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# Antiquity of Christianity in India with Special Reference to South Central Kerala

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**Abstract:** *The archaeological data regarding Christianity are widely spread and scattered at different parts of India. Even though the present research is confined to south central Kerala, an attempt has been made here to incorporate the available archaeological data related to Christianity from various parts of India with special focus on the Kerala Coast. It looks for the material evidence which directly or indirectly connected with Christianity. Data from various archaeological excavated sites of Kerala are incorporated. It also examines evidences from epigraphy and numismatics sources and other antiquities and put forward the possibilities of further archaeological research in the field of antiquity of Christianity.*

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**Keywords:** Christianity, India, Historiography, Persia, Trade, Excavation, Numismatics

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## Introduction

The present sources of knowledge on early Christianity in India, especially of the study area are mainly from the written sources and oral traditions. The available written sources belong to the Portuguese period (16th century) and aftermath. The sources for the history of Christianity in the study area prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century are very few, because a good number of pre Portuguese documents, mostly written in Syriac had been burned down during the Synod of Diamper in 1599 (Geddes 1694:172; Ferrolli 1939:188; Zacharia 1994; Gillmann and Klimkeit 2016: 163). The historical records from the time of the Portuguese, state the different phases of the spread of Christianity in India in general and Kerala Coast in specific (Brown 1956). It widely spreads from the time of Indo Roman trade to the Persian traders in the early Medieval Period and European missionaries and traders in the Medieval Period.

However, their interpretations remain unsatisfactory because the source of this inference is based on conjectures regarding the advent of Christianity in Kerala till the medieval period. Documentation of the first fifteen centuries provides a rather confused and chaotic picture of events. It does not help in creating a chronological frame work of the history of Christianity in India particularly in the study region.

Therefore, an effort has been made in the present article to examine the available archaeological data of Christianity in India and correlate them with the historical background.

## Study Area

The study area of the present study includes the five districts such as Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta, which are collectively, termed as 'south central Kerala' (Figure 1). This region corresponds to the location of several pre Portuguese Christian settlements as well as the Churches and Christian settlements which were multiplied at the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Moreover, the region has got the excavated sites of Early Historic, Early Medieval and Medieval period which corresponds to the spread of Christianity in Kerala coast. However, the available archaeological evidence for the Christianity from other parts of the Indian sub-continent has also been included to provide a comprehensible picture for understanding the antiquity of Christianity.

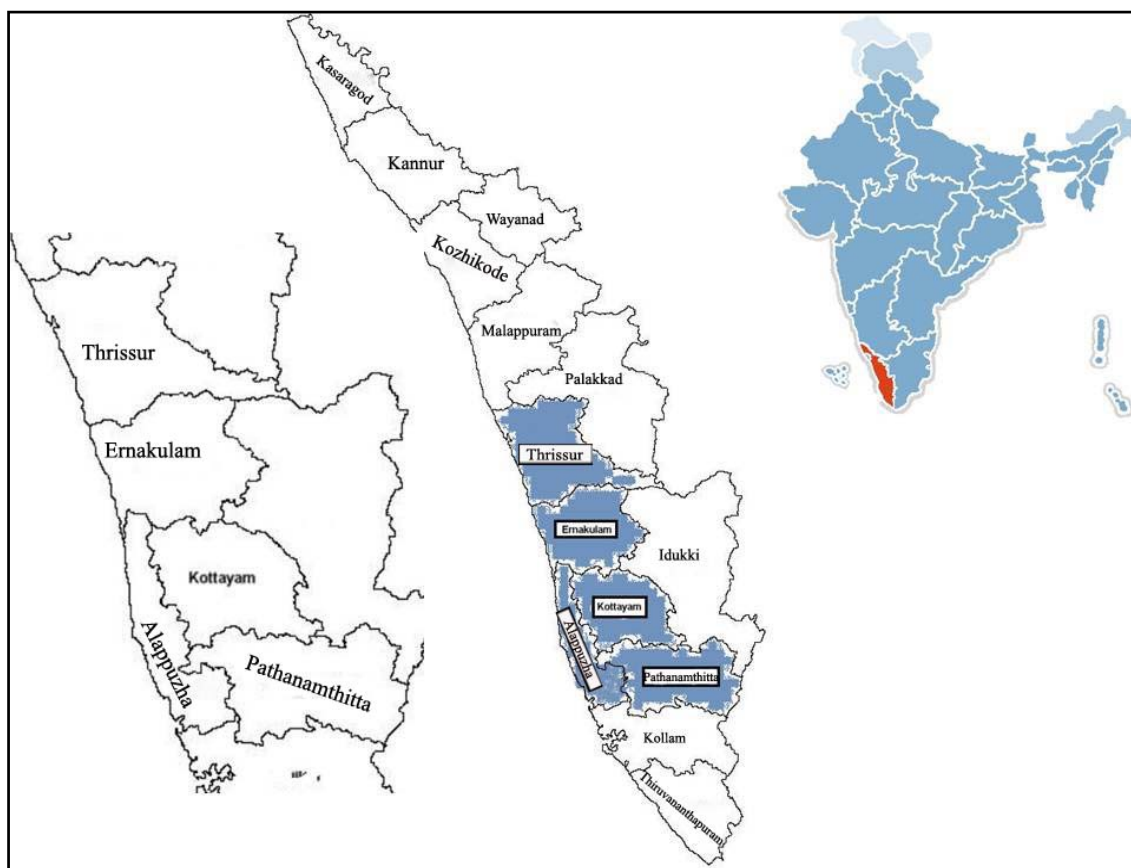


Figure 1: Map Showing the Study Area

## Objectives

Studies in Christianity of Kerala are mainly focused on the history and development of Christian faith, arrival of Christianity in India by St. Thomas Apostle and his arrival on Malabar Coast. Studies so far have ignored the possibility of tracing the archaeological

sources. No attempt has been made to collect the archaeological sources of Christianity in India particularly in the Kerala Coast. Therefore the present study aims at a comprehensive analysis of the antiquity of Christianity in India in general and Kerala in particular.

### **Early Works on Christianity in India**

It is traditionally assumed that Christianity was brought to India by St. Thomas; one of the twelve disciples of Christ, who believed to have arrived in Malabar Coast c.52 C.E. A number of attempts have been made by various scholars to explain the history and growth of Christianity in India especially of Kerala (Medlycott 1905; Brown 1956; Tisserant 1957; Pothan 1963; Mores 1964; Perumalil and Hambye 1972; Podipara 1979; Menachery 1982; Neil 1985; Mundadan 1984; Puliurumbil 2008,, 2012). They basically deal with Christianity and little on the activity and nature of Church. They mainly focused on the history of Christianity in India. Their works highlight various aspects like the arrival of Christian faith in India by St. Thomas, St. Thomas tradition in south India, Churches constructed by St. Thomas, Syrian Christian tradition and the changes made by the European missionaries after the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 C.E. Their works merely focused on the schism that took place after the Synod of Diamper and explained the formation of various denominations among Christians in Kerala. Most of the later publications on history of Christianity in Kerala were based on their works.

However, two earliest works on the history of Christianity of Malabar are by Gouvea (1606) and Geddes (1694). The book written in Portuguese by Gouvea is very significant in understanding the nature and the customs of Christians during the time of the Portuguese and their religious interventions made by them among the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The Portuguese version was translated by Pius Mekandathil (2003) into English with the title “Joranda of Dom Alexis De Menezes: A Portuguese account of the sixteenth century Malabar”.

Another remarkable book was written by Michael Geddes (1694) on “The History of Church of Malabar”. The work by the Geddes was much concerned with the iniquities of Roman Catholic behaviour as to describe the Indian Church and was published in English in 1694. A book on Christians of Asia before 1500 by Ian Gillman and Hans Joachim Klimkeit (1999) narrates the Christians of Palestine, Arabia, Georgia, Persia, Central Asia, China, South East Asia and India. The work has emphasized the arrival of the Christianity to India through the north-western frontier and rejects the South Indian tradition of St. Thomas.

### **Explanation on Early Christianity**

The efforts by various scholars have provided an outline of the development of Christianity in India especially of Kerala. It begins with the early arrival of Christianity in India by St. Thomas the apostle, arrival of Syrian Christians through the Persian relation and ends with the changes made by the Portuguese *Padroado*, the Dutch and

the Anglican Missionaries of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There are two views evidently observable in the explanation of the arrival of St. Thomas in India (Brown 1956; Mores 1964; Perumalil and Hambye 1972; Neil 1984). The first view is based on the *Act of St. Thomas* and the second is based on the south Indian tradition.

*The Act of St. Thomas* is one of the earliest accounts related to the history of Christianity in India. It is written in Syriac and talks about the journey of St. Thomas for the purpose of propagation of the gospel in India. The work is divided into nine sections, of which the first eight are called “*Acts*” and the last section is called “the consummation of Judas Thomas” (Mores 1964: 25).

The Southern Indian tradition is also known as Malabar tradition. It is mainly based on the literature of the Portuguese period and aftermath. According to this tradition apostle came to Malabar Coast for the propagation of Christianity and landed at the ancient port of *Muziris* in c. 52 C.E (Geddes 1694; Brown 1956; Tisserant 1957; Mores 1964; Perumalil and Hambye 1972; Menachery 1982; Neil 1984; Mundadan 1984; Gillmann and Klimkeit 2016). According to the Malabar tradition the apostle preached the gospel wherever he travels and established churches. He had found seven churches at various locations in the Malabar Coast. It is noted that the concept of seven churches seems to have been in circulation for a long time as oral tradition. This oral tradition was finally collected and translated into a written form only from the eighteenth century onwards (Malekandathil 2007:27). However it was only at the time of recording that it became evident that when the people spoke of seven churches, the name of these churches varied from place to place.

