware of the truth, and because some of them were with the *Kāvyar* (pagans) out of one hundred and sixty families who were counted as Christians (*Nasrānis*) who lived in *Malayālam* in those days, ninety-six families left the Way and sixty-four remained.

In those times, as a high-priest ruling in the kingdom called *Urahāyi* had seen a vision in his night dream, for this reason, according to the order of the Catholicos of the East, a trader who was living in Jerusalem, a Christian called Thomas, because of his trade and because, if there were Christians in *Malayālam*, he would have met them, came by a ship and, having reached *Malayālam*, he summoned all the Christians from *Maliyamkara* to *Tiruvamkod*, met them, spoke to them abundantly and reassured all the sixty-four Christian households that were in *Malayālam*, as his younger and older brothers, and again, boarded the ship, went away and reaching Jerusalem, he arrived. Then he reached where the Catholicos was dwelling and, after informing him about all the circumstances, according to the order given by the Catholicos, the metropolitan who was ruling the place called *Urahāyi*, priests, deacons, Christians along with women and children from *Bagadash* (Bagdad), *Ninuve* (Nineveh) and Jerusalem, together with the merchant Thomas, sailed away again, reached *Malayālam* and, in the year 345 of Christ they arrived in *Maliyamkara*. The sixty-four houses of Christians who were in *Malayālam*, coming together, discussed, and went to the king who was then ruling *Malayālam*, the Lord *Cēra Kon Perumāl*, met him and, having explained the entire situation in front of his Majesty, his Majesty understood and he designated the country of Koṭungallur drawing its boundaries, and separated sufficient land for a church (*paḷḷi*) and a market-quarter (emporium? *paṭṭanam*) and, having given this, his Majesty the Lord King *Cēra Kon* was pleased to have written on a copper plate every privilege of close-to-royal status that the *Surīyāni* Christians should enjoy and to administer as long as the sun and the moon would last, and these plates that they bought from him can still be seen. After this, in the land designated in the country of Koṭungallur they built a church and from east to west in south-north direction four hundred seventy-two shops and houses behind the shops were built. In those days and in later times, when they lived according to the Way and the customs, very often from *Bagadash* and from *Ninuveh* and from Jerusalem and from other directions, by the

order of the Catholicos of the East, Suriyāni high-priests came to *Malayālam* and they ruled over the *Suriyānikkar* who were in *Malayālam*. Likewise, later, after some time, after Kodungallur was dispersed, in the year 823 of Christ, from *Bagadashi*, the Suriyāni high-priests Mar Šābor and Mar Prott, together with a person called Sawrīšo, came to Kollam, met the king called *Cakkravṛtti*, made offerings to him, and in Kollam, they built a church (*paḷḷi*) and a market-quarter (*paṭṭanam*). And so, likewise-likewise (*īvaṇṇam īvaṇṇam*), several Suriyāni high-priests came to *Malayālam* and they were spreading the Way (*marggam naṭattukayum*) and established churches. In the times when they were doing so, when 1500 years had passed [since the birth] of Christ, the Franks (*paṛankikal*) came to *Malayālam* and were there. For those who were in *Malayālam*, even in those times, by the order of the Catholicos, *Suriyāni* high-priests, namely Mar Denaha, Mar Yākō, Mar Tōma and Mar Yowālāha, these four high-priests, together came to *Malayālam* and ruled and established churches. Then, after these four people had completed their time, when it was in the years of the 1580s (*orāyirattañṇutta ěmbatil*) of Christ, again, by the order of the Catholicos of the East the *Suriyāni* high-priest called Mar Avuṛāhām came to *Malayālam*. In those times, to those *Suriyāni* high-priests who by the order of the Catholicos were coming to *Malayālam*, the Franks ordered to guard by all means the whole way so that they might not come to *Malayālam* and they started secretly to torture and kill the high-priests. Because of this, Mar Avuṛāhām was distressed but, by the goodwill of God, he was saved from the hands of the Franks, he ruled in *Malayālam* righteously and established churches, and he completed his time. However, in those times, as the coming of Suriyāni high-priests was interrupted, the Franks learned that the *Suriyānikkar* in *Malayālam* were perplexed (*manassu muṭṭ³*) because there were no high-priests. Then, by the order of the Roman Pope, Alleśa a Frankish bishop who was Viceroy of the Fort (*koṭṭekkabīseri*) and <arch>bishop, after he came to *Malayālam*, tried by all means to convert the *Suriyānikkar* who were in *Malayālam*, learning that this was

