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CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

THE ANTI-COLONIAL TURN

Clara A. B. Joseph



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Christianity in India

By studying the history and sources of the Thomas Christians of India, a community of precolonial Christian heritage, this book revisits the assumption that Christianity is Western and colonial and that Christians in the non-West are products of colonial and postcolonial missionaries. Christians in the East have had a difficult time getting heard—let alone understood as anti-colonial. This is a problem, especially in studies on India, where the focus has typically been on North India and British colonialism and its impact in the era of globalization.

This book analyzes texts and contexts to show how communities of Indian Christians predetermined Western expansionist goals and later defined the Western colonial and Indian national imaginary. Combining historical research and literary analysis, the author prompts a re-evaluation of how Indian Christians reacted to colonialism in India and its potential to influence ongoing events of religious intolerance. Through a rethinking of a postcolonial theoretical framework, this book argues that Thomas Christians attempted an anti-colonial turn in the face of ecclesiastical and civic occupation that was colonial at its core.

A novel intervention, this book takes up South India and the impact of Portuguese colonialism in both the early modern and contemporary period. It will be of interest to academics in the fields of Renaissance/Early Modern Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Religious Studies, Christianity, and South Asia.

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Clara A. B. Joseph

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To two Thomas Christians who have fought the good fight and kept the faith—

Jose Joseph Veetuelikunnel and Rosamma Joseph Veetuelikunnel (Kappen)

Whithersoever you will, our Lord, send me; only to India I will not go. (*The Acts of Thomas*)

The discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind. (Adam Smith)

Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, Oriental in worship. (Placid Podipara)



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1 Introduction

The anti-colonial turn

Christianity is both Western and colonial, and Christians in the non-West are products of colonial and postcolonial mission. These assumptions are not unusual. We hear them, for example, in Voltaire's letter 156, dated 5 January 1767, to Frederick the Great condemning Christianity as "assuredly the most ridiculous, the most absurd and the most bloody which has ever infected this world" (285). Voltaire's indignation arose from the grim narratives of colonialism that found their way into French society. While his reasons for condemning colonialism were economic (Goldie and Wokler 159), it was also very clear to him that colonial greed was supported by the Christian zeal of Europeans. And so we read in "Quotes on Hinduism" on the website *Surya's Tapestry* that Voltaire

France's greatest writers and philosophers (sic), was a theist, and a bitter critic of the Church, which he looked upon as the instigator of cruelty, injustice, and inequality. No wonder that Voltaire, who strongly opposed the Church's totalitarian grip over men's lives, and may count as one of the ideologues of secularism, mentioned the religions of India and China as a model of how religion could be a free exploration by the individual.

The West is thus seen as Christian, and the East, non-Christian. As for India, the presence of Christians within its borders is simply further evidence of colonialism's serious goal to convert Indians to Christianity. What Voltaire, as well as the writer of the aforementioned website, failed to recognize was that Christians lived in India prior to European colonialism and that these Indians fought colonialism as *Christians*.

In fact, the conclusion of orientalists—namely that colonialism's purpose was to civilize and Christianize—dominates both popular and academic discourse to this day, including anti-colonial and postcolonial discussions. A host of scholars, many of them political scientists, define the West's post-colonial reach as Christians going into non-Christian territories (Lewis; Fukuyama; Huntington; Blankley; Todorov; Cliff). These scholarly conclusions, interestingly, include regions such as "the Middle East," "Africa,"

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“India,” and “China”—which saw the advent of Christianity in the precolonial period, a fact their research either ignores or minimizes. Postcolonial studies also dismiss the Indian Christian element in the literature on India’s colonization, as practitioners see Christianity as a colonial import (Fanon; Bhabha; Viswanathan *Outside*; Bell). Once again, they assume that Christianity is Western, that it is colonial, and that Christians in the East are unfortunate leftovers of European colonialism.

The primary goal of this volume is to revisit these presumptions about Christians in India and reveal how communities of Indian Christians, in fact, predetermined Western expansionist goals and defined the Western colonial and Indian national imaginary. I trace the Western notion of the Indian Christian in precolonial times and the encounters during Portuguese colonialism. The volume concludes by looking at some of the consequences of mistaken representations of Indian Christians in the postcolonial and national space in contemporary times.

