

# ASIATIC PAPERS

## A CHRISTIAN CROSS WITH A PAHLAVI INSCRIPTION

### RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE TRAVANCORE

#### STATE

*(Read on 11th September 1924.)*

#### I.

MR. A. R. RAMANATH AYYAR, Superintendent of Archæology in the Travancore State, kindly sent me, for decipherment, with his letter, dated Trivandrum, 5th February 1924, "a photo-print of a Cross, which was recently discovered at Kaḍamaṭṭam in the Travancore State, having a Pahlavi inscription engraved on a canopying ribbon round it." Mr. Ayyar wrote: "It may be noted that the portion of the inscription on the left limb of the arch is identical with the shorter sentence found on the Crosses at St. Thomas's Mount and at Koṭṭayam, while the remaining portion of the writing seems to consist of two short sentences separated by a + mark." The photo-print was not clear. So, I wrote on 13th February and requested "that a full-size squeeze of it may be taken." Mr. Ayyar thereupon sent me, with his letter of 18th February, an estampage of the inscription, and then, later on, sent also a photograph of a better impression. He repeated in this second letter what was said in the first about the writing on the left limb of the Cross, that it was "identical with the shorter sentence engraved in the same portion of the three other Crosses

at Kottayam and St. Thomas's Mount." He then added: "The equal-armed Cross, cut out in low relief under the inscribed belt, is similar to that found at the Mount and that the sculpture seems to be of a slightly later date, but this question of age will have to be decided by Pahlavi scholars on a consideration of the script engraved in the record in question."

As to the situation of the Church in which the Cross is found, the particular position in which it is found and the sculptural details of the Cross, I will quote here at some length Mr. Ayyar's remarks, which he has made in his official Report, and of which he has kindly sent me a copy with his letter of 22nd April 1924. He writes:

"This Cross is found embedded in the south wall of the sanctum in the Jacobite-Syrian Church at Kaḍamaṭṭam, a village six miles to the west of Muvattupula, a taluk-centre in the Travancore State and about 40 miles from Kottayam where the other two Crosses are found; but my informants were unable to give me any interesting details as to whether this Cross had been preserved in the Church from a very long time or whether it was brought down from some other place and fixed up in its present position. The Church which is picturesquely situated on the top of a small hillock does not claim any antiquity, epigraphical or architectural, except for the presence of this Persian Cross. This new Cross resembles the bigger Kottayam Cross in its sculptural details, i.e., it is an equal-armed Greek type with fleur-de-lis extremities, and it stands on a pedestal of three steps. It is flanked by two detached pilasters of the same type as that of the other two examples and on the capitals of these are also found two couchant *makaras* or fish-monsters facing each other and supporting with their gaping mouths a semi-circular belt (*prabhāvali*) arching above the Cross. The outer rim of this arch is represented as ornamentally curving out in two hooks on either side of some central flower-and-bead cluster. In the place occupied by a down-turned dove with outspread wings (symbolizing the Holy Ghost) and shown as pecking at the top of the upper limb of the Cross, we have in the Kaḍamaṭṭam example a somewhat curiously shaped object which resembles a crown or a bishop's mitre, or worse still a shuttle-cock; but as these have no symbolical significance, we have to take this object to be an extremely crude representation of a dove, whose extended wings have the outlines of two inturned rose leaves, whose body and tail are inartistically sculptured as five straight feather-tipped strands, and whose head and beak (looking like a turnip) are hardly recognizable as parts of a bird's anatomy. On either side of the lower limb of the Cross are the same floral device



branching out upwards in conventional curls and a semi-circular triple band envelops the steps in a rainbow arch. Five oblong niche-like depressions have been crudely picked out for the sake of ornament on the plain pedestal below this cavalry of three steps and some later (Romish ?) enthusiast has conveniently managed to shape them into the abbreviated formula I. N. R. I. (*Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judæorum*). The portion containing the Pahlavi writing is a narrow ribbon of stone which springs at either extremity of this base and going up straight to a height of about 15" curves round in a semi-circular arch of 9" radius enveloping the top of the Cross and its halo-circle.

"The inscription on this band seems to consist of three short sentences separated by two + (cross) marks. Of these the portion running down the left limb from one such mark at the top corner appears to be identical with the shorter sentence found in the same position in all the other three Crosses, both at Kottayam and the Mount; but the remaining portion appears to be different and to consist of two sentences marked off by the other dividing + symbol. Sculpturally considered, this crudely wrought Cross at Kaṣamaṭṭam seems to be a later copy of the one at St. Thomas's Mount; but an authoritative opinion as to its probable age can be pronounced *only* by Pahlavi scholars, after a careful consideration of the script employed in the present record."