In fact the valuable source that refers to the seven churches being instituted by St. Thomas is a Syriac letter written by Mar *Thoma IV* of *Pakalomattom* family in 1721 C.E. The context for shaping of this document is that *Carolus Schaaf*, who was a Dutch scholar from Leiden and who had earlier prepared the *Lexicorn Syriacum* in 1717 C.E., made a query to *Marthoma IV* about the Indian tradition of St. Thomas in particular and about Indian Christianity in general. In response to his query bishop sent the letter in 1721 C.E. The letter written by the bishop states that the seven churches established by the apostle were at *Mylapore*, *Corignalore (Kodungallor)*, *Parakar (Parur)*, *Irapelli (Eratuupetta)*, *Kothamangalam*, *Niranam* and *Tirobancode (Thiruvancode)* (Malekandathil 2007 :27). But the concept of seven churches has undergone through various changes and the names of these churches appeared differently in the later publications.

## Early Historiography

The Latin, Syriac and Greek writers have mentioned and accepted the relationship between St. Thomas and India. References of St. Thomas was made by various scholars in subsequent centuries were surveyed and summarized by W.R Philipps (Philipps 1903) and quoted by Gillman and Klimkeit (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016 :161). The writers and their expressed views are summarized in the table 1.

**Table 1: Comments of the Latin, Syriac and Greek Writers on the Relationship of St. Thomas with India and His Demise** (Adapted: Gillman and Klimkeit 2016)

Year	Authors	Comments
2 <sup>nd</sup> Century C.E?	Syriac“ Doctrine of the Apostle”	St. Thomas wrote letters from India and evangelized Indian region and Countries bordering on it
c.170 C.E	<i>Heracleon</i>	St. Thomas died a natural death
c.210 C.E	Clementine Recognitions	St. Thomas evangelized the <i>Parthians</i>
220 C.E	Clement of Alexandria	St. Thomas died a natural death
251 C.E	Origen	St. Thomas evangelized the <i>Parthians</i>
340 C.E	Eusebius	St. Thomas evangelized the <i>Parthians</i>
378 C.E	St. Ephraim	St .Thomas was martyred in India and his relics were in part at Edessa and in India
389 C.E	St. Gregory of Nazianzus	St. Thomas evangelized India
394 C.E	St. Gregory of Nyssa	St. Thomas evangelized Mesopotamia
397 C.E	St. Ambrose	St Thomas was martyred
400 C.E	St. Asterius	St Thomas was martyred
407 C.E	St. John Chrysostom	The locality of the grave of St. Thomas was known to him
410 C.E	<i>Rufinus</i>	St. Thomas evangelized Parthia. His relics were at Edessa
410 C.E	St. <i>Gaudentius</i>	St Thomas was martyred in India. Some of his relics were at Brescia
420 C.E	St. Gerome	St. Thomas was in India
431 C.E	St. <i>Paulinus</i> of Nola	St. Thomas was allotted to India
443 C.E	<i>Sozomen</i>	He mentions the famous church of St. Thomas at Edessa and perhaps implies that may be his relics were there
c.445 C.E	Socrates	He mentions the famous church of St. Thomas at Edessa and implies that perhaps his relics were there
594 C.E	St. Gregory of Tours	St. Thomas was martyred in India; his relics were transported to Edessa, and there then existed a famous church in India, at the place where the body of the apostle was first buried.

The accounts of various scholars provide considerable evidences to conclude that St. Thomas was the apostle of the *Parthian* empire and preached in India. Again dates of his activity are controversial. There is no evidence about the place where St. Thomas was martyred in southern India; and all the indications point to another location (Gilman and Klimkeit 2016:163). There it seems that the St. Thomas tradition was brought to south India by west Asian merchants and navigators who had been frequenting the spice marketing localities of Kerala coast since Roman time.

It is perhaps remains uncertain when St. Thomas arrived in India in the early part of the Christian era. But a few questions remain unclear even today such as; whether he entered through the north western part of ancient India by land route or travel to the southern region/Malabar coast after reaching the north or reached by sea route directly. Most of the books written on the history of Christianity in India from its beginning have provided unsatisfactory results and a confused picture of the events.

### **Persia and Christians of Kerala**

Under the leadership of Constantine Christianity became the legal religion of Roman Empire. The Empire essentially had two major traditions of Christians. The churches at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea were basically Greek speaking. They developed liturgies and practices that tended to emphasize theological and mystical union of believers with God. Churches at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea adopted Latin as the official language (Mathews 1991: 328). Both of them gradually developed legal and administrative practices that reflected the genius of the Roman hierarchy. Greek and Roman became two powerful wings of deep routed tradition of Christianity.

An ecumenical council of both Greek and Latin tradition was organized by Constantine, the Roman Emperor, who was seeking the unity of his empire through unity of religion. The first ecumenical council was held in *Nicea* in 325 C.E (Brown 1956: Tissarent 1957; Mores 1964; Neil 1985). Both the Greek and the Latin Bishops participated. The second council was held in Constantinople in 381 C.E which eventually made a superiority of the Latin bishops of Rome (Mathews 1991: 330). When the Roman Empire became Christian in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Christians of Sassanid Empire were suspected by their rulers of divided loyalty (Perumalil and Hambaye 1972: 25). The Christians in the Persian Empire or Sassanid Empire had also become independent by the council of Seleucia- Ctesiphon in 410 C.E. Eventually there were three major centres of Christianity at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E; Rome under the Latin bishops , Constantinople under the Greek power and Seleucia –Ctesiphon of Persian church.

Church of Persia was the church which existed in those regions which were once part of the Persian Empire. They were rivals of the Roman Empire. This church more or less was spread in the present Iran and Iraq. As this part of the world was successively ruled over by the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and the Persians, the

Church in these regions has been known in the history by these various names (Perumalil and Hambaye 1972: 24). This shows that the Church building tradition and origin of Christianity was emerging from various sources from the west and getting established in India at different times.

### **Trade Relationship with Persia**

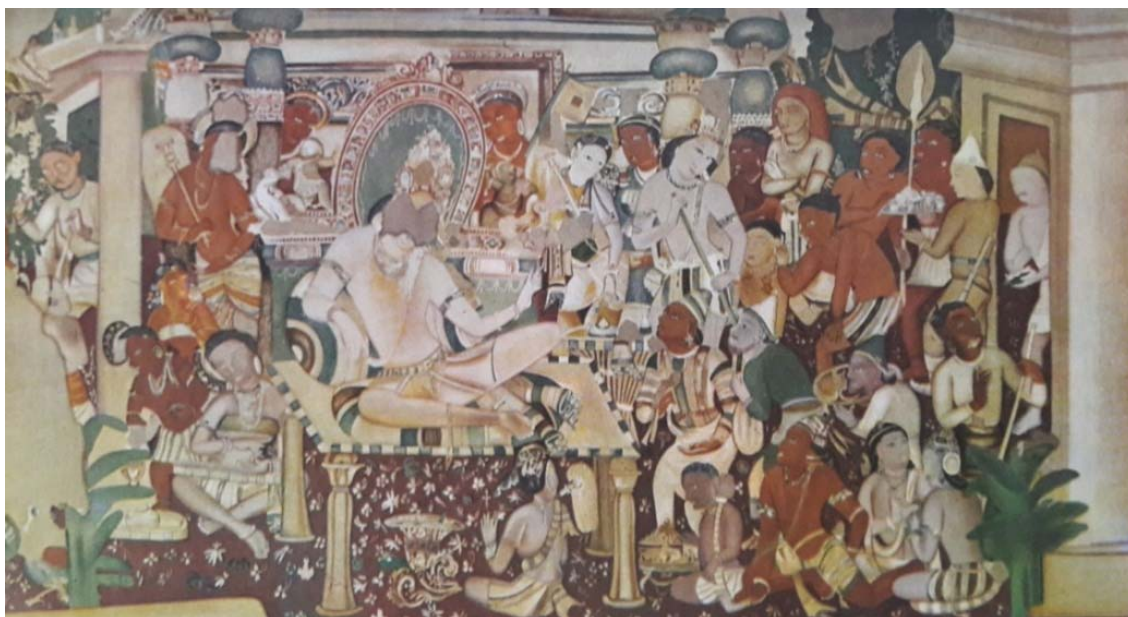
When the Roman trade with India became weak from the time of Marcus Aurelius in the third century, the traders of the Persian Gulf region had dominated the trade with the Malabar Coast with the establishment of the Sassanid rule in Persia by *Ardashir* circa 224 C.E. The Christian traders were the prominent group of people to make a commercial link with Indian Coast, some of them even entered monasteries as in the case of the sixth century Persian monk Abraham of *Kashkar* and the seventh century monk Bar *Sahde* (Malekkandathil 2003: 38). The geographical closeness of the Persian church with Indian region probably had provided easy accessibility of the Persian Christianity to the western Coast of India, especially to the Malabar Coast since the early centuries of Christian era.

The earliest reference of the relation between the Persian church and Christians of Kerala was related to the arrival of Thomas of Cana in 345 C.E. It is believed that the Thomas of Cana settled in the Malabar Coast and several privileges in the form of the copper plates were given to him by the King of Malabar. These plates had been in the custody of the Portuguese and were lost in the 16<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The Portuguese version of the copper plates dated 1604 is survived in the British Museum (Poggi *et al.* 2001).