Through its analysis of canonical and popular narratives on Christianity in India, the project identifies two trends as culprits in imagining Christianity in India as colonial. First, studies on South Asia tend to focus primarily on North India, as a result marking the colonial period as the beginning of Christianity in India. Second, in South Asian Studies, the predominance of the Islamic and, mainly, British colonialism excludes extra-Islamic material on the history and culture of regions (chiefly in South India) that warded off Islamic invasion or experienced different dynamics under other colonizers (the Portuguese or the Dutch, for instance). This book, however, takes up South India and the impact of Portuguese colonialism, covering an area of research—the Thomas Christians—that is basically understudied.

The “Thomas Christians” are a community in India that claims descent from converts of the Apostle Thomas in the first century. They were and are a minority in India. According to veteran church historian A. Mathias Mundadan, their population today is “about nine million” (*Concise* 700)—in other words, somewhere in size between the populations of Israel and Portugal. In precolonial and colonial times, they were an elite force to reckon with. Their members were growers and traders of spices, with many serving in the armies of native kings. Portuguese mariners and invaders sought out this community to obtain a monopoly of the spice trade and to oust traders from India, Africa, and beyond, and European colonizers later courted their loyalty.

This volume aims to identify moments of collusion and conflict in Thomas Christians’ encounters with oppressors. Such an examination, I suggest, can provide a counter-discourse to mainstream and nationalist narratives that conflate colonialism and Christianity and represent Christians of India as artefacts of colonialism. With this goal in mind, I explore key texts and contexts from before the seventeenth century, highlighting the colonial aspirations and activities of both the Church and the State.

Colonialism is Christian: where the East and the West meet

There is much truth in statements that lump Christianity and colonialism together. Questions on the justness of war and the morality of depriving the peoples of the Americas of their land and livelihood assumed theological proportions in the middle of the second millennium. Western emperors obtained the blessing of the pope in parcelling out the lands of the New World. The New World, in turn, saw the advent of priests on ships meant for merchants and soldiers. Not surprisingly, modern scholars from the metropolis and ex-colonies, both orientalist and anti-colonialist, agree that Christianity was a companion and often facilitator of colonialism. Some go further to conflate the two, suggesting that colonialism *is* Christian. And all of them assume that Christianity is Western.

Thomas Thompson and Granville Sharp, for example, while opponents in their views of Christianity, agreed that colonialism was a Christian endeavour. Thompson had put forward a Christian defence of slavery in his pamphlet *The African Trade for Negro Slaves, Shewn to be Consistent with Principles of Humanity, and with the Laws of Revealed Religion*, which he dedicated to The Company of Merchants Trading to Africa. Granville Sharp, in his *An Essay on Slavery* (1773), criticized Thompson for falsifying his so-called Christian arguments. As Edward E. Andrews explains, “Sharp envisioned . . . an empire of universal Christian benevolence where religion, rather than race, was the true marker of benevolence” (25–26). Both Thompson and Sharp reasoned on the basis of the colonialism-is-Christianity equation. Stephen Neill’s *A History of Christianity in India 1707–1858* and, especially, *A History of Christian Missions* also present colonialism as a Christianizing mission, and this, even when Neill’s *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to A.D. 1707*—acknowledged precolonial Eastern Christianity in India. More recently, Robert Eric Frykenberg in several of his works, but mainly *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, underscores the Christian nature of colonialism. Thus, for instance, he ends his chapter “Indian Christians and the ‘Hindu Raj’” observing that present-day Maharashtrian Hindus objected to Christianity because it challenged the caste system—a complaint also made by the colonizers in the colonial period. These several scholars, even when acknowledging certain problems, see colonialism as a very Christian and, therefore, positive enterprise. Furthermore, the “Westernness” of not just colonialism but also Christianity per se is integral to their philosophy of research.

