

THE FIRST PORT OF DISEMBARKATION OF THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN INDIA ACCORDING TO THE *ACTS OF THOMAS*

INTRODUCTION

We are accustomed to learn since many centuries that St Thomas the Apostle on his mission journey to India landed at Cranganore in Kerala in 52 AD. A sure literary evidence that is used by all to prove the mission of Thomas in India is the apocryphal book of the *Acts of Judas Thomas*. The author of this book writes that the apostle landed in India in a place called *Andrapolis* (according to the Greek version) or *Sandrokmahosa* (according to the Syriac version). Many attempts have been so far made to prove that Cranganore (Kodungallur) in Kerala was the city so mentioned in the book. However, a careful reading of the narrative content of this book indicates that the place could not be Cranganore, but some other place on the west coast of India. This article is an attempt to study the *Acts of Thomas* in a different light and to situate the city of disembarkation of the Apostle Thomas in India as it is narrated in this apocryphal book in a place other than Cranganore.

1. ANDRAPOLIS (OR SANDROK MAHOSA) IN THE *ACTS OF THOMAS*

The *Acts of Thomas* is one of the five apocryphal Acts of the Apostles and it is the only Apocryphal Acts written in the Syriac language and also the only one that is handed down to the present generation in its entire form. Taking into consideration both internal and external evidences one comes to the conclusion that it could have been composed in its present form at some time between the years 220 - 250 AD at Edessa. It describes the story of the mission of the apostle Thomas in India and his martyrdom there.

The story goes like this. After the ascension of Our Lord the apostles assembled together to decide on their field of evangelization and by lot Thomas got India. As he was reluctant to go to India, the Lord himself appeared and He sold Thomas to a merchant called Haban who came from India, from the kingdom of Gondophares, to fetch a carpenter to build a palace for the king. Thomas, with the merchant, set sail to India and their first port of disembarkation was a royal port city called *Andrapolis* according to the Greek version of the story and *Sandrokmahosa* according to the Syriac version. Once in the city, they went for a wedding banquet in the royal palace. During the dinner, the Apostle did not take anything and one of the cupbearers slapped him on the cheek as a consequence of which Thomas forewarned that dogs would drag in the hand that beat him. It happened so and the flute girl, who was a Hebrew and who alone had understood the words of the apostle, revealed this to the King. So, the King, realizing that Thomas was a man of God, wanted the Apostle to bless the couples. The Apostle instructed the young couple of the virtue of continence and abstinence and the couple were converted by him. The King became furious and wanted to imprison Thomas and the merchant but they had already set sail to the 'city of India'. Later on the king also got converted. When some years later the news reached them that the apostle was preaching in another part of India the king, together with many followers went and joined him there. This is the story that we read in the *Acts of Thomas* concerning the city of *Andrapolis* and the events that took place there.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF ANDRAPOLIS-SANDROK MAHOSA

Our main concern in this article is to identify *Andrapolis or Sandrokmahosa*. The book does not furnish us with much information which would help us to identify this port. However, from the story we are able to infer the following elements concerning this city.

It was a great trade centre of India where ships from the West reached very often. This we assume from the fact that they had taken a ship to come to India and considering the nature of the voyage and the swiftness of the journey, we infer that it must have been a well travelled-route.

It was a royal city to which the name *Andrapolis* or *Sandrokmahosa* was some how attributed. We say that it was attributed, because so far we have not discovered any place in India or outside which in any epoch of history ever had this name.

It had some kind of relation to the city of 'the king of India', Gondophares. This is inferred from the statement in the *Acts of Thomas* that the people of *Andrapolis* got the message that the apostle was preaching in the city of India and they together with the king and the royal couple went and joined him.

There was a Jewish presence in the city or at least Jewish girls were present in the royal palace. There was a Jewish flute girl at the banquet story of the *Acts of Thomas*.

There should have been a forest in the vicinity of it, which would explain the presence of a lion by the royal palace.

The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*¹ describes a city with all these qualities on the western coasts of India. It is called Barygaza. We presume that *Sandruck-Andrapolis* of the *Acts of Thomas* may be this ancient port city on the Western Coasts of India which was called *Bharukaccha* in Sanskrit. Besides etymological similarities, geographical, historical and linguistic evidences converge to confirm this assumption to be valid.

2.1 Barygaza: A great trade centre on the West Coast of India

The author of the *Periplus* has devoted a great length of his volume to describe the port city of Barygaza and its neighbouring places. From this we can gauge the importance of this port at his time and its popularity. The author seems to have gone there personally, because his description is so vivid and minute². This city is identified today with Broach or Bharuch in the Gujarat state in western India. The name Barygaza seems to have been derived from the Prakrit *Bharukachha*, which was a corruption of the Sanskrit *Bhrugukshêtra* or *Bhrugukachha* which means "the plain of Bhrigu" who was a

¹ The *Periplus of the Erythrean sea* is an ancient account of the sea voyage to India and the neighbouring countries written by an unknown author in the first century AD, most probably around 60 AD. The Erythrean sea, to the author, is the Red sea and the present Indian Ocean. This is, perhaps, the first integral account of the sea voyage to the Indian sub-continent from the coasts of Arabia. It is the first record of organised trading with the nations of the East, in vessels built and commanded by subjects of western world. The book was originally written in Greek. Many translations and editions have been so far published. In this article we follow mainly the English translation edited by Wilfred H. SCHOFF, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1995. Some other important editions and translations which we have referred to are: W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean*, 2 vols, London, Cadell and Davies, 1807. Vol. II is *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*; J.W. MCCRINDLE, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Erythrean Sea*, Calcutta, 1879.