*Cosmos Indicopleustes* was of Greek origin and he made two voyages; the first was in c. 520 C.E. towards the region around Egypt; the second was during the reign of Justinian I (527-565 C.E) towards Black sea, east Africa, shore of Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka (Faller and Albert 2011:217). The *Topographia Christiana* (Christian topography) was the outcome of his travels and it was completed in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. In this work he mentions about the trade between the east Africa and the Indian Ocean region. According to Cosmas Sri Lanka is in a central position and is much frequented by ships from all parts of India. It is also visited by ships from Persia and Ethiopia, and it likewise sends out many of its own. Ships also passed on to the markets such as *Male* (probably Malabar) where pepper is in abundance, and to *Calliana* (probably *Kalyan*) which exports copper and sesame-logs, and cloth for making dresses (Faller and Albert 2011). His work also states that there is a church of Persian settler in Sri Lanka and a priest ordained in Persia, a deacon and some minor clergy. The regular interaction with the Persian region might have opened the way for the interaction of religion especially the Christian faith. Therefore, a very well active trade and religious link was existed between the western Coast of India and the Persian Region.

It also might have been because of the major involvement of Christians in the Indo-Persian maritime trade that the Sassanid ruler *Yazdirgird I* ( 399-422 C.E) deputed

*Catholicos Ahai* c.415 C.E to Fars to investigate the piracy of the ships returning from India and Sri Lanka ( Malekandathil, 2003: 39).The trade relation between the Western Coast of India and Persia is represented in the paintings at Ajanta.



**Figure 2: Painting Depicts Persian Envoys in Royal Court in the Cave No. 1 at Ajanta**

The painting between the windows on the right and the central door of Cave no 1 at Ajanta depicts the court scene of Chaluckyan ruler Pulikesi II (Dhawalikar 1973; Griffiths 1983; Yazdani1983). A slim pale skinned chief sits in the royal court, on a throne with an oval shaped back richly ornamented with coloured trefoils. He receives envoys from a foreign court. From the right, three fair bearded men, dressed like Persians in conical caps, approach him in a crouching attitude; the first bearing a string of pearls; the second, a jug or bottle; and the third, a large tray filled with presents. Behind the third is a man with a stick, probably the usher, partly turning round to speak to another Persian in the door way, who advances with gifts. In front of the man in the door way is a foreigner in tightly fitting tunic, trousers and stockings; the curly hair and conical cap, and a long straight sword buckled at his side (Figure 2). The subject of this picture was supposed to be an Iranian embassy sent by Khosru II of Persia (591-628 C.E) to PulikesiII (609-640 C.E) whose capital was at Badami in Karnataka (Dhawalikar 1973: 38; Griffiths 1983:16; Yazdani1983).

Similarly, the Arab Geographers such as *Iban Hurradabih* in 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E, *Al Buruni* c.973 and *Al Idrisi* in c.1160 had mentioned about port at Sinkli (old name for Kodungallor) in their travelogues ( Ducene 2016:177). The name of ports on Malabar Coast like Sinkli and Quilon were quoted again by Arab geographers like *Al Watwat* in 1318, *Al Dimasqi* in 1327, *Abu Al Fida* in 1331and *Qalqasandi* in 1418(Ducene 2016). These are the few glimpses of information which can be traced about the relation between Persia and Malabar Coast after the period of St. Thomas. The church historians' claims that the Church of Persia had direct and regular contact with the

Christians of Kerala and it provided bishops to the Kerala churches (Brown 1956; Mores 1964; Perumalil and Hambye 1972). The Christians of Malabar are called Syrian Christians because from the earliest time onwards the language used for worship has been Syriac. It is likely that there had been very strong association of Malabar Christians with the Persian region. Moreover the Persian elements had played a major role in the process of making Christian faith in Kerala, prior to the Portuguese.

## **Antiquity of Christianity**

Archaeological explorations and excavations carried out in Kerala in the late 1990s by various institutions and individuals have brought to light sites ranging from Prehistoric to medieval period. Therefore, the analysis of material remains from the early historic sites like Pattanam and Vizhinjam and the medieval sites like Kottappuram are very important. It helps one to understand the trade on Malabar Coast and its impact in the spread of Christian religion.

## **Early Historic Trade**

Evidence for the trade link between Kerala Coast and West Asia has been unearthed from the sites like Pattanam and Vizhinjam. Pattanam is located (N 10° 09'24.8; E 076°12'33.6) in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. The archaeological investigation carried out in the site from 2007 to 2015 revealed five cultural layers, stretching a span of 3000 years from 1000 B.C.E.( Cherian 2015:35). They are the Iron Age from c. 1000 BCE to c. 500 B.C.E., Iron Age- early historic transition from c. 500 B.C.E. to 300 B.C.E., early historic period from c. 300 B.C.E. to 500 C.E., medieval period from c.500 C.E. to 1500 C.E. and modern period from 1500 C.E. onwards (Cherian and Li He 2015:62). The excavation revealed a large amount of pottery fragments consisting of both the Indian pottery and non-Indian pottery. The Indian pottery varieties include *Rouletted* ware, BRW, BW and Russet coated painted ware. The non-Indian pottery includes the Mediterranean pottery like Amphora, West Asian, South Arabian and Mesopotamian potteries such as Torpedo jar, Turquoise glazed pottery (TGP) and Chinese pottery/ceramics.

The total volume of pottery assemblage recovered from the region amounting 4.5 million shreds including 1.40 lakhs shreds of Mediterranean, West Asian, Red Sea, South Arabian, Mesopotamian and South China region. The 2015 excavation season revealed fifteen tubular jars. The intact jars were 40 cm long and the diameter of the rim was 12 to 13 cm (Cherian 2015). It also exposed the architectural feature of Early Historic Period. The structure measures 7 m x 3 m from a depth of 172 cm (Cherian 2015). The material evidences like the pottery and other antiquities from the site reveal that Pattanam could be Muziris as mentioned in *the Periplus of Erythraean Sea* (PME 53.17.27-8) (Cherian 2015:48).

Vizhinjam is located (18°22'N; 76°58' E) in the Trivandrum district of south Kerala and systematic archaeological excavations were conducted for three seasons from 2011 to 2013. It provides evidences for three cultural periods ranging from early historic (c.1st

century C.E) to medieval and modern (Abhayan *et al.* 2014; 253). The excavations revealed artefacts like pottery, stone beads, and glass objects including beads, metal objects, terracotta objects and terracotta tiles datable to the first centuries of C.E to the modern period .Other important findings from *Vizhinjam* are Coin of Ptolemy II, Rouletted ware, large quantities of torpedo jar and Turquoise glazed Pottery (Kumar *et al.* 2013). Based on the various radiocarbon dates and relative dating of the artefacts, three cultural periods were identified such as Period I –early historic to medieval (1st century C.E to 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E), Period II- medieval (800 C.E to 1500 C.E) and modern (1500 C.E to 2012 C.E) (Abhayan *et al.* 2014; 256). The excavated evidences show that the site seems to have been active during the early historic period, but the zenith of the trade of Vizhinjam was during 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century of *Ay Chieftain* (Kumar *et al.* 2013: 200).

## Medieval Trade

Kottappuram fort or Cranganore fort is located (N10°11'41.3; E76° 12'45.1) on the bank of river *Periyar*, near Kodunagallor in Thrissur district. The archaeological excavations were carried out for three seasons from 2009 to 2012. The excavation has exposed several structures and artefacts like pottery, bangles, coins, and iron implements, fragments of tobacco pipes, glass beads and stone beads. The pottery assemblages excavated can be classified into indigenous and non-indigenous (Sona 2014:41). The indigenous pottery includes red ware and buff ware and non-indigenous pottery includes celadon, turquoise glazed ware, porcelain and few shreds of torpedo ware .A total of twenty five coins have been unearthed from the site. It includes Portuguese copper coin, Dutch copper coin, Indo-Dutch *Rassi Panam*, Travancore copper coin and Chinese copper coin.

## Salvage Excavation at Sampaloor

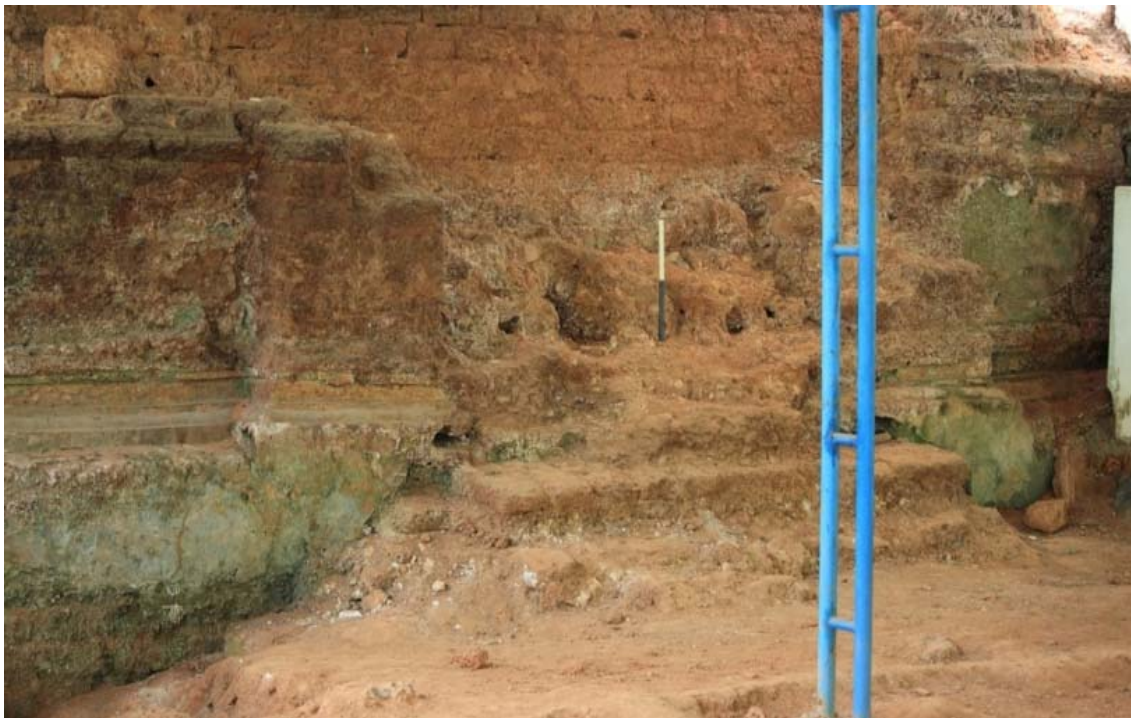
Sampaloor is a small town situated (N10°16'00.8; E076°17'51.4) on the northern bank of river *Chalakkudy* in the *Mukundapuram taluk* of Thrissur district of Kerala .The structural remains of a church were discovered accidentally by the parishioners when they dug the land for the construction of a new building in 2007.The digging also exposed three skeletons. The site was a major centre of Jesuit missionaries since the time of the Portuguese. When the Dutch captured the Portuguese strongholds including Cochin in 1663, the Jesuit missionaries shifted their centre from Cochin to Sampaloor to protect their faith from the Dutch Protestants.