not possible, he gave thirty thousand *kāśu* contributed by people (or: money contributed by thirty thousand people?) to the *Pērumpaṭappil Sōrupam* (the Kingdom of Cochin), so that for three entire years the *Suriyānikkar* in the land of *Pērumpaṭappu* were tormented and their minds were tormented so that their minds become weakened and, for this reason, the *Suriyānikkar* in *Malayālam* obeyed the Frankish bishop. In this way, they joined the Franks, and continued like this for some time, and they changed the customs and all the regular order of the *Suriyānikkar* and put an end to the marriage of the priests. However, as they had been joined to the Franks, after fifty-five good years have passed, by the order of the Catholicos, a *Suriyāni* high-priest, called Mar Ginattīs, who came to *Malayālam*, was caught and brought from *Mailappu* to the Fort by the injurious Franks and was drowned in the sea, and because this became known to all of the *Suriyānikkar* in *Malayālam*, then the *Suriyānikkar* living in *Malayālam* altogether gathered in a *yōgam* at the church of *Maṭṭāmcēri* and decided that ‘from now onwards forever, for the times of the generations to come we would not join either in good or bad terms with the injurious Franks,’ and they made an oath. All of them together wrote and sealed a letter and they dispersed. After this, the Frankish bishop, who was in Fort Kodungallur, wrote letters to the priests and the Christians and, as he sent people in secret to certain people with expensive clothes and ornaments with them, some of them had accepted these complimentary gifts and secretly went to visit the bishop.

Those who visited the bishop, he satisfied by words and money. As this was going on, all the supposedly firm churchmen of the *Suriyānikkar* in *Malayālam* started obeying the Frankish bishop. However, the Franks and those *Suriyānikkar* who joined the Franks along with them, bribed the chieftains of each kingdom and tortured those *Suriyānikkar* who refused to join them, so that they join the perfidious Franks. Those who refused to join, were in disorder and again, in those days, when the Syrian high-priests who were coming by the order of the

Catholicos of the East had been secretly killed, by the good will of the Lord, who is accessible to everyone, by the order of the Compagnie (*kumbaṇṇi*) that established justice and righteousness and followed the Lord's commandments and who ruled the country according to the will of the Lord, a respected Admiral (*amarāl*) came to *Malayālam*. However, like Īso Bar Nōn, who chased the pagans from the land of Kinān by the order of the Lord, similarly, the respected Admiral chased away from Fort Cochin the Franks who were more fraudulent than the pagans and, then, from every fort. Because of this, from then, until today, the poor *Surīyānikkar* happily praise the Lord. Because of that, from that day, until the present day, by the order of the Catholicos of the East Syrian high priests continued to come to *Malayālam* without any interruption. Having said that, now, around the times of thousand seven hundred, by the order of the Catholicos of the East, there came to *Malayālam* the *Surīyāni* Mār Śemaon, and his letter sent from Dūrat (Surat), but the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s caught and made someone to read it (*karummiletti pāṭirimār piṭiccu vāyipiccarīṇṇu*) and the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s and the *pāṭiri*'s of Sampaḷūr¹³ together decided that, in order to catch the *Surīyāni mettrān*, they ordered to guard the way in which he was coming. He was found and was taken to Fort Pondicherry (*Puticcerikoṭṭa*) and was in arrest there. Especially, in thousand seven hundred and five when, following Mār Śemaon, the *mettrān* Mār Gowriyel¹⁶ reached *Malayālam* upon the order of the Catholicos of the East, he realized that a large number of the *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the Franks and were following the Frankish customs and all the priests of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam*, and of those *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the Franks, did not follow the *Surīyāni* customs, such as the marriage and that day by day the number of the *Surīyānikkar* in *Malayālam* was decreasing and he was heartbroken (*manassukedayi*). So as to separate from the Franks the *Surīyānikkar* who had joined the fraudulent Franks, having convinced (*pāṭṭilvarutti*) forty-two *paḷḷikār*, after