² "This is, if the boast may be allowed, the peculiar pre-eminence of the work: it belongs to this author alone, as far as I have discovered, to give the true direction of this western coast of the Peninsula and to state, in direct terms, its tendency to the South, while Ptolemy stretches out the whole angle to a straight line, and places the Gulf of Cambay almost in the same latitude as the Cape of Comorin", W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and the Navigation of the Ancient in the Indian Ocean*, 411.

local hero³. According to the local legends, the city was originally founded by this sage Bhrigu and so was called Bhragapor or Bhragu's city. Barygaza may also signify "the water of wealth, from *Bari* –water and *Gaza* – wealth, riches, treasure"⁴. So, for the Greek authors, this city was a real port of wealth. This coastal region held this position for many centuries till it had to give way to the neighbouring port of Surat.

We find the following early references to this great port city.

The *Brhatsamhita* (XIV.II) and *Yoginitantra* (2.4) refer to it. It is also mentioned in the Mathura Buddhist image inscription of Huviska. A grant of the Gujara king Jayabhatta IV also makes mention of this town. The *Bhagavatapurana* (VIII, 18,12) places it on the northern bank of the river Narbada. In the early Buddhist literature as well as in the early centuries of Christian era *Bhrugukachha* was an important seat of sea going trade and commerce. The *Sussondi Jataka* refers to the journey of the minstrel Sagga from Benares to *Bhrugukachha*, which was a seaport town (*pattana gama*) from which ships sailed for different countries (*Jataka* III, p. 188 ff)⁵.

Barygaza had been linked to a number of trade routes which connected it with the whole of India.

Six major market areas served Broach during the period under review. The first and the foremost was Central Asia-Taxila. Well-travelled caravan routes connected Taxila with the Central Asiatic trade marts from Kashagar to Kandahar. Taxila was connected to Mathura and Pataliputra by a grand route first noticed by Megasthenes, the Seleucid envoy to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. It was constructed in eight stages: from Pushkalavati to Taxila, from Taxila across the Indus to Jhelum, from Jhelum to the Beas, from Beas to the Sutlej, from Sutlej to Jamuna and from Jamuna, via Delhi region to the Ganga. From the Ganga it went to Kanauj and then to Prayag and Pataliputra. A network of roads connected Pataliputra with cities such as Savatthi, Kosambi, Champa, Tamralipti, Varanasi, Mathura, and Vidhisha. A well-marked route connected Mathura with Ujjaini. From South came routes linking Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh with Paithan from where other routes passed through Central India to Mathura and beyond⁶.

All these references clarify how Barygaza had been connected to all parts of India. Products of interior land were brought by land or by the great river Narbada to this port for trade with the West.

To Barygaza were directed large quantities of Indian and Chinese products, some of which were sent from China and central Asia through Kabul Poalais, so as to join other supplies at the great centres Minnagara and Ozene⁷. Barygaza received

³ SCHOFF, *Periplus*, 180. Bhrigu in Hindu mythology is a divine seer, son of Brahma (or of Varuna, or of Indra, or of Prajapati), and eponymous ancestor of the Bhrigu or Bhargava clan. See J. BOWKER, (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, 1999, 145.

⁴ W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients*, 395.

⁵ B.C. LAW, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, Delhi, Munshi Ram Manoharlal, 1984, 278.

⁶ B.G. GOKHALE, "Barukachcha/Barygaza", in G. POLLET (ed), *India and the Ancient World, History, Trade and Culture before AD 650. P.H. Eggermont Jubilee volume Presented on the occasion of his 70th Birthday* (OLA 25), Louvain, 67.

⁷ This Ozene is the modern Ujjain.

by way of Tagara wares brought by an old Andhra route across India from the East Coast⁸.

Warmington quoting Pliny distinguishes four different stages in the evolution of the discovery and use of sea routes to India for trade purposes by the ancient Greeks and Romans :

(a) *From the time of Alexander and Nearchos' voyage to the time of Tiberius' reign* – merchants set sail from Arabia Eudamenon, follow round all the Gulfs coasted along Arabia, and then along the Asiatic Coasts Caramania and Gedrosia to the Indus and southwards and return the same way (Pliny VI, 100 and *Periplus* 57).

(b) *Between Tiberius' and end of Gaius' reign (AD 40-41)* – start from Arabia Eudamenon or Cane, until after Ras Fartak (Syagros), the Arabian coast receded, where upon they sailed across the sea to Patala on the Indus.

(c) *Between roughly A.D. 41-50* – men not desiring to take only the voyage to the Indus began coasting or sailing from the ruins of Arabia Eudamenon or from Cane as far as Ras Fartak as before and then taking “a shorter and safer voyage” across, so as to strike the India coast at Sigerus (Meliziagra in *Periplus*, Melizegiris in Ptolemy, either Jaigarh or Rajpur) whence they could proceed north or south at will⁹. Presumably men started to sail direct to Barygaza also during this time, returning the same way and calling, if they wished, at Socotra or Moscha (*Periplus* 31 and 32).

(d) About 50 A.D. – after leaving Ocelis, the ruins of Arabia Eudamenon, Cane or Cape Guardafui, in July, they could be throwing the ships' head off the wind with a constant pull on the rudder and shift of the yard, thus sailing in an arc or a circle, go across to Malabar marts in forty days (*Periplus* 57; Pliny VI, 101)¹⁰.