The first church of Sampaloor is believed to have been built by the Jesuits between 1662 and 1670.The missionaries established a seminary in 1662 and a printing press in 1679 (Ferroli 1939: 471). The first book, printed here, was a Portuguese- Tamil dictionary by Fr. Antony De Provencain 1679 (Ferroli 1939: 470). When Tippu attacked the region in 1790, the church, seminary and the printing press were destroyed (Davis 2006; 31). The site was abandoned for a long period and the new church was constructed in 1862 and renovated in 1979 (Davis 2006; 39). The salvage digging unearthed the base of the western wall, nave entrance, parts of the collapsed façade and the basement of the

front porch and burials. The orientation of the church is north to south with altar in the north. The exposed western wall of the church measures 75 meter long and constructed with laterite blocks (Figures 3-5).



**Figure 3: Western Wall of the Church, Sampaloor, Thrissur, Kerala**



**Figure 4: Entrance of the Church, Sampaloor, Thrissur, Kerala**

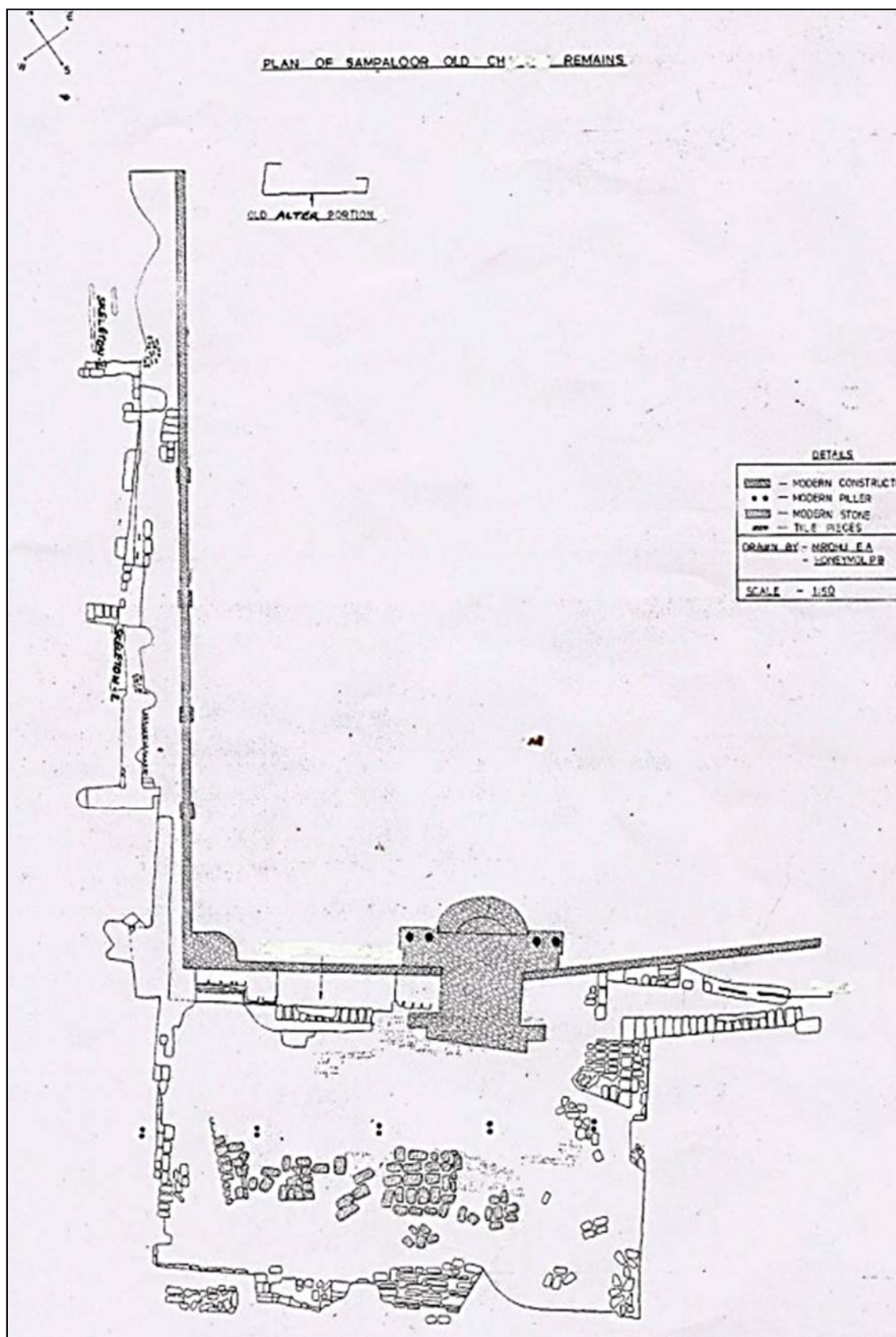


Figure 5: Plan of the Exposed Church Structure, Sampaloor



**Figure 6: Exposed Skeletons, Sampaloor, Thrissur, Kerala**

The cannon balls were made of granite as well as cast iron. The diameter of the cannon balls is about 4 cm. The roof tiles found in the site are fragmentary in nature. Two types of roof tiles have been noticed; flat tile with a conical end and a curved roof tile. Laterite blocks of different sizes have been used for the construction of different parts of the structure and the most common size of the laterite found measures 30 cm x 20 cm. Lime was the main binding material and was prepared by using locally available river shells. The digging has unearthed various materials like intact cannon balls, different types of roof tiles, porcelain shreds, coins, iron fragments like nail and sword, fragments of tobacco pipes and beads.

Several potsherds of white and blue porcelain have been unearthed. The materials found at Sampaloor are very much similar to the materials found at Kottappuram, a Portuguese fort site. It is located 20 km north east of Kottappuram. Remains of two skeletons were found outside the western wall of the church and a partially exposed skeleton below the wall in the section. The first skeleton was that of a 1.73 m tall individual and the length of the radius is “25” cm .It was probably a male skeleton aged between 40 and 45. The second skeleton may also probably be of a male with height 1.52 m and the skull fragment of the third skeleton is exposed in the section (Figure 6).

## Numismatics Evidence

Discovery of coins bearing the Greek name of *Gundaphares* from the North West part of India is the major source of information about the king who was mentioned in the Act of St. Thomas. The hoard consists of 85 coins and the Peshawar hoard contained one of the coins of *Gondophares*. The *Malakand* hoard throws considerable light on the history of both the Indo- Scythian and the Indo- Parthian kings who succeeded the Indo-Greeks in the Gandhara region. The coins issued by the king *Gundaphares* were discovered at the hoards of *Malakanda* and Peshawar (Bopearachchi, 1993: 58). A coin with the depiction of a cross on its obverse side was found from the vicinity of Tashkent (Gillmann and Klimkeit 2016: 187). A Nestorian cross is set within the hemi circle made of bead symbol (Figure 7). The coin dates back to 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E and it is in the collection of the State Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg (Gillmann and Klimkeit 2016: 187).



**Figure 7: Coin depicts Nestorian Cross** (Gillmann and Klimkeit 2016)



**Figure 8: Stone relief depicting three priests beside a cross** (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016)

A good number of Roman coins were discovered from different parts of the Malabar Coast. These substantiate the trade contact between Rome and Malabar in the early part of the Christian era. Discovery of Roman coins in Peninsular India has been reported for the past two centuries. Important findings of Roman coins in the state of Kerala are *Vaniyankadavu* near *Kottayam* in *Kannur* district (1847), *Iyyal* in *Thrissur* district (1945), *Poonjar* in *Kottayam* district (1945), *Kumbalam* in *Ernakulam* district (1974)

and Valluvally in *Ernakulam* district(1983). The Iyyal hoards consist of 34 silver punch marked coins, 12 gold coins and 71 silver Roman coins( Satyamurthy 2011 :14). The hoard covers a period of 123 B.C.E to 117 C.E and has the coins of Tiberius, Claudius and Nero. A fabulous discovery was made from Valluvally and the hoard consists of 252 Roman coins. These coins belonged to the period of Nero (54-68 C.E) to that of Antonius Pius (138-161 C.E) (Satyamurthy 2011:14.). The hoard contained the coins of Roman rulers like Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrianus, Nero and Antonius Pius. The numismatics evidence substantiates the trade relation of Malabar Coast with Rome in the first and second centuries of C.E.

### **Antiquities from North Western Part of India**

A broken stone relief depicts three Christian priests standing beside a cross. A portion of the stone which depicts the cross is partially broken and only the lower part of the cross is visible (Figure 8). The cross is set within a square border and the relief dates back to 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E and is in the collection of State Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016:187).