that, the *pāṭiri*'s of Sampaḷūr together with the Carmelite *pāṭiri*'s, made an effort and from this, twenty *paḷḷikār* were convinced to return to their previous state. However, in these times, now, the help of the respected Compagnie (*kumbanni*) is with this poor *Suriyānikkaran* high-priest Mār *Gowriyel* and the Commodore (*kumadora*) is also supporting him, and because they were supporting the foreigners, with the grace of the Lord who is accessible for everyone, the respected Commodore showed his goodwill and, because of this, it is assured that all the Christians (*nasrāṇikal*) in *Malayālam*, will be separated again from the Franks and will live according to the *Suriyāni* customs as *Suriyānikkar*, as they had been before. All this truth shall be known to the Commodore who is close to Christ and to the Respected Body and all the Respected Masters who are close to Christ and may they protect in their goodwill the *Suriyānikkar*.

7.2 The Translation of the Leiden MS Or. 1213 (Syriac Version)

The events that happened to the Syrians and their history

In the year fifty-two of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mar Thoma came to *Hendo* and arrived in Mailapu.¹ There he preached the gospel to many people made them disciples and he baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.² After that, he left from there, came to Milibar and reached Maliakkara and he preached the preaching of the way also to the local people there and he built there an altar to the Lord³ and in it he consecrated two priests. Then, he left from there, he came and reached Kottakkayal and there he built a church and in the same way also in Ittappelly and in Gokkamangalam, and in Niranam and in Thiruvakkottu. After that, he returned again, went to Mailapu and was pierced with a spear by the pagans who were infidels and his soul was breathed out in peace. In fact, after the death of the Apostle Mar Thoma, *Hendo* and Milibar also stayed without preaching and without spiritual guide, with the only exception for the priests who had been consecrated by the hands of the Apostle Thomas. There followed that, after ninety-two years *Hendo* and also Milibar was a widow without priests and without presbyters and there were only lay men and women. It was in those days that there arose a magician whose name was called Manikkavācar from among the unbelievers. He also came and arrived in Mailapu, and there, he made many wondrous things in his magic and made the chief and head lay people stumble and he turned them away from the true faith. No man was able to stand up against him and against his command. Thus, for this reason, the remnant of the believers fled and came and took refuge in Milibar. Therefore, when the believing brothers who were in Milibar saw them, they rejoiced because of them with a great and good joy, and they intermarried with each other according to the custom of the believers. After that, when the hundred and sixty-four true Christian households that remained in Milibar passed much time in this condition of being without priests and without directors and were divided among them because some people, that is, men from among them, became unbelievers

in the orthodox faith, while others did not. Now, those who became unbelievers, were ninety-six houses, while those, who stayed in the orthodox faith, were sixty-four houses.