According to this theory, the third stage (between 41-50 A.D.) in the discovery of sea route to India took the voyager to the coasts of Gujarat. It is in the same period that the apostle Thomas is said to have visited king Gondophares at Taxila, where among the ruins discovered, people point also to the palace of the said king¹¹. According to the *Acts of Thomas*, the apostle led his way to Taxila from Barygaza. The fact that there were well-travelled routes to Taxila from Barygaza, both by land and by sea, makes this proposition all the more viable and valid.

But does the fact that Barygaza was an important port of India in the early centuries of our era credit it with the name of *Andrapolis*? In the Armenian version of the story of Thomas we read like this, when they crossed over to the other side of the sea, and came to a city, they heard the sounds of trumpet and joy¹². The indication is clear. They had crossed the sea to enter this city. Taking into consideration the fact that their destination was India, this city should have been in India. In the story of Thomas by

⁸ E.H. WARMINGTON, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*, New Delhi, 1985, 56. See also W. ROBERTSON, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India, and the Progress of Trade with that Country Prior to the Discovery of the Passage to it by the Cape of Good Hope*, London, 1817, 61-62.

⁹ Warmington is of the opinion that the first attempt at this route was made in 42 AD (Pliny VI, 101). See E.H. WARMINGTON, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 64.

¹⁰ E.H. WARMINGTON, *The Commerce between Roman Empire and India*, 45-46

¹¹ J. ROONEY, *Shadows in the Dark land*, Rawalpindi, 1984, 38.

¹² «*Quand ils eurent traversé (furent passé de l'autre cote de) la mer et furent parvenus à la (une) ville ils entendirent la son de la trompette (et de la joie) et de l'allégresse* ». D. L. LELOIR, *Ecrits apocryphes sur les Apôtres 1, Traduction de l'Édition Arménienne de Venise* (CCSA 4), Brepols-Turnhout, 1992, 550.

Abdias we read that Thomas and Haban arrived at length on the Coasts of India and in the first city they entered they were present at the marriage of the King's daughter. What we note here, besides the divergence from the other versions of the story, is the expression 'the first city of India'. In *De Miraculis* also we see the same expression 'civitatis primae Indiae'. It is this first city of India or the city of first India that we locate at Barygaza. Hosten is of the opinion that it is possible to translate in two ways part of this sentence that we see in *De Miraculis*, which refers to the Deacon-king "the apostle called his deacon, him who had been king of the first city of India (civitatis primae Indiae) where the apostle had been invited to the marriage", and "... him who had been king of the city of the first India where the apostle had been invited to the marriage"¹³. He says, "there, then was Sandruck, the first city of India, the first city of *citerior* India, the first city of the first India"¹⁴. This first city of the first India was Barygaza or Broach.

2.2 Barygaza: The royal city of the Andhra Dynasty

The Greek term *Andrapolis* means the *polis* or city of Andhra, if we take it in its etymological sense. In the same way the Syriac *Sandrokmahosa* means the city of Sandrok. So, in this sense, how can Barygaza, a city on the Gujarat coasts, north of Konkan, be called the *Andrapolis* or *Sandrokmahosa*? There are no etymological similarities to be noted. So we have to search in the geographical and political situation of this place. The historical period under consideration should be the second quarter of the first century A.D. In this period this famous port belonged to the Andhra kings. Let us get back to the *Periplus*, which is almost contemporary to the apostle Thomas' arrival in India. It speaks of a king called Nambanus. Schoff¹⁵ identifies this Nambanus¹⁶ with Nahapana, the founder of the *Saka* era of 78 AD. Smith also has the same opinion¹⁷. These *Sakas* were known as western Ksatrapas¹⁸ or Andhra Kings. At the heights of its power the sway of the Andhra Kings extended from the Telugu country proper right across India to Nazik and beyond, where they ruled as "Lords of the West" or Western *Kshatrapas*¹⁹. A dynastic name, borne by many of these monarchs, was Satakarni. So, at the time of the composition of the *Periplus* (around 60 A.D.), Satakarni kings of the Andhra Dynasty were having a prominent role in the Western Coast of India. These Andhra kings were still having their sway in these places at the time, or at the time immediately before, when the *Acts of Judas Thomas* was composed. The Andhra dynasty came to an end in 225 A.D., and the *Acts of Thomas* might have been composed around this period. So it is possible that the author of the *Acts of Thomas* had this city of the Satakarni kings in his mind when he wrote of the *Sandrokmahosa* or *Andrapolis*. It was customary for the Greek and Roman writers to name a place after the dynastic names of the ruling people. Thus in the Greek version of the *Acts of Thomas* we see the place named after Roman geography as city of Andhra or *Andrapolis* whereas the Syriac

¹³ H. HOSTEN, "Notes and essays on St Thomas", *Works of Hosten*, vol.18, folio 63 (collections kept in Vidya Jyothi, Delhi). The Deacon King here mentioned is the king of Andrapolis who had joined the apostle at the city of India and who was later ordained deacon by the apostle, according tot the *Acts of Thomas*.

¹⁴ But here Hosten means to say Cranganore. But we find all his arguments are valid more for Barygaza than for Cranganore.

¹⁵ SCHOFF, *Periplus*, 198.