It appears from the *Indian Antiquary*<sup>1</sup> of December 1923, that the slab of the Cross was discovered at the close of the year 1921 by Mr. T. K. Joseph. The discoverer writes (*op. cit.* p. 355):

"As the epigraph was in Pahlavi and not in Vatteḷuttu, I forwarded a copy of it to the Pahlavi scholar Dr. Cassartelli. The inscription seems to be a replica of the one on the other two similar slabs. Rev. Fr. H. Hosten, S.J., of Darjeeling, in a letter to me dated 27th May 1922, says: 'I have compared it with the Mylapore (Greek Mount) inscription, and have little doubt but yours is a replica of it.'"

Rev. Father Hosten has referred to this new Cross in his article entitled "Christian Archæology in Malabar" in the December 1922 issue of the *Catholic Herald of India*. He says there that "the art displayed by the Kaṣamaṭṭam Cross. . . may help to determine certain almost obliterated designs of the Mylapore Cross, and this may lead to a very distinct advance in the interpretation of the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians." Rev. Father Hosten has described again, in detail, from photographs sent to him recently by the Archæological Department of Tra-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 52, pp. 355-6.



vancore, the design of the Crosses and the symbolism on them.<sup>2</sup> In his description, he speaks of the pillars of the St. Thomas Mount as "appearing to be more primitive, more Persepolitan(?), than those of the Kottayam Cross, No. 1."

Mr. Joseph does not tell us how Dr. Cassartelli, the learned Bishop of Sanford, has read and translated the inscription. As far as I know, his transliteration and translation are not published.

From Dr. Burnell's article<sup>3</sup> which is referred to later on, and other subsequent writings on the subject we gather that the Mount Church Cross was discovered by the Portuguese when they were digging in 1547 the foundation for a new Church, the Mount Church on its present site. They came across the ruins of old Christian buildings, and in these ruins, they found the Cross with the Pahlavi inscription. This they installed in their new Church where it now stands. According to Dr. Burnell, miracles were believed to have been worked with this Cross. This Cross was soon unhesitatingly identified with the one which the Apostle St. Thomas is said to have embraced while on the point of death and its miraculous virtues specially obtained great fame.<sup>4</sup>

## II.

In reply to Mr. Ayyar's inquiries, I had submitted my reading and rendering of the inscription to him with my letter of 15th April. After I announced my paper to our Society, I learnt that my translation, sent to Mr. Ayyar, was published in the June 1924 issue of the *Academy* by Mr. T. K. Joseph, the discoverer of the inscription, to whom it seems to have been passed on by Mr. Ayyar. In this paper, I beg to treat the whole subject at some length. If I do not mistake, this is the first attempt at decipherment in relation to this Cross.

*Decipherment of the Inscriptions on the previous Crosses.*—Mr. Ayyar and Mr. Joseph have referred to three other Crosses of the kind previously discovered and as Mr. Ayyar has spoken of a short sentence of the recently discovered Cross as being identical

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Athæneum*, August 1923, p. 67 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, November 1874, pp. 308-16.

<sup>4</sup> T. K. Joseph, *Indian Antiquary*, December 1923, p. 355.



with a similar sentence in the previously discovered Crosses, I will, at first, speak briefly of these Crosses, their inscriptions, and the attempts made to decipher them. If I do not mistake, this is the first time that the subject of the Crosses inscribed in Pahlavi has been brought before our Society, and so, I think, a brief account will be of some use to our local students.

(a) The Crosses with Pahlavi inscriptions were first discovered in 1873 by Dr. A. C. Burnell, who drew the attention of scholars to them in a letter, dated "Mangalore, South Canara, Madras Presidency, May 12th, 1873," addressed to the London *Academy* and published in its issue of 14th June 1873 (pp. 237-8). In that letter, he expressed an expectation, that "the old Syrian Churches (at Nirāṇam, Kayamkullam, etc.) will no doubt furnish other copies" (p. 238). The recently discovered inscription under examination has fulfilled Dr. Burnell's expectation, and we should not be surprised if some more Crosses with inscriptions are discovered in that part of the country. In the same letter, Dr. Burnell had promised to get the inscription lithographed and send copies of the lithograph to Pahlavi Scholars and he had done so.