Another important evidence for the presence of Christianity in India came from the Buddhist centre at Taxila (Figure 9). Crosses are depicted on bricks and the shape of the crosses corresponds to that of the crosses found in Malabar Coast as well as that of St. Thomas church at *Mylapore* in Tamil Nadu (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016:187).



**Figure 9: Crosses on Bricks, Taxila (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016)**

## Epigraphy

There are several evidences of inscription within the study area as well as in different parts of the country which can be truly linked with the history of Christianity. The Takht- I Bahi inscription of *Gundaphares*, the king who was mentioned in the Act of St. Thomas (Mores1964), *Sogdian* inscription along with the painting of cross at Tankse in Ladakh, Persian cross with Pahlavi inscription at various locations, *Tharisapally* Copper plate which dates back to 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E and 92 inscriptions from various churches in the study area are discussed here.

### Takht-I- Bahi Inscription

The *Act of St. Thomas* states the name of the king *Gundaphares* or *Godopheres*. The Takht-i- Bahi stone inscription was discovered by Dr. Bellew from *Shahabazgarhi* and is kept in Lahore Museum (Indian Antiquary II 1873: 242). The inscription consists of six lines and the alphabet is Kharoshti in Saka variety (Epigraphia Indica XVIII: 262). It states that (during the reign) of Maharaja *Gundufara* (in) the year 26, in the hundred and third year-103-on the first day of the month *Vaisakha*, on this *paksha* day, the chapel of *Balasvamin* the saviour (is) the pious gift of Mira the saviour, together with his son and daughter, in honour of prince Kapsha, in honour of his mother and father (Epigraphia Indica XVIII: ibid). The Takht-i-Bahi inscription was written on the first day of the month of *Vaisakha* in the year 103 that corresponds to 46 or 47 C.E in the 26<sup>th</sup> regnal year of the King *Gundaphares*. It was the information from both the sources- of epigraphy and numismatics-along with a reference in the *Act of St. Thomas* made us believe the existence of the ruler *Gundapheres* in the north western part of India. It was in his territory that St. Thomas first arrived in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of C.E.

### Sogdian Inscription and Rock Art at Tankse

The rock art site of Tankse is the most important site of Ladakh for the historical period with a great number of inscriptions. They provide information about the role of Ladakh at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Geographically it is located in the north-east of Ladakh. There are about 300 petroglyphs at Tankse and almost 70 rock inscriptions in various scripts. Tankse is the site in Ladakh where we find Arabic, Sogdian, Tocharian and Śārāda inscriptions. In the village of Tankse, there are four main boulders and also four minor boulders with rock art and inscriptions. One of the boulders has petroglyphs and 27 inscriptions. There are Tibetan, Arabic and Sogdian inscriptions on the boulder. Sogdia was a region inhabited by Iranian people. The centre of Sogdian territory was the city of Samarkand which is now in Uzbekistan. The Sogdian script is on the boulder no 6 and it is clearly recognisable. It is written in vertical columns and read from left to right. The inscription has 9 vertical columns. It is seen near the right top of a cross and can be translated as: 'in the year 210, we, Caitra of Samarkand, together with the monk Nosh-farn, were sent as messengers to the Qaghan of Tibet (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016: Plate 27, INTACH and TEDAHL: 2014). The north-south arm of the cross is about 22 cm high and east west arm is about 18 cm long (Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10: Crosses Depicted on Boulder No. 6, Tankse, Ladakh

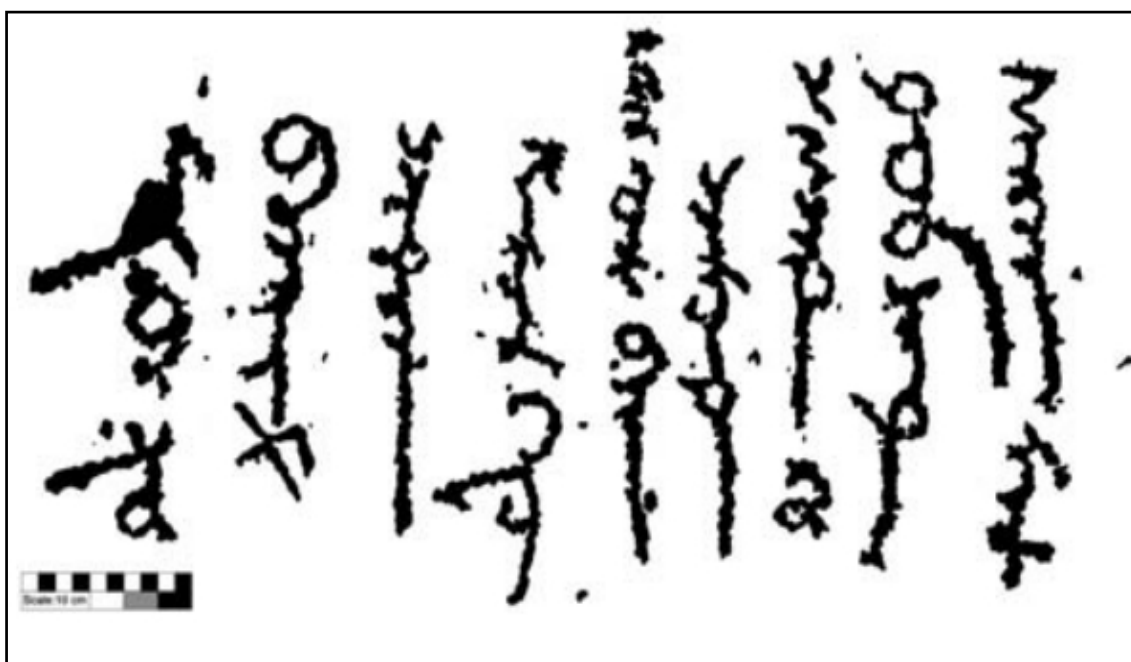


Figure 11: Sogdian Inscription (after INTACH and TEDAHL: 2014)

On the same boulder, there is an undoubtedly Sogdian Christian inscription that reads 'Uri Tarxan, have come here in the name of God' (Gillman and Klimkeit 2016).

## Persian Crosses with Pahlavi Inscription

Seven altar crosses bearing inscription have been discovered at various places of peninsular India. Five of them are located within the present study area. These altar crosses bear almost an identical Sassanian –Pahlavi inscription (Travancore Archaeological Series 1930: 67). Out of the five crosses, two of them are erected on either sides of the sanctuary wall of St. Mary's Knanaya Church, *Kottayam* (Figure 12; Figure 13). Other crosses are located at Holy Ghost Forane church, *Muttuchira*, St. George Yacobite Syrian church, *Kadamattom* and one is inside the chapel of St. Mary's Church, *Alengad*. Apart from these, similar crosses were found at *Dandi* on the bank of the river *Zuari* in Goa and at St. Thomas Mount near Chennai. The crosses at Kottayam were first reported in Indian Antiquary (Indian Antiquary Vol. III and Epigraphia Indica Vol. IV). The crosses at *Muttichira* and *Kadamattom* were reported in Travancore Archaeological Series (Vol.VII). These crosses are popularly known as Pahlavi crosses since most of them have Pahlavi inscription engraved on it. A very similar cross engraved on a pillar without any inscription was discovered from Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.



Figure 12: Cross No 1 with Pahlavi Inscription



Figure 13: Cross No 2 with Pahlavi Inscription

Two stone crosses with Pahlavi inscription are erected on either sides of the altar arch at St. Mary's *Knanaya* Church, Kottayam. These crosses are carved on a single stone. The one found on the right sanctuary wall measures about 75 cm tall at the centre of the wall and 22.5 cm long at the base. The stone in which the cross is carved has curvilinear shape at the top. The second cross is about 1.6 m tall at the centre with 1m

width at the base. The stone in which the cross appears has elaborative carvings. The Pahlavi inscription on both the crosses can be seen on the ribbon portion that runs around the cross from the bottom left to the bottom right of the stone.

The reading of the inscription on the left sanctuary arch by Burnell is '*Yin Rjya ma vn drd idnmn' Mun amn msiha –i-mdm af rsd-I aj asar bokht* (Indian Antiquary 1874: 314). The translation of the reading is 'in punishment by the cross (was) suffering of this one, He who (is) true Christ and god above and guide ever pure' (Indian Antiquary 1874: *ibid*). At Muttuchira, the stone in which the cross appears has a square base and it ends in a segmental arch at the top (Figure 14). It is 73 cm tall at the centre and 59 cm width at the bottom. It was found at *Muttuchira* in 1925 along with the debris of a chapel under renovation and first reported in the Travancore Archaeological series (Travancore Archaeological Series 1930:75). A narrow belt of 6 cm thickness runs all around the edge of the cross and inscription is written on it. But unfortunately the inscribed arch of the stone has been mutilated and only a portion of the left upright limb of the belt is preserved today.



**Figure 14: Cross at Muttuchira**



**Figure 15: Cross at Kadamattom**

The cross inscribed with Pahlavi inscription at St. George Yacobite Syrian church *Kadamattom* (Figure 15) is 88 cm tall at the centre with 53 cm width at the bottom. It is found on the southern altar wall of the church. The cross is of a Greek type with fleur – delis extremities, is equal armed and stands on a pedestal of three steps. It is flanked by two detached pilasters and on the capital of these is found two crocodiles or fish monsters facing each other and supporting with their gaping mouths, a semi-circular belt arching above the cross.

The outer rim of this arch is represented as ornamentally curving out in two hooks. Five shallow oblong niches like depressions have been created on the plain pedestal below the three steps. The portion containing the inscription is a narrow ribbon of stone around the cross (Travancore Archaeological Series 1930:69). The inscription consists of three short sentences separated by two cross marks. The transliteration of the Pahlavi inscription was given by Gopinath Rao is '*Le zibah vai min Minav denen, Napist Mar Shapur, Le mun ahrob Mashiah avakhashahi kher bokht*'. Translation of it is I, a beautiful bird from Nineveh (have come) to this country, written Mar Shapur, I, whom holy Messiah, the forgiver, freed from thorn (Travancore Archaeological Series 1930:72).