Those who oppose colonialism, whether or not labelled “postcolonialists,” also see colonialism as a Christian enterprise. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* deplores the psychological degradation and objectification of colonized Algerians perpetrated by the self-acclaimed and morally superior colonizer’s declaration that the former were insensitive to ethics. He concludes that “the Christian religion” (41) is to blame, for “the Church in the colonies is the white people’s Church, the foreigner’s Church. She does not call the native

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to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor" (41). Fanon's quarrel is thus with the Western colonial administration, which, as he sees it, is directed by a Western colonial Christianity that spells disaster for the native population. "The Christian religion" is Western. Yet, in the case of Algeria, the most famous Christian in the West is none other than Augustine of Hippo, who was born in Numidia, that is, modern-day Souk Ahras, Algeria. Like Gandhi in India, Fanon appears to be oblivious to the continued presence of communities of precolonial Christians.

Similarly, writing about colonial efforts in China, John Atkinson Hobson makes a slight distinction between what he calls the early Catholic missionaries who brought about small-scale conversions through their sanctity and preaching and in the process introduced Western sciences and others. Hobson defines these latter through the choice image of "an educated Chinaman" (215):

The Chinese have watched with much concern the sequence of events—first the missionary, then the Consul, and at last the invading army. . . . We cannot wonder that the Chinese officials should hate the missionaries. Their Church is an *imperium in imperio*, propagating a strange faith and alienating the people from that of their ancestors. (215)

One would think that his complaint is against the specifically Western and colonial Church in contrast to the Eastern and non-colonial Church that had a history in China. But this is not the case. For Hobson, there were good missionaries and there were bad missionaries. These former were the "early Catholic missionaries," likely William of Rubruck or Giovanni di Monte Corvino and his companion—the Dominican, Nicholas of Pistoia—in the late thirteenth century or even Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. The bad ones (and Francis Xavier might easily be among them) paved the way for Portuguese and later colonizations. Hobson makes no mention at all of the waves of missionaries from the Levant who entered China beginning at least during the Tang period in the seventh century and by the eighth century had created metropolitan centres (see Wilmshurst 109; also see Malancharuvil 14). *The Oxford Reference Online* refers to the "legend" of St. Thomas the Apostle having preached in China, and songs and folklore of the Thomas Christians refer to him having visited China, among other places. Alphonse Mingana provides evidence for the spread of Christianity to China well before 790 C.E. And Philip Baldaeus writes,

It is general opinion here, that St. *Thomas* the Apostle coming first to *Socotora*, an isle at the entrance into the *Red Sea*, there preached the Gospel with good success; whence coming to *Cranganor* and *Coulang* [Quilon/Kollam], he converted a great number to the Christian Faith. From hence taking his way thro *Coromandel* into *China*, he returned to *Maliapour*, where he suffered Martyrdom. (630)

None of these narratives, however, enter into Hobson's consideration of the precolonial period.

For Gauri Viswanathan, at least as she explains the problem in her award-winning book *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, conversion has a destabilizing effect in modern society. She writes, "Secularization in the colonies remains a flawed project, even more than in England, because of the absence of an emancipatory logic that steers *a once monolithic religious culture* into the gradual absorption of pluralized groups into the nation state" (13) (emphasis mine). In my essay "The S(p)ecular 'Convert': A Response to Gauri Viswanathan's *Outside the Fold*," I trace the problem in Viswanathan's work to the following two presumptions. The first is that conversion is a key element in the definition of modern society. The identity of the state as "supreme legislator and arbitrator" proceeds from the tensions that conversion raises. Her second assumption is that whereas the religious culture of England was always diverse, the religious culture of India was once monolithic. I show that these two points are interlinked such that the premise of the first is the second:

That is to say, conversion in the context of India is politically troublesome because India (a colony), once being "a monolithic religious culture," knew no need for conversion until recently. India therefore lacks an indigenous system to survive in the face of this new-comer. Colonization is one major force that often created converts and, even more, attempted an (impossible) assimilation of the various groups into the nation state. Later on, the (still colonial) hegemony of secularism did no better. (106)

Viswanathan's narrative affords no place for precolonial Christians in the colony because Christianity, according to Viswanathan, was a colonial (if not British) import.