¹⁶ The name in the Greek text is Mambarus, which all translators agree should be read as Nambanus.

¹⁷ V.A.SMITH, *Early History of India*, New Delhi, 1993, 210.

¹⁸ M. COMMISARIAT, *A History of Gujarat*, vol. I, Bombay, 1938, xxxi.

¹⁹ ZACHARIAH, "The Churches of SS Thomas and Bartholomew in Malabar", *Pax, The Quarterly Review of the Benedictines of Caldy* 86 (1928), 148.

version takes the name after the king ruling in the place at the time and thus we have *Sandruckmahosa* – might be, city of Satakarni.²⁰ There fore, city of Andhra and city of Satakarnis signify one and the same place, Barygaza, which at the time when the apostle Thomas is supposed to have come to India and also at the time when the *Ath* was composed, found itself under the rule of the Andhra kingdom or the Satakarnis. It is natural and quite possible that to the Western traders Barygaza in the early first century of Christian era and even later till the end of Andhra dynasty sometime around 225 A.D., was known as the city of Andhra or the city of Satakarni. Thus all the said arguments confirm that the *Andrapolis* of the Greek and *Sandruckmahosa* of the Syriac mean one and the same place and this place could be Barygaza of the Greek and *Bharukachcha* of the Sanskrit.

2.3 Relation of Barygaza with the Indo-Scythians of North-West India

The third reason for holding Barygaza as the *Sandruck-Andrapolis* of the *Acts of Thomas* is the fact that it had been in contact with the Indo-Scythian Kingdom of North West India. The most important king of the Indo-Scythians was Gondopahres, to whose court Thomas was invited according to the *Acts of Thomas*. At the time of the *Periplus*, the power of the Indo-Scythians had extended even as far as Gujarat. There had been extensive trade relation between the two kingdoms. The trade might have been done both by sea and by land. The great royal high way connecting Taxila and Pataliputra, two great centres of trade and civilisation in India, had a branch to Barygaza from Mathura via Ujjain. Wares could be brought down to Barygaza by this route or by the great river Narbada. That there was also a sea route connecting these regions also is clear from the description in the *Periplus* where it is said that the author came down to Barygaza from Minnagara via Baeones²¹ by sea.

During the time of the *Periplus* or even during that of the *Acts of Thomas* these regions were not possibly inaccessible to each other. There are indications that the whole Rann of Cutch region of today, called by the *Periplus* as the Gulf of Einrion, was engulfed by sea in earlier dates. This area was and is still always prone to earth quakes. Strabbo in his Geography mentions it as a region prone to earthquakes²².

It appears probable from what he (Aristoboulos) has stated that India is also liable to earthquakes as it becomes porous from the excess of moisture and opens into

²⁰ “Die griechische Version bewahrte den auch bei den römischen Geographen vorkommenden Namen Andra in Andrapolis, ‘Stadt der Andra’, während die syrische Redaction bloß den Namen des dort residierenden Königs Satakarni in der Verstümmelung Sandruk als Bezeichnung für ‘Stadt der Satakarni’ festhält“. J. DAHLMANN, *Die Thomas-Legende*, 65.

²¹ This Baeones, in opinion of Schoff, is Piram Island opposite the mouth of Narbada. W. SCHOFF, *Periplus*, 181. Vincent had earlier preferred Diu. “Baeones is Diu; Diu is the Avi Caman of Al Edrissi because he reckons one day and half’s sail from Cambay to Avi Caman, and two from Avi Caman to Indus”. W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and the Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean*, 384. His opinion is more reasonable considering the distance from Schythia to Baeones that he gives. “The passage from Schythia to Baeones is three thousand stadia, which agrees sufficiently with the actual distance of about 300 miles”. W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and the Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean*, 384. The location of Diu just on the way to Barygaza makes it all the more probable.

²² The great earthquake that devastated these regions of Gujarat very recently (in January 2001) only confirms our surmise. Even the great migration from Cutch and Gujarat to Java which led to the establishment of Buddhist kingdoms there might have been due to these earthquakes than, as it is usually thought, because of the hostile Aryan invasion. These Buddhist kingdoms survive in Java even today in the tremendous temples of Boroboedor and Brambanan. “The conversion of a navigable bay into a salt desert, and the diversion of the rivers that watered it, must have spelled ruin and starvation to multitudes of its agricultural and seafaring inhabitants, who would have been forced to migrate on a scale unusual in history”, SCHOFF, *Periplus*, , 174.

fissures, when even the course of the river is altered. He says that when he was sent on some business, he saw a tract of land deserted which contained more than a thousand cities with their villages, for the Indus, having forsaken its proper channels, turned itself into another on the left, much deeper, into which it burst like a cataract, so that it no longer watered the country on the right, from which it recede, for this had been raised by the inundations not only above the level of the new channel but even above that of the new inundations²³.

At the time of the *Periplus* it seems to have been “open water, although shoal, with a clear opening into the ocean below the Indus delta, and with a branch of the Indus running into it”²⁴. This saline plain was certainly at one time flooded by sea, as shown by the abundance of salt and by the remains of vessels dug up near the neighbouring villages. Within historical times it was probably a scene of active sea trade; even in modern times the port of Mandavi, on the southern coast of Cutch, carries on a direct trade with Zanzibar, in small vessels averaging 50 tons, of less than 10 feet draught. Schoff remarks,

The whole area was probably raised by some great earthquake. The upheaval is too regular to have occurred by ordinary causes. At the time of the *Periplus* it seems to have been open water, although shoal, with a clear opening into the ocean below the Indus delta, and with a branch of the Indus running into it. Now the Indus delta is pushed very much farther south, and the scour of the tides has carried its alluvium along the coast, almost blocking up the Rann; while the branch that watered it no longer flows in that direction²⁵.