**Figure 16: Cross with Pahlavi Inscription, Alangad**



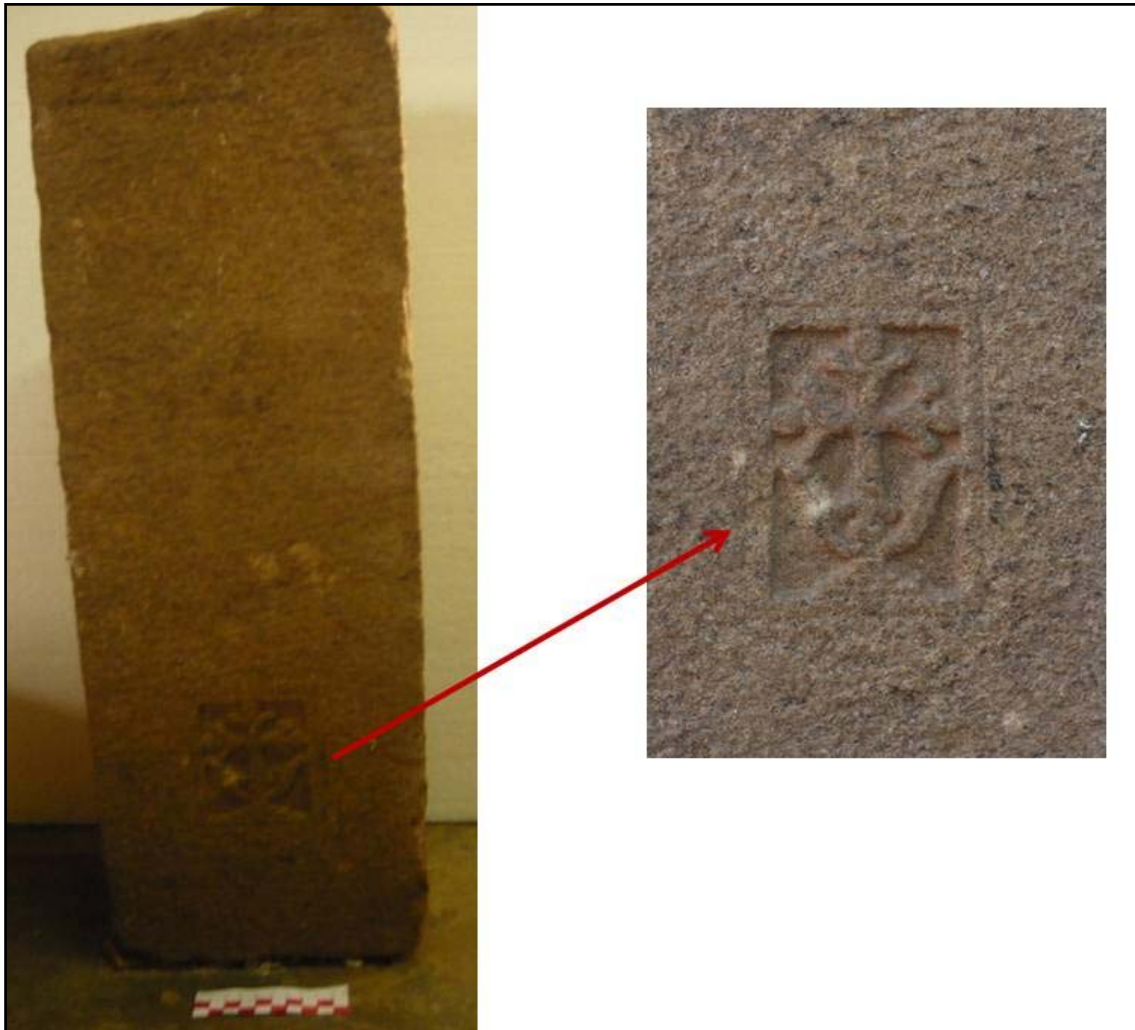
**Figure 17 Cross with Inscription, Goa**  
(Courtesy: Pilar Seminary Museum Goa)

Similarly, a cross with Pahlavi inscription was found inside the chapel of St. Mary's Church Alangad, Paravur taluk of Ernakulam district. The stone in which the cross is engraved is 78 cm x 58 cm. The inscription found on the ribbon that runs around the cross from the bottom left to the bottom right (Fig 16). Another cross with Pahlavi inscription was discovered at Dandi near Agassaim on the bank of the river Zuari in Goa in 2001. The left part of the stone is missing but the cross is visible and it is exhibited inside the Pilar seminary in Goa today (Figure 17).

The Pahlavi inscription on the cross found at St. Thomas Mount, Chennai in the latest transliteration of Gerd Gropp is '*Unser Herr Messias erbarme sitch uber Gabriel, den Sohn des Chaharbokht, den Enkel ded Durzad, der dies (Kreuz) anfertigte*'. It could be translated as

‘Our Lord Missiah may show mercy on Gabriel, the son of Chaharbokht (literally meaning having four sons), the grandson of *Drurzad*( literally meaning born in distant land) who made this( cross) (Malekkandathil. 2010; 6). A cross engraved on the granite column of an excavated building at Anuradhapura has been discovered in 1912(Fig 18).

Dr. Burnell states that all the Persian crosses closely resemble one another and it is impossible to assign them all to the same period. Based on the letters of the inscription, one found at St. Thomas Mount, Chennai and on the left altar wall at Kottayam is the oldest. The former probably dated to 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E and latter is not older than 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E (Indian Antiquary 1874: 313).



**Figure 18: Persian Cross Engraved on a Pillar, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka**  
(Courtesy: Archaeological Museum, Anuradhapura)

### **Tharisappally Copper Plate**

The Tharisappally copper plate consists of five plates and variously known as *Kollam* plate, *Sthanu Ravi* plate and *Kottayam* plate (Travancore Archaeological Series 1908:60). Most of the plates have inscriptions on both sides and the average dimension of each

plate is about 25 x 9 cm. It was first reported by Captain Charles Swanston (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal 1833). It was written in several languages such as Arabic, Persian, old Malayalam etc and the scripts used were *Vattazhuthu*, *Granda*, Pahlavi, Hebrew and *Kufic*. Even though it was studied by many, the copper plate was first translated into English by Herman Gundert and published it in the Journal of Madras Literary Society in 1844( Varier 2013:57). The inscription was studied by various scholars like *Gopinath Rao* (TAS 1908) and *Elengulam Kunjan Pillai*, who dated the inscription to 9<sup>th</sup> century for the first time. It was recently studied and translated by a team of scholars including Professor M.R *Rakhav Varier* and *Kesavan Veluthat* in collaboration with *Elizabeth Lambourn* from the University of De Mont Fort. The inscription was issued in the fifth regnal year of *Cera* ruler, *Sthanu Ravi*, equivalent to 849 C.E (Lambourn 2016:379). The inscription speaks about the donation of land to the church at Kollam as well as the tax privileges granted to its by the West Asian chief merchant and two trade groups, the *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam* (Lambourn 2016:ibid). The copper plate was issued to *Maruvan Sabr'isho*, who was the West Asian chief merchant who held the formal administrative post of the Superintendent of weights and measures. The king donates the land for the church to the Christian merchant communities of West Asia with specific boundaries. It also provides certain social privileges and consent to collect tax and run the market (Varier 2013; 114). The inscription states that one *Iso tapir* has erected the church in Kollam and the king gifted him a number of families consisting of *Ilavar*, *Ilakkaiyars* and *Vennanas* to the church. The *Ilava* communities can use their cart within the market and the fort and *Ilakkaiyar* communities can work within the fortification.



**Figure 19: Tomb Stones with Inscription, St. Mary's Knanaya Church, Kaduthuruthi**

All the complaints against them should be solved by the church people (TAS 1908: 63). The grant was given in the presence of several West Asian traders as witnesses and their names were also given in the copper plates (Varier 2013;116). A group of names of twenty five merchants were given in the last plates. A group of eleven names are

written in kufic script in Arabic Language, ten names are given in Pahlavi and grouping both Iranian Eastern Christians and Iranian Zoroastrians, four names are given in Hebrew (Lambourn 2016; 379).

## Church Inscriptions

Apart from the major inscriptions a good number of minor inscriptions are also found in the churches across the study area. The inscriptions found in the churches are seen on the open-air crosses, donations to the church and on tomb stones. However, a good number of them are associated with tombstones.

Various scripts like Pahlavi, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Vattezhuthu were used to write them. Some others are written in Tamil, Malayalam, Greek, Syriac, Latin languages. Several tomb stones inscribed with inscriptions in the Churches have been lost when the new cemeteries were constructed. However, a good number of them have been translated and documented and quite a few are preserved in the church premises even today. The tomb stones with inscription are preserved at St. Mary's Knanaya Church, Kaduthuruthi and St. Mary's Forane Church, Kanjoor and several other places (Figure 19). The details of each inscription found in the churches across the study are appended in the table 2.