Dr. Burnell's interest in the discovery of the Pahlavi inscriptions was from the point of view of supporting Prof. Weber, who had, in his essay on the Rāmāyaṇa "suspected Greek influences in the composition of that poem" (*op. cit.* p. 237). He said: "It will now, in consequence of this discovery, be possible to prove that much in the modern philosophical schools of India comes from some form of Christianity derived from Persia; and this fact at once explains also the origin of the modern Vedānta sects in Southern India exclusively." Dr. Burnell added: "The number of these tablets proves that there must have been [Christian] communities in several places, and those large enough to have Churches, both on the S. W. and S. E. coasts of India." The early Christian settlers from Persia were taken to be Manichæans, and Dr. Burnell thought, that Manigrāmam, the name of the settlement of the Persian Christians, came from Mānī, the founder of Manichæism. Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānuja and Madhvācārya, who founded the modern schools of Vedānta, were all supposed



to have come under the influence of Christian settlers whose settlements were not far from the towns of these founders.

(b) Dr. Burnell then published a pamphlet, entitled "On some Pahlavi Inscriptions in South India." It was printed, in 1873, at the Mission Press in Mangalore.

(c) This pamphlet was reprinted with additions by Dr. Burnell in the *Indian Antiquary* for November 1874 (vol. 3, pp. 308-16), under the heading "On some Pahlavi Inscriptions in South India," with four figures. These are: (1) The Mount Cross, (2 & 3) the Sassanian and Chaldeo-Pahlavi attestation to a grant, and (4) the Tablet at Kottayam.

(d) On the appearance of Dr. Burnell's pamphlet, Dr. Martin Haug, attempted a reading and translation in the *Beilage zur allgemeinen Zeitung* (No. 29) of 29th January 1874. Haug's reading and rendering are given by Burnell in the reprint of his pamphlet in the *Indian Antiquary* for November 1874 (p. 314).

(e) Then Dr. E. W. West gave his reading and rendering while reviewing Dr. Burnell's above pamphlet, in the *Academy* of 24th January 1874 (vol. 5, pp. 96-7). He gave two readings and two translations, varying according to the position of the lines, *i. e.*, when one read the upper and longer line first or the shorter line first. Again for the short line, he submitted an alternative reading and rendering.

(f) Thereafter, in 1892, Prof. Harlez gave his reading and translation, before the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists, which met at Paris (*Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists*, Paris, 1892).<sup>5</sup>

(g) Then, in the *Epigraphia Indica* of 1896-97 (vol. 4, pp. 174-6), Dr. West gave an amended reading and translation.<sup>6</sup> Herein he read the long line first.

<sup>5</sup> Vide Dastur Darabji Peshotan Sanjana's paper in the *Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Madressa Jubilee Volume*.

<sup>6</sup> In a brief paper, read before the Jarthoshti Din ni khol karnari Mandli, on 14th November 1896, I drew the attention of our Parsee scholars to Dr. West's above-mentioned article in the *Epigraphia Indica* and gave a brief account of the Pahlavi inscriptions in Madras. Vide my Gujarati Iranian essays (પરસી ભાષા), part III, pp. 193-96; also my *Glimpse into the Work of the Jarthoshti Din ni khol karnari Mandli*, p. 70.



(h) Then Shams-ul-ulama Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana gave four alternative readings and renderings in his paper entitled "The Pahlavi Inscription on the Mount Cross in Southern India".<sup>7</sup>

### III.

*Doubt as to the Script being Pahlavi.*—Before I proceed further, I will say here a few words on the subject of the doubt as to whether the script of these inscriptions is Pahlavi. Mr. Ayyar in his letter of 16th May 1924 writes:

"While all Persian scholars, though they may have certain disagreements in its interpretation, are however decided that the script employed in the record is Pahlavi, it is passing strange that Dr. Bernard of St. Thomas of the Mannanum (Travancore) Carmelite Seminary should, in his *History of the St. Thomas Christians* (in Malayalam), give a curious preference to the interpretation which certain Brahmans of Mylapore are supposed to have offered to the Portuguese in the 16th century and that Fr. Burthey of Trichinopoly, more interested in theology than archaeology, should have declared the script and language of the record to be Aramaic and Tamil respectively."

Thus, giving an expression to his surprise, Mr. Ayyar has sent me "two prints of the Kottayam Crosses wherein," he says, he has "successfully combined separate photos of the Crosses and the estampages of their inscriptions so as to yield clear and complete pictures." On carefully looking at these two prints, and on looking to the facsimiles given in other writings as referred to in this paper, and on looking to the photo-liths of the inscriptions on the Crosses, students of Pahlavi would have no doubt about the script being Pahlavi.