It seems that the river Indus had a tributary that almost flowed into the Cutch region. Geological studies in the Gulf of Cambay pointed out that from the geological formation of the country bordering on the Rann, it appeared that the drainage of the Punjab once flowed into it:

It may have been that the original course of the Indus from the Punjab was in a more south-easterly direction than that of the present day ... (In this Gulf), coinciding to a large extent with the black-soil belt, there can be clearly traced a natural depression in the surface of the country for some twenty miles from the head of the Gulf, terminating in a shallow lake of brackish water called the Null ...at the time (some of the Vedas) were composed, the Suruswuttee, the most easterly of the Punjab rivers, which now loses itself in the desert of Rajpootana, flowed into the Indian Ocean. This confirms to some extent the theory of the case of the alluvial deposit at the head of the Gulf of Cambay²⁶.

There fore, the whole Cutch region of today was a navigable bay and it was easy for voyagers to come to the ports of the Western India. This indicates that these two regions at the river Narbada and the river Indus were easily accessible to a voyager desiring to go from one to the other. And the invaders from the early centuries had reached the Decan from Kabul and Multan and above by coming down the Indus. The early Sakas, of whom the Andhra kings were but a branch, have used the same route. And curiously enough, as Vincent remarks, there seems to be a general connection between this province of Gujarat and Sind, for “Paolina remarks the language is the same from

²³J.C. MCCRINDLE, *Ancient India Described in Classical Literature*, Westminster, 25.

²⁴ *Periplus*, 174.

²⁵ SCHOFF, *Periplus*, 173-174.

²⁶ A. ROGERS, “A few remarks on the Geology of the country surrounding the Gulf of Cambay in Western India”, *Quarterly Journal of Geological Society of London*, 26 (1870), 118-124. He was perhaps among the earliest observers of the geology of the Gulf of Cambay (close to Lothal) in Gujarat coast.

Surat to Tatta”²⁷. This helps us to think that these two regions of India were connected geographically, politically and commercially and for the apostle and his companion to go to the Indus delta from the delta of Narmada was not very difficult. The *Acts of Thomas* gives us this particular information that as the inhabitants of the first city of India were mourning over the departure of the apostle from their midst, they got news that Thomas was preaching in the city of India and they also went and joined him. This shows that these two regions were having some kind of communication and perhaps a constant contact between them could be thought of. The author of the *Acts of Thomas* must have had a good knowledge of these places when he composed his work. At the time of his writing the book, far greater information concerning these regions were surely at his disposal than we have of them at present. But as his primary purpose of composing the book was catechetical and not historical, he might not have thought of giving much concern to historical, geographical and political precision.

The rulers of this region were, as we have already seen, the Andhra kings or the Western *Kshatrapas*. It seems that they had a kind of subordination to the Indo-Parthian Kings. “The earliest foreign ruler in the west whose name has been preserved was the Satrap Bhumaka Kshaharata, who struck coins with Parthian affinities, and may be presumed to have been subordinate to one or other of the Indo-Parthian kings, perhaps Gondophares”²⁸. Though the exact date of his reign is not known, it may be assumed to be approximately at the middle of the first century A.D., or possibly a somewhat earlier period²⁹. The next important king in this line whose name is recorded in history is Nahapana. The period of his rule may be placed approximately between AD 60 and 90³⁰. His name indicates a Persian origin. At first he held the title of *Satrap*, but later he assumed the title the Great Satrap (*Mahakshatrapa*) and he was also known by the Indian title of *Raja*. His dominions comprised a large area, extending from Southern Rajputana to Nazik and Poona districts in the Western Ghats, and including the peninsula of Surastra or Kathiavar. His titles of *Satrap* and *Mahakshatrap* indicate subordination to a northern power, which can only have been that of the Kushans who were the immediate successors of the Indo-Scythians. His coins always bear the symbol of arrow and thunderbolt and this connect him with the Parthians. All the Saka kings in India had this particular symbol which showed their subordination to the Parthians³¹. Gondophares the great Indo-Parthian king also had this symbol. When the Kushans overthrew the Kingdom of the Indo-Parthians, not long after the death of Gondophares (50 A.D.), we may assume that the *Kshatrapas* in the west continued to be subordinated to the Kushans. There fore there seems to have been an historical and political relation between the rulers of the Sind region and those of the Narbada region. And this affinity calls for a constant communication between these two regions as we have postulated a little while ago. The *Periplus* furnishes us with this particular information that the coins of Alexander and Meneander were still in circulation in Barygaza³².

Therefore, there existed historical, political, geographical and linguistic relation between the two regions, the Indus delta and the delta of the Narmada, in our case

²⁷ W. VINCENT, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients*, 385, note 22.

²⁸ V.A. SMITH, *Early History of India*, 209.

²⁹ V.A. SMITH, *Early History of India*, 210.

³⁰ G. YAZDANI, (ed.), *The Early History of the Deccan*, Parts I-VI, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1960, 103.

³¹ V.A. SMITH, *Early History*, 210.