**Table 2: List of Inscriptions in the Churches of the Study Area**

Sl. No	Location	District	Brief Description
1	Yacobite Syrian Church Angamaly	Ernakulam	The church was rebuilt in the year the bones of Givargis Archdeacon who died in A.D 1640 were re-entered in the Church
2	Yacobite Syrian Church Akapparambu	Ernakulam	On a cadjan ,The king of Cochin ordered the Puthankurukar to divide the property belonging to their church equally with the Pazhayakkurukar to avoid any further disturbances of peace which was often taking place, Kollam Era/Malayalam Era (K.E/M.E) 926
3	Yacobite Syrian Church Akapparambu	Ernakulam	on a cadjan, The division is effected in the presence of the officer deputed by the King of Cochin, K.E 926
4	St. George Syro Malabar Basilica church, Angamaly	Ernakulam	Tomb stone refer to the death of Mani -Pauloda of Velaparambil, K.E 835, Mithunam 14

5	St. George Syro Malabar Basilica church, Angamaly	Ernakulam	Tomb stone refer to the death of Avaran Anna of Velaparambil, Makaram 28
6	St. George Syro Malabar Basilica church ,Angamaly	Ernakulam	Mentions Avaran Pauloda ,Kattanar and few others
7	Yacobite Syrian Church, Angamaly	Ernakulam	Is said to record that the church was rebuilt in the year1900?)( the bones of Givargis Archdeacon who died in A.D 1640 were re-entered in the Church
8	Yacobite Syrian Church, Angamaly	Ernakulam	Slab on the left altar records the death of Itti Cheriyaada, K.E 776 Makaram 29
9	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Itticheriyadu Mappilla of Orarukuru, K.E 756 Mithunam 11
10	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that death of Olisemma of Orarrukuru, K.E 708 Makaram 26
11	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Kunnacci, K.E 853 Makaram 26
12	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Sankanatti, K.E 839 Vrischikam 30
13	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Kocca Mariyam, K.E 804 Karkadakam 30
14	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Mani Ayippa Mappilla, K.E 775 Minam 9
15	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Cherian Varkey, K.E 798
16	St. George Church Aruvithura	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Ayippa Mani, K.E 781 Dhanu 22
17	St. Marys Forane Church Bharananganam	Kottayam	Tomb stone states the death of Ayippa Mattu, K.E 790 Karkadakam 2

18	St. Marys Forane Church Bharananganam	Kottayam	Tomb stone states the death of Okkan Kurian of Maramarram, K.E 812 Edavam 29
19	St. Marys Forane Church Bharananganam	Kottayam	This slab contains three damaged epitaphs states the death of Ittu...kken Mappilla , Mattan and another
20	St. George Yacobite Syrian church, Kadamattom	Ernakulam	Le zibah vai min Minav denen, Napist Mar Shapur, Le mun ahrob Mashiah avakhashahi kher bokht.
21	St. Marys Church Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab found in the church states records that Katavil Mani Mattu Kattanar died on this day, K.E 768 Minam 8
22	St. Marys Church Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab register the death of a certain Mattuven, K.E 753 Minam 8
23	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Vilakeyil Ittiyera, K.E 836 Vrischikam 30
24	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Vatakketattu Mattu, K.E 827 Minam 24
25	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of kuriyol, K.E 793 Tulam 23
26	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Accamanpila, K.E 836 Mithunam 21
27	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Thomman Pothan, K.E 796 Edavam 16
28	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Annamma, K.E 770 Karkadakam 3
29	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Kunnaseri Kunnanmappila, K.E 782 Kumbham 7

30	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Alunkal Thomaccen, K.E 823 Chingam 7
31	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Mar Aburanmetran and 4 kattans had the church enlarged , constructed new chapel after demolishing the old, K.E 765 Kumbham 23
32	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Madacci Koera, K.E 732 Chingam 20
33	St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi	Kottayam	Stone slab in the Church states that the death of Madathil Mathan, K.E 792 Tulam 30
34	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Vittavatta Kuriyakos, K.E 807 Makaram 3
35	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records that (name not clear) died, K.E 831 Chingam 21
36	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Mattuvan Kuriyan, K.E 807Mithunam 3
37	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Kockokken Chako Kuriyada, K.E 839 Chingam 2
38	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Tommen Okkanda, K.E 83-Kumbam 2
39	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Okanda Tommen, K.E 803 Medam 24
40	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Chommar Velannane , K.E 831 Chingam 18
41	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Muttuvan Accar, K.E 825 Minam 7
42	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Chandi Kurian, K.E 834 Karkadakam 7

43	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Annama, K.E 815 Mithunam 25
44	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Mariyam, K.E 897 Minam 28
45	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Ittuppa, K.E 831 Chingam 22
46	St. Marys Yacobite Syrian Church Kandanad	Ernakulam	Inscription on the baptismal font states that the baptismal font was presented by Koccokkan and others
47	St. Marys old Church Kanjirappally	Kottayam	Inscription on the pedestal of the open-air cross states that it was set up during the time of vicar of Kulalkkattu Thekumri Kattanar, K.E 816 Minam 1
48	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Stone slab on the wall of the church records the death of Kapiyar Chacko , K.E 796 Minam 24
49	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Tomb stone embedded in the wall of the church records the death of Kaittottungal Accunniyamma, K.E 864 Kanni 3
50	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Tomb stone embedded in the wall of the church records the death of Kaittottungal Varikit yapalo, K.E 889 Mithunam 20
51	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Tomb stone embedded in the wall of the church records the death of Varikit Olacci, K.E 884 Karkadakam 20
52	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Tomb stone embedded in the wall of the church records the death of Kurisakko Cummar taragan, K.E 750 Dhanu 24
53	St. Marys Forane Church Kanjoor	Ernakulam	Tomb stone embedded in the wall of the church records the death of Aburan Varkida, K.E 872 Mithunam 7

54	Martha Mariam Marthoma Valiapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	On a bell kept above the altar states that the bell was cast for the church on that day, K.E 905 Kanni 8
55	Martha Mariam Marthoma Valiapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	On a tomb stone , the name of the individual is not readable, K.E 819 Vrischikam 13
56	Martha Mariam Marthoma Valiapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records that the death of Kuriyada Panicar, the wife of Korada of Mudalakkodam, K.E 794 Medam 30
57	Martha Mariam Marthoma Valiapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records that death of Aviran Koratta of Mudalakkodam , K.E 809 Kanni 18
58	Mathoma Cheriapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records that (name not clear) died, K.E 775 Makaram 3
59	Mathoma Cheriapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	Tomb stones records the death of Ittiyira of Mundekkal, K.E 774 Vrischikam 1
60	Mathoma Cheriapally Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Tomman Mattayi, K.E 893 Makaram 3
61	St. Marys Knanaya Church Kottayam	Kottayam	On slabs built into the steps in front of the Valiapally records that the names of deceased persons and the dates on which they died
62	St. Marys Forane church Kuravilangadu	Kottayam	On a line of writing on the rim of the bell in the bell tower of church
63	St. Marys Forane church Kuravilangadu	Kottayam	On another bell within the church states that the gift of the bell to the church of Holy Mary at Kuravilangad
64	St. Marys Forane church Kuravilangadu	Kottayam	On three other bells in a separate out house in the church compound

65	St. Marys Forane church Kuravilangadu	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Mar Alexandrius the Metrapolita of Malangara on Thursday and his burial on Friday Dhanu 24. A.D. 1687 in the sanctum of the church, was set up by Varkki Kattanar
66	St. Thomas Church Malayattor	Ernakulam	On the open-air cross in front of the church refers to the fresher's (?) that came ( in the river?) on the particular day; but the rest of the inscription is not decipherable, K.E 913 Mithunam 24.
67	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Inscription on an open-air cross states that the stone cross was set up by a private individual named Mattu of Kallarve, K.E 799 Kanni
68	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	On a mutilated cross in the church , Contains a few letters on the left upright ribbon
69	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Inscription on a stone states that Karingalkurisu(stone cross) was set up in the time of Mar Simeon and Jacob Patiri in place of an older wooden(?) cross. The inscription also mentions Mar Denha and Mar George who were the previous Metrans
70	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone records the death of Kuriyan Avuran, K.E 812 Mithunam 1
71	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone records the death of Alamma of Mattuven Kuriyada Kallarveli, K.E 806 Chingam 24
72	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death Audeppu Kuriyada of Konnapale , K.E 810 Mithunam 24
73	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Alamma of Tarida Mariam, in the month of Kumbha

74	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Alamma of Mattai Ayippu K.E - 42 Makaram 8
75	Holy Ghost Forane Church Muttuchira	Kottayam	Tomb stone states that the death of Elisa anamma of Kadappiram, K.E 875 Minam 26
76	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Tomb stone records the death of Narekkel Ciruta Koreda, K.E 809 Minam 9
77	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Tomb stone records the death of Eleccar, K.E 804 Vrischikam 2
78	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Tomb stone records the death of Chako Mappila of Valakkadavu, K.E 828 Kumbham 29
79	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Tomb stone , Name is not decipherable
80	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Tombstone, name is not decipherable, K.E 884 Chingam 9
81	St. Marys Forane Church Pallippuram, Cherthala	Alappuzha	Records the death of Aviran Kuriyada, K.E 792 Makaram 29
82	Yacobite Syrian Church North Paravur	Ernakulam	Inscription on the baptismal font state that it was donated by Abraham Mappilla
83	St. Thomas Church North Paravur	Ernakulam	Stone slab on the wall of the church states Chackko Cheriyaatda Kattanar and Mattayi, Mithunam 3 of 1729
84	St. Thomas Church North Paravur	Ernakulam	Stone slab built in the wall of the church states that the death of Mar Francisco Metran , the Bishop of the St. Thomas Christians of Malangara, K.E 799 Kumbham 8
85	Yacobite Syrian Church North Paravur	Ernakulam	Stone slab embedded on the west wall of the church states that the open-air cross in front of the western entrance was erected in 1566 , K.E 742 Vrischikam 6

86	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Thoma, K.E 897 Minam 28
87	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Vatakketattu Mattu Kattanar of Udayanperur, K.E 846 Dhanu 13
88	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Register the death of Matten Kadata Panikker, K.E 734 Medam 22
89	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Aruvara Varkey, K.E 836 Makaram 25
90	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Panikker, K.E 827 Mithunam 3
91	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone records the death of Mariya, K.E 865 Medam 5
92	Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church Udayamperur	Ernakulam	Tomb stone registered the alleged death of Villarvattam Thommarajavu , who was living in Cenonnalam