I will refer here in passing to a well-nigh similar case, wherein a script, which was Pahlavi as determined later on by Pahlavi scholars,<sup>8</sup> was not recognised as Pahlavi even by a scholar like Anquetil Du Perron. It is the case of the Pahlavi inscriptions in the Kanheri caves in the neighbourhood of Borivli. It was in 1861, that the late Dr. Bhau Daji had first drawn attention to

<sup>7</sup> The *Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Madressa Jubilee Volume*, edited by Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, 1914, pp. 192-8.

<sup>8</sup> See *Jarthoshti Abhyas*, No. II, p. 98a; No. III, p. 146a, 146-63 and No. IV, pp. 209-17.



them, and it was in 1866 that Dr. (then Mr.) E. W. West submitted a Note, dated 5th May 1866, to this Society, drawing special attention of scholars to the Pahlavi inscription.<sup>9</sup> Anquetil Du Perron saw the inscription in 1761, but he did not recognize the script as Pahlavi. He speaks of their being in Mogous or Mougous characters. In one place, he speaks of the characters as Mongous. He says:<sup>10</sup> "Deux inscriptions, qui paroissent récentes, chacune de douze lignes perpendiculaires; gravées peu profondément, & en caracteres Mougous, sur deux piliers qui font partie des murs; l'une haute d'un pied, l'autre large & haute de quinze pouces."<sup>11</sup>

In another place,<sup>12</sup> he speaks of the script as Mongous (caracteres Mongous). In the Index<sup>13</sup> again, he gives it as Mongous. We see from this, that even a scholar like Anquetil who knew Pahlavi though not much, could not recognize a Pahlavi inscription and took the characters to be Mogous or Mongous. "I think," as I have said elsewhere, "that the word Mougous is correct and is the same as the Parsee word Magav or Magous, the Greek Magi. It seems that he was properly informed by his guide or guides at the caves, that the characters were those of the Magous or Magis, but he did not properly understand the word, to take it for the characters of the Persian Magi or Mobads."<sup>14</sup> It seems that, just as in the case of the Malabar Coast Crosses, so in the case of the Kanheri and other caves in the neighbourhood, the Brahmins in charge of the places of worship had strange views. They seem to have told Anquetil that they were the works of Alexander the Great!

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<sup>9</sup> *Vide* my paper on Anquetil Du Perron read before this Society on 16th December 1915; and my *Anquetil Du Perron and Dastur Darab*, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> *Zend-Avesta*, vol. I, p. 404.

<sup>11</sup> Translation: "Two inscriptions, which appear recent, each of 12 perpendicular lines, inscribed less deep, and in character Mougous, over two pillars which form a part of the walls; one, one foot high and the other 15 inches broad and high."

<sup>12</sup> *Zend-Avesta*, vol. I, p. 395.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* vol. II, p. 732.

<sup>14</sup> *Vide* my paper on Anquetil Du Perron. *Vide* my book *Anquetil Du Perron and Dastur Darab*, p. 50.



## IV.

Before I give my decipherment, I beg to refer to the difficulty of reading such inscriptions. The decipherment of Pahlavi inscriptions is often difficult. The difficulty is due to various causes:

(a) Firstly, as many of the letters of the Pahlavi alphabet admit of more than one reading, there is, at times, a difference of opinion among scholars about the reading of some words even in the manuscripts. (b) This difficulty is added to in the case of inscriptions, wherein, besides the difficulty of engraving, there is that of doing so within a limited space. (c) Then, there is a further difficulty, when the inscription is to be done in an arched space. (d) Lastly, the artists, who engrave such inscriptions, are not literary men. They work mechanically from copies or tracings submitted to them and any error in the form of letters adds to the difficulty of deciphering them.

The difficulty about the decipherment of a Pahlavi inscription like that under notice is well illustrated by the attempts of scholars in reading the Pahlavi inscription on the above-mentioned Christian Cross in the Church of Mount St. Thomas at Madras, the like of which is also found on two Crosses at Kottayam. Scholars differ, not only here and there, but in most of their readings. Dr. West has given two readings, the second being an emendation of the first. Even in his first reading, he has given an alternative reading of the short sentence. Dastur Darabji P. Sanjana has given four alternative readings and translations. These facts show how difficult it is to decipher a Pahlavi inscription on a Christian Cross of the kind which is under examination in this paper. What Dr. West has very properly said of the Mount St. Thomas Cross is true of this also, that "there is little chance of any two Pahlavi scholars agreeing about its interpretation." In another place, he says: "It is exceedingly easy to point out such defects, but it is not so easy to suggest any really satisfactory reading of the whole inscription, as only the three words *denman*, *madam* and *bokht* are indisputable."<sup>15</sup> Again, add to the difficulty inherent in the read-

<sup>15</sup> *Academy*, 24th January 1874, p. 97.



ing itself, that of obtaining really good estampages and photos. For example, take the case of the inscription of the previously discovered Crosses.