³² *Periplus*, 47.

between Taxila and Barygaza. If such relations existed, there should have been regular contacts between them, and in this case there would be nothing unbelievable or absurd in saying that the apostle Thomas first landed at Barygaza and from there journeyed to the kingdom of Gondophares, as the author of the *Ath* seems to make us believe. And the description that he was in company with a man who knew the country and its trade routes very well, Haban, the *rajavaidehika* of King Gondophares, gives more credit to the theory.

2.4 Jewish presence at Barygaza

Our next point of discussion is the presence of a Jewish girl at the banquet in which the apostle and Haban took part. According to the *Ath* it is the Jewish girl that had been first converted by the apostle to his faith³³. And she was instrumental in converting the king and other people. At the end of the first act we see her weeping over the departure of the apostle without taking her with him³⁴.

Now our question is, how comes a Jewish girl in this port city of India? To find an answer, let us first see if it were possible for the Jews to be present at the west coast of India in the first century AD. This is possible considering the following facts – the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, the establishment of *pax romana*, the pre-eminence of the port of Barygaza as an international trade centre and the identity of the Jews as great commercial people. So there may be nothing astonishing about this girl at the banquet in the palace of one of the Andhra kings³⁵. Slave girls were taken to India by the western traders as gifts to the native kings. Among the lists of the imports to Barygaza, in the *Periplus*, we read among others, as gifts for the king, costly vessels of silver, singing boys, fine wine and *beautiful maidens for the harem*³⁶. And it is to be specially noted that it was only to Barygaza these girls were taken. No other place is mentioned by *Periplus* as receiving girls for the harem. And according to the *Periplus*, these girls came from Persia. Strabo also testifies to this presence of Jewish girls at the palace of the kings of Gujarat³⁷.

It is believed that Jews were present in the West coast of India from the time of diaspora. But we do not have evidences to prove this belief. But Jews known as *Bene Israel* (Sons of Israel), were present at many of the places at this coast and they are still to be found in one or two settlements³⁸. But we do not have the exact date of their arrival in

³³ In fact the apostle were all first sent to preach among the Jews. Here one may note an echo of this traditional belief. The apostle to India also might have followed the routes in India where there were supposed to be a considerable Jewish presence. The Jews were primarily business people and if they were already present in India in the first century AD, it is quite natural to suppose that they were also present in the port city of Barygaza.

³⁴ *Ath* I,

³⁵ “... if Habshis are still found in Janjira, little surprise need be felt if a Hebrew slave girl is described as living at the court of those Andhra kings”, ZACHARIAS, *The Indian Christians of Saint Thomas and Bartholmoeo*, 148.

³⁶ *Periplus*, 49.

³⁷ “La rencontre, pour être surprenante, n’en est pas moins conforme aux vraisemblables. Les jeunes musiciennes d’origine occidentale étaient aux témoignage de Strabon un article d’importation assure de plaire dans l’Inde ; elles ne s’y distinguaient pas professionnellement des *jeunes filles bien faites destinées a la débauche* que les trafiquants grecs offraient, avec des instrument des musiques, aux rois des ports du Guzerate », Strabon 82, 18, quoted by S. LEVY, “Notes sur les Indo-Scythians. III. St Thomas, Gondophares et Mazdeo”, *Journal Asiatique*, 9(1897), 33.

³⁸ At present these people are settled at Thana near Bombay. They number about 5000 people all others having returned to Israel and migrated to English speaking countries. Various studies had been done on these Jews of the Western coasts of India. The following works are quite useful : J.I. BENJAMIN, *The Bene*

India. There are many traditions about the origin of these *Bene Israel* of the Konkan region. Their customs and traditions point to a very ancient origin³⁹. It is a belief among these Jews that they came to India before the destruction of the second temple. It is assumed from the fact that they were ignorant of many Jewish events and practices, knew nothing of the Hanukkah festival and the ninth of Ab fast⁴⁰. They were equally ignorant of the Jewish events between 200 and 300 A.D. They are supposed to belong to the tribes of Asher and Zebulon, who were from the time of King Solomon the navigators of the Jewish people. The mariners who used to visit India were once shipwrecked on the Indian coasts not very far from Ophir⁴¹. This Ophir is the present Surat not very far from Bombay. And Surat is close to Broach (Barygaza).

Added evidence to the possible likelihood of the marriage feast being taken place at Barygaza is the mention of a vast forest area just near to this port city on the right side of the river Narbada. In the *Historical Geography of Ancient India* we read, “there was a forest in this sea port town called Korinta. It was on the banks of Narmada. Jina Suvrata visited it for instructing Jita Satru who was then engaged in horse sacrifice”⁴². If we take into consideration this large forest just near to the royal palace at least one of the legendary elements of the story of the marriage feast will vanish into thin air. Other wise one is quite logical in asking from where comes this lion in to the vicinity of a royal palace.

3 Christians at Barygaza

If we probably hold that Barygaza was the place where the Apostle first landed in India, It would be quite natural to ask if there was a Christian community at Barygaza who claimed Thomas as their apostle. Today there are Christians there, but they are all fruits of the modern missionary efforts. So we have to make an inquiry in to the history to see if there were Christians here and if they at any time claimed to be the descendants of those converted by Thomas.