Viswanathan is not the only source from the Indian, or non-West, side that views Indian Christians as converts of foreigners. If colonialism is conflated with Christianity, then it becomes difficult to think that native Christians would struggle for freedom from colonialism in India. Out of this assumption, then, we have Arun Shourie's accusation, in *Missionaries in India*, that Christians did not participate in the Freedom Struggle in India (200). Other scholars who acknowledge native Christian resistance to colonialism present it as a rather late movement in the history of colonialism in India. In this vein, we find studies of Christian influence on the nineteenth-century Brahma Samaj¹ or of independence struggles by Christians named as such only after the "first freedom struggle" of 1857 (Savarkar, *Indian*). The impression this late dating of the anti-colonial struggles of Indian Christians gives is that Indian Christianity is rooted in Western Christianity and that Indian Christians came to the battleground of the freedom struggle only after they realized they would profit from the independence that the rest of the

nation was guaranteeing them. The dating makes Indian Christians both traitors and opportunists, bizarrely denying them even the natural tendency for self-defence when under oppression. One consequence of the circulation of such narratives and the related ideology is the persecution of Christians, which continues today in India. In *Early Christians of 21st Century* and again in *Who Killed Swami Lakshmananda?* Anto Akkara reports on recent experiences of numerous individual Christians in Kandhamal, in eastern India, who were persecuted—people tortured or driven out of their villages or whose relatives or friends were killed. Religious persecution in the Indian context, then, both past and current, demands the premise that Christianity in India was a European colonial introduction.

In his preface to the 2012 edition of *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Walter D. Mignolo highlights his thesis that coloniality is very much a part of modernity, in fact that the latter cannot exist without the former. In an attempt to counter unidirectional and Eurocentric historiography, he focuses on the borders, where he sees the divide of “Western and Eastern civilizations, Christianity and Islam” (x). For Mignolo, too, Christianity can fall only on the “Western” side. If there is “no universal location to talk about Christianity” (73), then it is because that location is clearly Western. I would argue that the reason Mignolo cannot find “any case in which Christianity presents itself in serious engagement with Islam” (xxi) is because he himself does not engage in the oblique—“/”—“border thinking” (ix), promulgated in the title of his book and throughout, about how both Christianity and Islam survived in the East.

Finally, and to return to perhaps the most well-known example from the West, Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” is not just a clash of peoples of different faiths—Christians versus the rest—but is one first of all premised on an imaginary the-West-is-Christian-and-the-rest-is-not condition of the world. Such a formulation has no place for non-Western Christian communities, including those who became Christian prior to the advent of colonialism.

For all of these scholars, then, whether or not they are blatantly anti-colonial, colonialism is Christian and Christianity is Western. Their philosophy of research, like those who take a slightly more favourable view of colonialism, is founded on the assumption that Christianizing was a serious purpose of colonialism *and* that Christianity is a Western introduction into the non-West. All of these scholars have had an immense influence on a horde of intellectuals, and some even more over world leaders. Hobson’s impact, for example, on Lenin and Trotsky and Huntington’s over George Bush are well known; Carlos Lozada wrote in *The Washington Post* of Samuel Huntington as “a prophet for the Trump era.” It is, therefore, critical we turn our attention to the Eastern Christians, who claim a heritage that precedes European colonialism, and, for the purposes of this project, more specifically to the Thomas Christians.

The Thomas Christians: a response

To acknowledge the Thomas Christians is to provide an important response to the view that the East is non-Christian and that colonialism was an entry into non-Christian regions. This is not only because the Thomas Christians claim precolonial Christian heritage but also because their repeated resistance of colonial powers was strong enough that both the Portuguese Church (the Padroado) and the Portuguese State (the Estado da India) struggled to subdue them.

The Indian Christian community that persists in claiming apostolic heritage through St. Thomas adamantly claims a tradition that began in the first century. Let me quote Mundadan on this:

According to the Indian tradition, St Thomas came by sea, and first landed at Cranganore about the year A.D. 52; converted high caste Hindu families in Cranganore, Palayur, Quilon and some other places; visited the Coromandel coast, making conversions; crossed over to China and preached the Gospel; returned to India and organized the Christians of Malabar under some guides (priests) from among the leading families he had converted, and erected a few public places of worship. Then he moved to the Coromandel, and suffered martyrdom on or near the Little Mount. His body was brought to the town of Mylapore and was buried in a holy shrine he had built. As the tradition goes, Christians from Malabar, West Asia and even from China used to go on pilgrimage to Mylapore and venerate the tomb. (*History* 29)

There is much controversy over questions such as whether the apostle went to India at all or whether the converts belonged to the so-called high caste. However, an undisputed fact is that, generation after generation, certain communities of Christians in South India have claimed a St. Thomas Christian heritage and this claim has shaped their faith and lifestyle. Mundadan cites a tradition of visitors to Mylapore, the supposed location of the tomb of St. Thomas.