We have before us, among several others latterly given by other writers, three following impressions of the Mount St. Thomas Cross inscription: (1) The one given by Dr. Burnell; (2) the one given by Dr. West in the *Epigraphia Indica*; and (3) the one given by Dr. Harlez in the Report of the 1892 Oriental Congress of Paris.<sup>16</sup>

Strange to say, we find slight differences in all these three impressions or copies in the matter of the above-mentioned short sentence. By carefully observing this short sentence in all the three Crosses, one will notice that, though apparently identical, there is a difference here and there. Dr. West had to wait for some time before he gave his amended reading from more than one good copy of the photo-litho.

Rev. Hosten says: "If I were a Sassanian-Pahlavi scholar, I would not be satisfied with deciphering from photographs. I would insist on good estampages. . . only a rubbing, therefore, could bring out the exact details of the lettering with every jot and tittle."<sup>17</sup> With that view, I had asked for an estampage of this newly discovered Cross, and I thank Mr. Ayyar for kindly sending it to me. I am not sure whether it is a good estampage. But even with this estampage and the second good photo-print kindly sent to me by Mr. Ayyar, the task of decipherment has not been easy. In reply to Mr. Ayyar's inquiries, I submitted my reading and translation with my letter of 15th April 1924. I repeat here what I wrote to him: "One cannot claim any finality in such reading. When you see, that in the case of the previous inscription, the readings of five scholars—two of whom have submitted a number of alternate readings and translations—have differed, you must expect differences between my attempt and that of others who may follow."

With these few preliminary observations suggested by the decipherment of the inscription on the known Crosses, I beg to submit my reading and translation of the Pahlavi inscription on the Kaḍamaṭṭam Cross.

<sup>16</sup> As reproduced by Dastur Darabji in his article in the Madressa Jubilee Volume.

<sup>17</sup> *Indian Athæneum*, August 1923, p. 71.



TEXT.<sup>18</sup>

[illegible]

د (۱۴) س-پُر کسوسه پوسه په سکه د سکه د ۱۳۹۲

## TRANSLITERATION.

- (1) Li zibah vai min Ninav val denman
- (2) Napisht Mar Shapur
- (3) Li (mun) ahrob Mashiah avakhshāhi min khār bokht.

## TRANSLATION.

- (1) I, a beautiful bird from Nineveh, (have come) to this (country).
- (2) Written (by) Mar Shapur.
- (3) Holy Messiah, the forgiver, freed me from thorn (*i. e.* affliction).

I will now submit a few notes to explain my reading of certain words. I will at first speak of the first line on the right of the arch which is to be read from above to down below. Dr. West says of the similarly situated short line of the previous Crosses that "the shorter<sup>19</sup> line is much more uncertain, and there is little chance of any two Pahlavi scholars agreeing about its interpretation."<sup>20</sup> I think, this may turn out to be true of this line also.

(a) I have read what Dr. West has called a dash in the previous Cross as the word *li*, i.e. 'I.' In connection with this word, or dash, as he calls it, as seen in the previous inscriptions, Dr. West says: "The Inscription is really divided into two unequal portions by a small cross and dash. This dash is developed at

<sup>18</sup> The Inscription consists of three parts separated by a + cross-like mark. I have begun my reading from right hand side, reading the first line down from above. In the second two lines I have gone up from the right and have come down below to the left.

<sup>19</sup> The previous inscriptions have only two lines, one long and another short.

<sup>20</sup> *Academy*, 24th June 1874, p. 97.



Koṭṭayam into a shape like an hour-glass, or the cipher 8, laid upon its side; but this can hardly be read as any combination of Pahlavi letters, and is probably ornamental.”<sup>21</sup> I think, it is not an ornamental dash, but is the word *li*, i.e. ‘I.’ Our present inscription has, instead of two, three sentences separated by a cross. There is a similar sign (or dash as said by Dr. West) between the second and the third line, though not exactly the same. In the commencement of the third sentence, it is more like that on the Koṭṭayam Cross, i.e. of “a shape like an hour-glass.”

(b) I read the second word as *zibah*, Pers. زیبا ‘beautiful.’ One may object, and properly object, that the first letter of the word is not ز (z) as it ought to be written in the beginning of the word. But, I think that it is perhaps the difficulty of engraving, in a limited space, the long shape of z as it should be written in the beginning of a word, that may have led the engraver to use the form of the letter as it occurs in the middle of a word. But the letter may be read as d, if not z, without much difficulty and objection. In that case, it may be read as *dibah* ديبا, i.e. ‘gold-tissued,’ hence ‘beautiful.’ However, I admit, that I am not strong, nay, I am rather doubtful, in the reading of this word; but, I think, it is an adjectival word, qualifying, and in praise of, the next word.