Then, in that time, there appeared to the Metropolitan of Urhāy a vision during the night, during dawn. He rose and went to the Catholicos of the East and he related to him the vision that he saw. Then, when the Catholicos had heard this, he sent his envoys to all the churches, monasteries and cities of his jurisdiction, and they led them to him. When much crowd has gathered, together with their bishops and their merchants, and he [that is, the Catholicos] narrated before them all that the bishop had seen and that they spoke to him, then, there rose one of them, namely the merchant Thomas of Jerusalem. Then, he responded and said: “Behold, the fame of Milibar and of *Hendo* had been known to me from earlier times, from foreign lands and people.” Then, when the Catholicos heard his response, he rose from his place, he approached him, he hugged him and kissed him, and said to him: “I ask from you, my son and my beloved, to go to Milibar and meet the inhabitants of that land and relate to me the events that happened to them there.” In those very days Thomas of Jerusalem left and came to Milibar and reached Māliyāmkarā and met there the Thomas Christians and they were comforted together to a great extent. Then, the Christians related to him the events that had happened to them. When Thomas heard about those events, he confirmed them and encouraged them with sweet words. Then, immediately, he boarded the ship, and went to his place. After he reached his place, he approached the Catholicos, and told him: “Behold, I have seen with my eyes the Thomas Christians and we spoke to each other, and we got greatly comforted by each other, and I left them in hope and returned.” Hearing this, the Catholicos spoke to him and said: “Even if I am to place my soul for their sake, I would do it! But I beg from you to let me know whatever I should do that is needed for those children of mine!” Then, he [Thomas] let the Catholicos know whatever was needed for those brethren who were in Milibar. Then, after not much time, but still in those days, by means of the power of our worshipped Lord and

of the order of the Catholicos of the East, the merchant Thomas of Jerusalem left again and, together with him, also the bishop who saw the vision and, together with them, presbyters and deacons and also men and women, boys and girls from Jerusalem, and from Bagdash and from Nineveh. They boarded a ship, came to Milibar and reached Māliyāmkarā in the year three hundred and forty-five of our Lord. Then, they informed [literally; they related] the inhabitants of Milibar, and these gathered before the brethren who had come and together, they were taking counsel, and they went to the presence of *Cerakon*, the king of all Milibar, and they offered to him gifts and offerings. Then the king rejoiced because of them and told them: “Whatever you are asking from me, I will give you.” Then he gave them a land as large and extended as they wanted. He also gave them all the royal privileges, as they are written in brass plates. Behold, until today, these plates are with us. When they have received all this from the king, they returned and came to Māliyāmkarā. Then, they attended to the construction of the church and the construction of the city. Then they also built the church in the land of Koramkallur, which was given to them by the king. And they built there a city,⁵ that is, four hundred and seventy-two houses from the East to the West to the two sides. And they stayed there in that city according to justice. So, in those days and in the days after that, Syrian Fathers (*awwāhātā*, that is, bishops) were coming upon the order of the Catholicos of the East and were shepherding the diocese of *Hendo* and Milibar. When the Syrians were dispersed from that city and again, in the year eight hundred twenty-three, there came the Syrian Fathers Mar Šabbūr and Mar Proṭ and, together with them, the glorious Sawrīšō. They arrived in Kollam, approached the king *Cakkirviti* and asked a land from him, so that they may build there a church for themselves and found for themselves a city. That king gave them as much land as they wanted. Then, they also built a church and built a city (that is, market quarter) in Kollam. There followed after these days that again there came Syrian bishops and metropolitans according to the order of the Catholicos who sent them. After much time, more or less around the year thousand and five

hundred, there came the perfidious Franks (Portuguese) to this land of Milibar and they also became inhabitants of Milibar and of *Hendo*. And in that time there came again Syrian Fathers, Mar Denḥā, Mar Tōmā, Mar Yacqov and Mar Ya[h]wallāhā. They, too, governed this diocese of Milibar and of *Hendo* in the ancient custom. Then, after those times, in the year thousand five-hundred eighty, there came the Syrian bishop Mar Awraham. When he came to Milibar, the murderous Franks were jealous of him, laid ambushes to him and wanted to kill him. However, he escaped from them by the help of Christ our Lord. Because of this, it was in fear and trembling⁶ that he made this diocese to grow, because in those times the Franks, these enemies of the Exalted, began to set ambushes in the roads in which the Syrians were traveling, and to detain them and kill them. After the death of the Syrian bishop Mar Awraham for fifty-two years, nobody from the bishops reached Milibar. In those times there came a certain Frankish bishop through the order of the Pope of Rome. This bishop wanted to subdue the Syrians under his hands, but the Syrians broke away from him. Then, this tyrant went to the King of Qoqśin (Cochin)⁷ and gave him a bribe of thirty thousand double coins of gold. Then, the king began to torment the Syrians with all kinds of torments. The Syrians were tormented by that tormenter king for three years, so that there did not remain any strength in the Syrians because of these torments. And the Syrians were subdued because of the pressure of the kings (sic, in plural), under the hand of the Frankish bishop. Then, the Franks have changed the good manners of the Syrians and forbade the marriage of the priests and the deacons and taught a new and abominable religion.⁸ When the Syrians were in this state for the period of fifty-two years, God wanted to reveal the perfidy of the perfidious Franks by means of the patriarch Ignatius, who came to Mailapu, in order to come to Milibar. When this Syrian came to Mailapu, the Franks caught him and jailed him and brought him to *Qoqśin* and drowned him in the sea. Then, this became known to all Milibar from Syrian deacons who were there at that time. For this reason, all the Syrians gathered in the church of *Muttomcēri*, which was close to *Qoqśin*.