Sl. No	Year	Language and Script	Reference
1	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	T.A.S. Volume VII P. 153
2	1751	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 153
3	1751	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 153
4	1660	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 153
5	1667	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 153
6	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 153
7	Nil	Syriac	TAS Volume VII P 153
8	1601	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 156
9	1581	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 91
10	1533	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 91
11	1678	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 91
12	1664	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 91
13	1629	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92

14	1600	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
15	1623	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
16	1606	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
17	1615	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 62
18	1637	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 63
19	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 63
20	Nil	Pahlavi	TAS Volume VI P 72
21	1593	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 152
22	1578	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 58
23	1661	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 149
24	1652	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
25	1618	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
26	1661	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
27	1621	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
28	1595	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
29	1607	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 59
30	1648	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 150
31	1590	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 151
32	1557	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 150
33	1617	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 60
34	1632	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 72
35	1656	Tamil in Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 67
36	1632	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 72
37	1665	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 73
38	155-(?)	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 73
39	1628	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 71

40	1656	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 72
41	1650	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 73
42	1659	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 73
43	1640	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 72
44	1722	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 74
45	1656	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 73
46	1682	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 74
47	1641	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 148
48	1621	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
49	1689	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
50	1714	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
51	1709	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
52	1575	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 92
53	1697	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 93
54	1730	Malayalam	TAS Volume VII P 143
55	1644	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 142
56	1619	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 142
57	1634	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 142
58	1600	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 143
59	1599	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 143
60	1718	Tamil in Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 143
61	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume IV P 166
62	Nil	Greek?	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 123
63	1581	Syriac	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 123
64	1910	Latin	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 123
65	1687	Syriac and Malayalam	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 123
66	1738	Tamil in Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 125

67	1624	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
68	Nil	Pahlavi	TAS Volume VII P 75
69	1528 , 1580, 1581	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 77
70	1637	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
71	1631	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
72	1635	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
73	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
74	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
75	1700	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 78
76	1634	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
77	1629	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
78	1653	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
79	Nil	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
80	1709	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
81	1617	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 141
82	1625	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 145
83	1729	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 144
84	1624	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 146
85	1566	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VII P 144
86	1722	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 67
87	1671	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 66
88	1559	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 66
89	1661	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 67
90	1652	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 67
91	1690	Malayalam Vattazhethu	Travancore Inscription ,A topographical List P 287
92	1701	Malayalam Vattazhethu	TAS Volume VI P 68

Thus, by analysing the inscriptions found in the churches it can be observed that:

- Maximum inscriptions of those found in churches (around eighty percent of the inscriptions) are on the tomb stones. However, now it has become difficult for the churches to keep the old tombstone and preserve it since the churches hardly have any space for the new ones being erected. Therefore the earlier tomb stones were removed for the new ones.
- All the inscriptions found in the churches are post 1500 C.E and the earliest inscriptions are on the tomb stones. The tomb stones found at St. George church Aruvithura of 1533 C.E and 1581 C.E and one found at St. Mary's Forane Church, Kanjoor of 1575 C.E provide the early dates.
- The inscriptions found on the open crosses at three places give the date of its construction. These are Holy Ghost Forane Church, Muttuchira built in 1624 C.E, St. Mary's Church, Kanjirappally built in 1641 C.E and St. Thomas Church, Malayattor built in 1738 C.E. We can assume that the construction of open-air crosses had taken place after the Portuguese time.
- The earliest dates of the donation of baptismal font found at St. Thomas Jacobite Syrian Church North Paravur (1625 C.E) and St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church, Kandanad (1682 C.E.).
- The earliest inscriptions referred to the constructions of the churches or renovations found at St. Marys Valiapally Kaduthuruthi and it was in 1590 C.E.
- The church bell of St. Mary's Forane Church Kuravilanad was a gift in the year 1581 and the bell found at Martha Mariam Marthoma Valiapally, Kothamangalam was casted in 1730 C.E.
- Out of 92 inscriptions in the study area, fifty six inscriptions were written in Malayalam Vattazhethu, twenty seven inscriptions were written by using Tamil language in Vattazhethu script and remaining are in several scripts like Pahlavi, Syriac, Latin, and Malayalam.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The archaeological evidences for the early presence of Christianity from 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E are very meagre and they are scattered at different parts of the country. The concentration of archaeological records is more visible from 1000 C.E along the Western Coast of India particularly in Goa and Kerala. Churches were getting good patronage from the local rulers as seen from the inscriptions mentioned above. The evidence shows churches and Christian settlements were probably thriving before the arrival of the Portuguese. The palaeographic feature of some of the plates of *Tharissappally* copper-plate grant shows that it was probably written at several times by several individuals and hence it needs to be thoroughly investigated. Several scholars confirm

that the date of the Persian crosses found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka to 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Their precise period of time is still debatable. Some of them are probably the copy of the earlier crosses.

The present article proposes four broad phases of propagation and consolidation of Christianity in India especially in the Kerala Coast; The first phase that extended from first century C.E. to about 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E (about which very little is known); second phase; from about 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. to the arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar Coast in 1498 C.E.; third phase from about 1498 C.E. to the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653 C.E and the fourth phase from 1653 to the recent times.

The first phase represents the active trade between the Malabar Coast and Indian Ocean region with the Western world as it has been mentioned in the classical texts of *Sangam* literatures (Akananuru 149) and other travel accounts like the *Periplus of Erythraean Sea* (PME 53.17.27-8), *Pliny's Natural History* (NH 6.104) and *Ptolemy's Geography* (Geography 7.1). It is substantiated with recent archaeological findings from the Early Historic sites like Pattanam (Cherian 2009; 2015) and Vizhinjam (Kumar *et al.* 2013; Abhayan *et al.* 2014) and findings of Roman gold coins from several hoards. However, regarding Christianity in India, very few evidence are found in the north western part of India. The depiction of crosses near the 2<sup>nd</sup> century *Sogdian* inscription at *Tankse* and crosses engraved on bricks found at *Taxila* are the rare specimens. These few depictions obviously testify the presence of Christianity and the fact that it was not a totally unknown entity to the Indians. However, these sporadic findings also show that the adherence to Christianity was very scarce and might have probably more associated with the early travellers and traders coming from the West Asia.

The second phase, extending roughly from 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. to the arrival of the Portuguese, have much more evidences than the phase I regarding the propagation of Christianity in the Kerala Coast. The first and foremost reference was made by *Topographia Christiana* of the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. It was followed by several references during the period between 8<sup>th</sup> Century C.E and 15 century C.E (*Iban Hurradadbih* in 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E; *Al Buruni* c.973; *Al Idrisi* in c.1160; *Al Watwat* in 1318; *Al Dimasqi* in 1327; *Abu Al Fida* in 1331; *Qalqasandi* in 1418). The antiquity for this period regarding the Malabar Coast is associated with the Copper plate of Sthanu Ravi in 849 C.E and findings of several Persian cross with Pahlavi script datable to this period. This period marks the emergence of several Christian settlements close to the trade centres not only of Malabar Coast but also on the Coromandel Coast and Sri Lanka. Paintings in the cave no. 1 of Ajanta corroborate the trade link between Persia and the Western Coast of India (Dhawalikar 1973; Griffiths 1983; Yazdani 1983). Thus, the present understanding of the antiquity of Christianity in the Kerala Coast begins with this phase. It is the pre-Portuguese Syrian periods which extend from c.6<sup>th</sup> century C.E to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 C.E. In fact, the period prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, there was active involvement of Persian traders in the western Coast especially in the Malabar Coast. However, the intensity of the Christian settlements and their social and

cultural role was not fully reflected in the archaeological context. Therefore, the pre-Portuguese phase needs to be comprehensively investigated in the light of literary and archaeological evidences related to the Persian and Arabic contacts with the Malabar region around 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E.

The third and the fourth phases correspond to the arrival of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British and their involvement in the religious matters of Malabar Coast. It also witnessed the destruction of several books written in Syriac, renovation of pre-Portuguese churches and construction of new churches, construction of open air crosses and baptismal font in the churches. This period is fully recorded by both the Portuguese and the Dutch. As far as the antiquities of this period are concerned, it is illuminated with various inscriptions on the open air crosses, tomb stones and various palm leaf records in the churches across the study area. These palm leaf records can throw considerable light on the present subject if they can be accessed. Hence, the churches built during the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch are deficient in terms of their antiquity. Most of these churches might have been renovated many a times. However, both the foreign and Indian literatures provide references to their existence.

But certain questions remain unclear as to when Christianity had appeared on the Malabar Coast? Of the four phases, the last two have lot of archaeological and literary references whereas second phase has some credible evidences like the references made by *Topographia Christiana* of the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E, reference made by various Arab and Italian travellers and traders, copper plate of c.849 C.E and several Persian crosses with Pahlavi inscriptions. However, no credible evidence for the presence of Christianity in Malabar Coast during the first phase has been available. Archaeological records from the early historic sites provide evidence of trade and urban settlement but no data for the presence of church during this phase are available so far. Again, some of the churches on the Malabar Coast claim their antiquity from early phase without having concrete evidence to substantiate it.

Most of the earlier researches on the church history of Malabar Coast confined themselves to the first phase ignoring the details of subsequent three phases. Remarkable evidences of the last two phases that extend from the arrival of the Portuguese to the modern period were not fully recorded. Several churches have been destroyed; the inscriptions on tombstones of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are no longer there today; great amount of palm leaf records scattered within the churches are not yet been classified and studied. Hence, the future dimensions of the studies of understanding the history of Christianity on Malabar Coast needs to be thoroughly investigated.

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