(c) I read the next word as *vaya* (Av. 𐬕𐬀𐬚𐬭𐬀, Skt. *vi*, Lat. *avis* ‘bird’) and I take it that the word refers to the bird, ‘dove,’ in the design of the Cross. We see the bird very clearly in the design of the Mount Cross.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Burnell thus quotes Lucena (“a safe authority on the Portuguese translations in India of that time”) as speaking about the Mount St. Thomas Cross which was discovered “in digging for the foundations of a hermitage amid the ruins which marked the martyrdom of the apostle St. Thomas. On one face of this slab was a Cross in relief, with a bird like a dove over it

<sup>21</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 4, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> See *Indian Antiquary*, November 1874, p. 308 for the design. Also for the design, see the *Sir J. J. Madressa Jubilee Volume*, p. 196 and the estampage of the recently discovered Cross. And finally the Book of Ser Marco Polo, translated by Yule, third edition revised by Cordier (1903) vol. 2, p. 353.



with its wings expanded as the Holy Ghost is usually represented when descending on our Lord at his baptism or our Lady at her annunciation.<sup>23</sup>

(d) Ninav III. One may object to the word being Ninav, i.e. Nineveh. Some horizontal slips under ! give the letter the look of *b* . But the form of the word as seen in the previous Cross helps the reading. The form, as given by Harlez and reproduced by Dastur Darabji, is clear as III.<sup>24</sup> Dastur Darabji has printed it as II though he has read it as *van*. With reference to this name, Ninav, I would refer my readers to the account of Dr. Burnell in his paper, first published in the *Academy* of 1874 (vol. III), referred to above. It appears from that account that the early Christians who came to India were those from Babylon, and the adjoining countries. So, the mention of Ninav (Nineveh) refers to that part Persia.

I may say here that one may possibly object to my reading the word as Ninav in the recently discovered Cross. But the word is clear in the similar part of the inscription in the previously discovered Crosses. The flourish of the hand by the artist on the Cross under examination has not made the word clear in the present case. The word is written as III (something like III, i.e., hundred and eleven in Arabic figures) and it occurs as Ninav for Nineveh in the Pahlavi treatise of Shatroihā-i Airān<sup>25</sup>.

(e) Now we come to the middle line, which is the shortest. There, I read the first word as *napisht*, i.e., 'written' and the next word as *Mar Shapur*. This part of the inscription is mutilated. But I think that the name is that of the 'writer,' i.e., the person who got the stone inscribed with the Cross and the inscription. It is, as it were, his votive offering, and so, as may be naturally expected, he gets his name put down in the inscription. Mar Shapur referred to may be the Mar Shapur mentioned by Burnell as one of the early Christian emigrants.

<sup>23</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, November 1874, p. 313.

<sup>24</sup> See *Sir Jamshedji Jejeebhoy Madressa Jubilee Volume*, p. 196.

<sup>25</sup> Vide my Pahlavi Translation, part I, *Aiyādgar-i Zarirān*, Shatroihā-i Airān va Afdya va Sahigh-i Seistān, p. 115.



(f) Coming to the third line, I have referred above to the reading of this first word. The second word, I read as *ahrob* (*ahlob*), i.e., 'pious, holy.'

(g) Then the next two words *Mashiah avakhshāhi* are well nigh the same as in the previously discovered inscription of Mount St. Thomas.

(h) Then the last two words also seem to be the same as those of the previous inscription and I think they may be read as Dr. West had read them.

On receiving my reading and translation, Mr. Ayyar wrote in his letter of 22nd April :

"The reference to the 'bird' in the Kādamattam Cross as noted by you is quite in keeping with the pictured detail and is important, inasmuch as it helps to settle the doubtful nature of the emblem figured on the older Kōttayam Cross which it resembles and which latter had led Fr. H. Hosten of Darjeeling into some learned speculations in the *Indian Athenæum* for August 1923. The mention of Mar Shapur in the record is valuable in more aspects than one; and as in all likelihood, he may be identical with Maruvān Sāpir Īso of the Kōttayam copper-plate charter of the time of the Cera king Sthānu-ravi (ca. A. D. 880-900), this cross may be taken to furnish an important *dated* landmark more reliable than the mere approximations of palaeography, however carefully balanced they may have been. (See also Travancore Archæological Series No. II, pp. 60 *et seq.*)"<sup>26</sup>

I am glad to learn from what is said above by Mr. Ayyar from archæological and historical points of view, that my reading of this new Cross has interested him and has been found important and "valuable in more aspects than one."