In 354 a certain Theophilus, the Indian is said to have visited these parts of India and he is said to have come across Christians who were really integrated in the culture of India. This Theophilus had been sent when very young as a hostage from Divaeans to the Romans, when Constantine was at the head of the empire. The island called Divus is a portion of their territory, and the inhabitants of it are called Indians. When Theophilus had dedicated the Churches, and adorned them with such decorations as he could, he crossed

Israel of India, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1984; K. NATHAN, *Studies in Indian Jewish Identity*, New Delhi, 1995; K.H.SAMUEL, *History of Bene Israel*, Jerusalem, 1937 (This book was written in 1897 and was published only in 1937); S. SAMUEL, *Bene Israel of Maharashtra State*, Bombay, 1963.

³⁹ « D’après eux, leur arrivé en Inde remonte à des temps très reculés, soit avant la destruction du second Temple. Leur bateau aurait fait naufrage tous près d’une petite localité, Navgaon. Ce village est localisé près de deux petits îlots rocheux, Henry et Kenery (non loin de l’ancien port de Cheul). A l’exception de sept hommes et sept femmes, tous les passagers auraient péri et les livres de prières ainsi que le rouleaux de la Torah auraient disparu, emportés par les flots. Les naufragés auraient été enterrés par les survivants sous deux petits monticules de terre qu’aujourd’hui encore les Bene Israël considèrent comme le premier cimetière juif de Konkan ». M. ZETLAOUI, *Shalom India Histoire des communautés juives en Inde*, Imago, Paris, 2001, 210.

⁴⁰ When the existence of a Jewish community in India first attracted public attention in the 18th century, the group still adhered to such characteristic Jewish practises as circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, certain dietary laws, and celebration of some important major festivals such as Rosh Hashana (New Year), Yom Kipur (Day of Atonement), Pesah (Passover), and Purim (Feast of Lots). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropedia I, 973.

⁴¹ M. ZETLAOUI, *Shalom India*, 212.

⁴² B.C. LAW, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, 279.

over to the island of Divus, which was his native island. From there he made his way to the other districts of India and corrected many disorders among the inhabitants. For they listened to the Gospel in a sitting posture and had many other customs that were contrary to the law of God⁴³.

Cap. Wilford writes about Theophilus: "... the former Arian Bishop was a native of Divus, now Diu in Gujarat, and he was remarkably black that he was surnamed Blackmoor. His Hindu name was probably Deo Pal, perfectly synonymous with Theophilus in Greek. ...He had been sent to Constantinople with other people as hostage. He built their Churches for the benefit chiefly of the Roman traders. One of it was in the Persian Gulf. From there he went by sea to Diu, his native country and visited several parts of India"⁴⁴. In all probability the native land of Theophilus was Diu, a small island on the Gujarat coast of India. The suggestion that he crossed over to his native place indicates that the place was in India, if it had been to Yemen that he was sent as ambassador. In India he met with a Christian community that was having some practices which were against the Christian law. One of these practices mentioned is that they listen to the Gospel in a sitting posture. And we know that this is a true Indian style of listening to the reading. The practice of all Indian religions from the very early times was hearing the reading in a sitting posture. This custom is really Indian and it cannot come from other places. Theophilus was in India around 378 AD. The faithful by that time were already asked to stand up for the reading of the Gospel in the Church of Persia. So this particular Christian community that Theophilus saw in India could not be having much contact with the Persian Church. "It is interesting to note that the practice of sitting while the Gospel was being read, which is specially singled out for reproof, was also made a matter of reproach against the Alexandrian Church. Says Zozoman, 'among the Alexandrians prevailed this new and unbecoming custom, that while the Gospel was being read the bishop did not rise, which I have neither seen nor heard done elsewhere'. In India it was evidently also done. Is there in this common irregularity a trace of a relationship between the Church that sent Pantene forth, and the inchoate Church in the land to which he was sent?"⁴⁵ So this question also is very important. Was there such a relation between the Church of Alexandria and the Church of India? If this is answered positively this may even strengthen our belief that the port of embarkation of the Apostle was Alexandria and Haban had met the Apostle there. So we will have to hold that the Church in North and west India were more related to the Alexandrian Church than the Church of Persia. Theophilus was in India and his native place was Diu or some other places in this part of India. Then the Christians he found must have been near his native place, which had later become a Christian centre at the time of the Portugese occupation who had made it a bastion of their colonial power. Interestingly Barygaza comes geographically very close to Diu. This Diu had been of great importance in the long trade route between Barygaza and the West and Baryagza and the Indus delta. So it was the Christian community of Barygaza that Theophilus had visited. This Christian community was deeply rooted in the local tradition and culture. It was not an outfit of the Persian Church nor was it influenced by that Church. It was clearly indigenous and carried indigenous customs and traditions.

⁴³ This summary of this story is taken from A.M. MUNDANDAN, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, 118.

⁴⁴ Cap. F. WILFORD, "Origin and decline of Christian religion in India", *Asiatic Researches*, vol. X, 1808, 71-72.

⁴⁵ J.N. OGLIVIE, *The Apostles of India*, in G. MENACHERY (ed), *Nazranis*, (IHC) Trissur, 1998, 459.