And all the Syrians swore an oath in the name of the Creator in front of the holy altar that ‘From now onward and forever we would not adhere to the Franks nor our seeds to their seeds,’ and at the same time, they wrote these in a bill. Amen. When, in this way, the Syrians separated from the Franks, and in a few years the Syrians gained force, from that time the *bišop*⁹ of the Franks¹⁰ began to send to the Syrian priests, precious gifts and to write them letters in secret. Then, some of the Syrian priests accepted the gifts in secret and in the night went to the *bišop* of the Franks, while others did not accept and did not go. While this situation lasted for a short time, some of the priests stumbled and joined the *bišop*, while others did not. Then, there occurred a split among the Syrians and they formed two sides. After that, the Franks were having power over the Syrians, because half of the Syrians [adhered to the Franks]¹ and because the Franks gave bribes to the kings and the chieftains, so that they torment the Syrians. In that time came an *amarāl* who was a believer and a just judge and the ruler of all *Hendo* and *Milibar* and chased away all the Franks from *Qoqšin* and all the cities that are around *Hendo*, just like *Īšo Bar Nun* chased away the Canaanites and the other peoples. From that day and until the present day, there came joy to the side of the Syrians and there befell distress on the side of the Franks. The Syrians are adhering to the Syrian Fathers (*awwāhātā suryōyē*) who come from Jerusalem, from Nineveh, from Bagdaś and from other places by means of the order of the Catholicos of the East, while the Franks are adhering to the Frankish bishops who come from Rome and from other places by means of the order of the Pope of Rome. Again, in the year thousand seven hundred and five, there came the Syrian Metropolitan Mar Gawriel by means of the order of the Catholicos of the East, and saw the two sides and that there were many Syrians who were joining the Franks and that they are pursuing all the abominable customs of the Franks and are not preserving their foundation and their root and that both the priests of the Syrians and the priests of those Syrians who are joining to the Franks are not taking wives

¹ This line is written above the text.

unlike their forefathers, the Syrian priests were doing because they had reneged on the lawful marriage for the priests of the two sides and that, therefore, from those days and beyond, all those Syrians of Milibar would be joining the Franks who are machinating day and night. Because of all this, this Syrian *Metran* Mar Gawriel did not join the Syrians who are of his flesh, nor the Syrians who are joining the Franks, but became so to say in the middle, in order to divert the Syrians from joining the Franks. For this reason, many Syrian people joined him from both sides, namely from the side that has joined the Franks forty-four churches. However, now, because of the perfidy and the machinations of the Carmelites and the Sampallu (the Jesuits), twenty churches have separated from him. However, know, O, illustrious and blessed Lords, that if in this time the mighty Commodore and the blessed King of all Hendo and Milibar were to help this poor Syrian, then both sides would return to the Syrianness, and the perfidious Franks would not sway power over *Hendo* for the ages of ages.

The handwriting of the Syrian Priest Mattai, wretched, poor and evil. Amen.