## V.

*Who were the Malabar Coast Christians?*—Now the question is: Who were the Christians who put up Crosses with Pahlavi inscriptions in the Churches? It is rather difficult to say positively, who they were. There are various traditions about the first advent of the Christians to the shores of India.

There is the tradition, noted by Marco Polo, who has, in his book of travels, said that Malabar was the place where St. Thomas,

<sup>26</sup> Mr. Ayyar's reference is to the article, entitled "Three Inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi," in vol. 2, part 1, pp. 60-86 of the said series.



one of the twelve apostles of Christ, lies buried.<sup>27</sup> There is a difference of opinion as to whether the St. Thomas, who is associated with the early Christians of India, was the apostle himself or a later saint. Some even connected at one time the Pahlavi Cross in the Church of St. Thomé with the Apostle St. Thomas. We read on this point :

“ In repairing a hermitage which here existed, in 1547, the workmen came upon a stone slab with a Cross and inscription carved upon it. The story speedily developed itself that this was the Cross which had been embraced by the dying Apostle, and its miraculous virtues soon obtained great fame. It was eventually set up over an altar in the church of Madonna, which was afterwards erected on the Great Mount, and there it still exists. A Brahman imposter professed to give an interpretation of the inscription as relating to the death of St. Thomas, etc., and this was long accepted.”<sup>28</sup>

*Anquetil Du Perron on the Malabar Coast Christians.*—Anquetil Du Perron, in his *Zend-Avesta*, in his account of his visit to Cochin on 31st December 1757, speaks at some length on the subject of the Christians.<sup>29</sup> I quote here from my paper on Anquetil Du Perron read before this Society:<sup>30</sup>

“ Anquetil's description of Cochin shows that the city and the surrounding district formed a great centre of trade at that time. Some of the Europeans who lived there were literary persons. There were also many learned Christian priests. There were a number of Christian Churches built by the several European communities that traded with India. Anquetil visited Veraple, which was the seat of the Apostolic Vicar of the Malabar Coast. His description of the Christians of this district will be found somewhat interesting to the students of the history of the spread of Christianity here. Even M. Florent, a head priest of the district, could not tell him how old was the Christian population there. At the time of Anquetil's visit, there were about 200,000 Christians, of whom 50,000 were Roman Catholics, 100,000 Syrian Malabari Catholics, 50,000 other Syrian Christians (Syro-Malabares Schismatiques). The Latin or Roman Catholics again were divided into three classes : 1. Christians of St. Thomas. 2. The Topas, born of Portuguese fathers and Indian mothers, either by legal marriage or concubinage, who

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<sup>27</sup> *Vide* the third edition of the translation of Yule, revised by Cordier (1903), p. 353.

<sup>28</sup> Third ed. of Marco Polo by Cordier. Notes, p. 358.

<sup>29</sup> Tome I, partie 1.

<sup>30</sup> “ Anquetil Du Perron of Paris. India as seen by him ”, pp. 19-20.



dressed as Europeans. Most of the domestic servants of the Dutch, the English and French in India belonged to this class. 3. The Moundukarens who were recently converted Malabari Christians and who dressed as natives of the land, and the Kouloukarens who were fishers and sailors.

*The Time of the Inscription.*—There remains the question as to the time when these Crosses were put up and this question is connected with the question as to who those Christians were who put them up. The very fact of the Crosses having Pahlavi inscriptions of the types we see, shows that, even if there had been some early settlements of Christians on the Malabar Coast at the time of the advent of St. Thomas the Apostle, these Crosses are not their offerings. They belong to some later times. Dr. West says on this subject:

“Regarding the date of the Pahlavi Inscriptions nothing very definite can be ascertained from the forms of the letters . . . All the peculiarities can be found in the Kanheri Pahlavi inscriptions of 10th October and 24th November 1009, and 30th October 1021 ; and some of them in the Pahlavi signatures of witnesses on a copper-plate grant to the Syrian Church in Southern India which has been attributed to the ninth century.”<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Burnell wrote:

“The characters and language are nearly those of the books, but are not by any means of the earliest period. If one may judge by the legends on coins, the dates of which are known, the earliest of these inscriptions may belong to the 7th or 8th century. The earliest appears to be the ones at the Mount and in the south wall of the Kottayam old church, the latest that behind a side altar in the same church and on which is also a sentence in Syriac in the ordinary Estrangelo character, to judge by facsimiles of MSS. of a period not older than the 10th century. At all events, these Crosses are long subsequent to the time of the Apostle St. Thomas.”<sup>32</sup>

I agree with these scholars, and think, that the inscriptions belong to times much posterior to Apostle St. Thomas. I think there is a very great likelihood of their belonging to the 7th and 8th century after Christ. In this connection, I wish to draw special attention of the students of this question to what Anquetil Du Perron has said about a tradition that he had heard. I will quote him at some length :

<sup>31</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 4, p. 176. <sup>32</sup> Reprint in the *Indian Antiquary*.