The story of Jordanus of Severac also takes us to the Christians at Barygaza who had great reverence for the apostle Thomas⁴⁶. When Jordanus and his confreres were at Thana, near Bombay, in 1321, they were received by a Nestorian Christian family into their house. There were some fifteen Nestorian Christian families at this time at Thana. These people told Jordanus that at Broach there are some Christians but they are Christians only by name. The description of the story follows thus:

Four minor brothers with Brother Jourdain...went up on a vessel to gain Columbo (Coulam) but dragged by winds and the storm and also, thanks to the desire of sailors that wanted to visit the church of St Thomas, they were, against their attempts and their will, drawn toward the city of Thana that is three months of road of Tauriz. There were there fifteen families of Christians, but Nestorians. A family of good heart received the brothers in their home. They were at Thana since eight days when the Nestorians advised them to send one of them, to the city of Paroth (Baroach), where there were a lot of Christians, but Christians rather by name than of a real faith, who missing of capable masters to teach them, were unaware of what they had to believe. Fathers would be able, they said, to instruct them and to baptize them. Jordan, who knew the language of the country better than his friends, decided to go there. He took with him two Nestorian Christians, of which one, who perfectly knew the language of the Hindus, offered to serve him as interpreter. Having embarked at Thana, they arrived at Supera where Thomas had preached, and constructed a church that pagans destroyed, but the Christians later rebuilt⁴⁷.

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

In this India there is a scattered people, one here, another there, who call themselves Christians, but are not so, nor have they baptism, nor do they know anything about faith. Nay, they believe St Thomas the great to be Christ⁴⁸.

So can we not assume that they may be the descendents of the converts of Thomas? If they had been the fruits of the Nestorian proselytising efforts of the 7th century AD they should have carried some elements that would be distinguishable to the Nestorians of Thana. This statement of the missionary speaks volumes of the characteristics of the so-called Christians. They were a scattered people and called themselves Christians. But as Jordanus says they were not Christians because they had no baptism. They called

⁴⁶ Jordanus of Severac was a Dominican missionary who together with four other companions set out to India to preach Christianity. He was later made the first Latin Bishop of India. The book written by him, the *Mirabilia Descripta*, remains a source book today. The book is translated into English by H. Yule.

⁴⁷ F. BALME, "Un missionnaire dominicain en Orient au quatorzième siècle. Le B. Jourdain de Séverac, évêque de Coulam sur la côte de Malabar, aux Indes orientales, 1318-36", *L'Anne Dominicaine* (1886), 18-19. The translation is made by the present writer.

⁴⁸ JORDANUS, *Mirabilia Descripta*, H. YULE (tr.), London, 1893, 31.

themselves Christians and believed Thomas to be Christ. This really takes them back to the Apostle Thomas. We quote another passage from *Mirabilia*:

In this India the greater part of the people worship idols, although a great share of the sovereignty is in the hand of the Turkish Saracens, who came forth from Multan, and conquered and usurped dominions to themselves not long since, and destroyed an infinity of idol temples, and likewise many Churches, of which they made mosques for Mahomet, taking possession of their endowments and property. 'It's is grief to hear, it is woe to see'⁴⁹.

Yule the translator of the work comments, "The allusion would seem to be to the conquest of the Carnatic and Malabar by the Generals of the Khilji sovereigns of Delhi, Ala-ud-Din und Mubarik (A.D. 1310-1319). The Khiljis were Turks by descent. Multan was at this time subject to Delhi. But perhaps, the "not long since" has a deeper import, and refers to the conquests and iconoclasms of the great Mahmud of Gazni, 300 years before. Indeed he is speaking here of the Lesser India, i.e. of Sind, Gujarat and the Konkan, the scene of Mahmud's most memorable expeditions. Mahmud coming from Ghazni would come through Multan and indeed he took that city several times"⁵⁰. Thus we come to the conclusion that, as the "Andhra Kingdom extended from the Telugu country proper right across India to Nazik and beyond, where Andhra Kings ruled as 'Lords of the West', one of whom was famous as Maecenas of ancient Maharashtra literature"⁵¹, Andrapolis and its description in the *Ath* fits perfectly such a place as Barygaza. Our proposition, Barygaza as the Sandruck Andrapolis of the *Ath*, is well supported by internal and external evidences. All the evidences, which we have so far unearthed, help us to reach a conclusion that the first city of India or the city of the first India where the apostle Thomas is said to have made his first Indian convert is the port city of Barygaza as mentioned in the *Periplus* and Strabbo or the modern Broach or Bharuch on the West coast of India in the present state of Gujarat.

CONCLUSION

This article was just an attempt to understand the *Acts of Thomas* in its geographical and political milieu. A closer study of this apocryphal book clarifies that unlike popular as well as scholarly belief of the past, the book contains a historical nucleus. In the light of the present added interest in the study of the Apocryphal books, especially of the *Acts of Thomas*, this study assumes a greater proportion. It traces the arrival of the Apostle Thomas in India some years back than the present understanding of 52 AD. The actual landing of the apostle on the shores of India must have taken place some time around 43 AD. The circumstantial evidences show that Thomas might have reached Taxila after 44 AD. The whole journey to India from Alexandria might take, in the normal circumstances, at least one year. The journey from Barygaza to Taxila by road might take six months. He must have stayed at Barygaza at least some six months. Thus we may calculate that the arrival of the Apostle Thomas might have taken place around 43 AD. But, this is only a hypothesis which has to be supported with clear evidences. We hope that it will be a subject of future research. At the same time, though the date may remain a matter for further study and research, Barygaza can be considered as the most probable place of the first disembarkation of the apostle Thomas in India.

⁴⁹ *Mirabilia Descripta*, 23.

⁵⁰ *Mirabilia Descripta*, 23.

⁵¹ ZACHARIAS, *The Churches of Sts Thomas and Bartholomew*, p. 148.