“Quelle est donc l'origine du Christianisme dans l'Inde ? Je crois que cette question ne peut être décidée par les Monuments qui existent actuellement dans cette Contrée. Ce qu'on dit d'un Mage, qui avoit le titre de *Mannuca vasser* (mot qu'on prétend singfier *Manicheen*), et qui passa dans l'Inde où il répandit sa doctrine, ne m'a été confirmé par aucun Chrétien de Saint Thomas, Catholique, ni Schismatique. Mais, sans m'arrêter aux autorités vraies ou supposées, je dis que ceux qui connoissent l'Orient ne trouveront rien d'impossible, ni même d'extraordinaire dans l'Apostolat de Saint Thomas aux Indes Orientales. Les Caravanes de Syrie pour Bassora, marchoient alors comme à présent. Les Arabes alloient aux Indes tous les ans et débarquoient aux environs des lieux nommés maintenant Calicut & Mazulipatam. J'ajoute que, selon une opinion reçue dans le Pays, plusieurs Chrétiens de Chaldée, fuyant, dans le septième siècle, la persécution des Mahométans s'embarquèrent à Bassora, & vinrent s'établir parmi les Chrétiens de Saint Thomas”,<sup>33</sup>

This statement of Anquetil seems to present the possibility of two views. These Crosses may be the work of some Persian Christians who had taken to Manichaeism and who, therefore, in order to avoid the persecution in their own country, had fled from there under the leadership of a Zoroastrian Magi, who also had turned to be a follower of Mani and settled on the shores of India.

Dr. Burnell has in his above-mentioned paper, referred to these Manichaeans and has even pointed to a place in Malabar as deriving its name from Mani.

But I think that there is reason to believe that these Crosses were not put up by Manichaean Christians, or Christian Manichaeans, because the history of the Manichaeans and of the Albigenses, who were an offshoot of the Manichaeans, shows that the Manichaeans were persecuted by the orthodox Christians on the ground that they were not true followers of Christ. Manichaeism was a mixture of Zoroastrianism, Christianity and even of Buddhism. One may say that in spite of their not being true orthodox Christians, they believed in Christ. But what we know of the tenets of Manichaeism does not permit us to believe that they had that faith in the personality of Christ as a redeemer of afflictions, as seems to have been evinced by the offerers of the Crosses in question, in the Pahlavi inscriptions.

<sup>33</sup> *Zend-Avesta*, Ouvrage de Zoroastre, tome premier, première partie, p. 179.



So, I think that the Christians who offered the Crosses were the Christians referred to by Anquetil in the last part of the above extract. They were the Christians who had to leave Persia, like the Zoroastrians, to escape from the persecutions of the Arab invaders of Persia. We must bear in mind that here, it is not only the question of Anquetil's own view. He speaks of what he had heard in Malabar itself. I therefore think that the Crosses may be the offerings of some of the Christians who had come to the shores of India in the middle or latter part of the seventh century and in the eighth century, owing to the persecution of the Arabs, and, in referring to the afflictions of Christ, they allude to their own afflictions of being compelled to leave their country for their faith.

#### POSTSCRIPT.

Since this first attempt at reading and translation sent to Mr. Ayyar and after I announced my paper, I have seen in the Indian *Academy* of June 1924 (p. 122) what is called a photo-lith with "scale one-third," given by Mr. T. K. Joseph with a short Note, wherein he gives in a foot-note my foregoing translation as sent by me to the Superintendent of Archæology of Travancore. If that be a litho from a clearer photo, I should like to modify my reading a little in the third line, though that will not make any important change in the meaning. My reading of the third line from this larger photo is as follows:

[Am... (?) Meshihā avakhshāhi min bim bokht.]

#### TRANSLATION.

"I whom... (?) Messiah, the forgiver, freed from danger (or terror)."

The modification consists of the following:

(a) The reading of the foot word as *am* in place of *li*. This makes no change in the meaning.

(b) I get doubtful about the word preceding Messiah which I first read as *ahlob*, i.e., 'holy.'

(c) I read the last but one word as *bim* instead of *khar*; but this modification in the reading of the word makes no important change in the sense.

September, 1924.