The region closely linked to the claim of a St. Thomas apostolic tradition is the present-day state of Kerala, known loosely as Malabar. Polish historian Jan Kieniewicz writes about this designation in the sixteenth century:

When speaking of Malabar, I refer to the economic entity connected with the western coastal region of India from Mt. Dely [Ezhimala] down to Cape Comorin [Kanyakumari] in which pepper growing and pepper trade probably played the key role. It is of course an open question whether we can consider Malabar as a socio-economic system. For, in spite of very strong economic ties and cultural unity, it resembled rather a loose conglomerate of villages. In addition, caste divisions strengthened political divisions which in their turn made the creation of one country or one state out of Malabar difficult. (78)

Kieniewicz thus identifies the present district of Kannur as the start point of Malabar and the Tamil-speaking region of Kanyakumari as the end point.²

There is no written evidence for the arrival of St. Thomas in India. To borrow the words of Scottish theologian and evangelical missionary Claudius Buchanan, there is as much evidence that St. Thomas went to India as there is that St. Peter went to Rome (36). Buchanan means that the evidence rather is in the tradition. What exists today is a living tradition: that is, the Thomas Christians, residing mainly in Kerala, who claim this past. Eusebius records that between 180 and 190 C.E., Pantaneus visited the Christians of India. George Nedungatt, in his article, “Christian Origins in India According to the Alexandrian Tradition,” presents this as the earliest historical reference to the existence of Indian Christians. Church historians tend to rely on Western historiography for evidence of the life and faith of the Thomas Christians. The Portuguese practice of burning “forbidden” books and whole libraries as part of the auto-da-fe—targeting Thomas Christians among other—has left scholars to rely on external sources, including Portuguese narratives, for information on the Thomas Christians.

It is not as if the West was unaware of the existence of Christians on the shores of India in precolonial times. We find references to Christianity in India in Christian writings of the early centuries. Nedungatt, basing his work on research conducted by scholars such as Albrecht Dihle, argues that Church Fathers (for instance, Origen and Athanasius) were aware that “Aryan India” (that is, North India), did not know Christ, but that South India did (421). In stating this, Nedungatt is also responding to those (such as Wilfred H. Schoff) who insist that references to India on key topics in the early centuries referred to any place but India. Other Western sources include Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Isidor of Seville. The Roman martyrology and the hymns of St. Ephrem link the Apostle Thomas to India. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (c. the ninth century) mentions ambassadors of Alfred the Great setting off to visit the tomb of St. Thomas in India to obtain blessings for victory in war, and Chaucer, in the Middle Ages, mentions “Thomas of Inde.” Julian of Norwich makes a similar reference:

Also god shewed me that syn is na schame, bot wirschippe to mann, for in this sight mynn vnderstandynge was lyfted vp in to hevenn; and thann comm verrayly to my mynde David, Peter and Paule, Thomas of Inde and the Maudelaynn, howe thaye er knawenn in the kyrke of erth with thare synnes to thayre wirschippe. And it is to thamm no schame that thay hafe synned—no mare it is in the blysse of heven—for thare the takenynge of synne is tourned into wirschippe. Right so oure lorde god schewed me thamm in ensampille of alle othere that schalle cum thedyr (17.17–25). (Qtd. in Shimomura, 46)

Thus, Julian of Norwich lumps “Thomas of India” in with King David, Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene as one of those inspiring “sinners” whose

sin (presumably of doubting the Resurrection) is transformed into a blessing in his subsequent commitment and apostolic work.

European explorers of the medieval period who sought a direct route to India hoped to find allies in Indian Christians, if not the community of the elusive Christian king of the East, Prester John. Vasco da Gama's man is said to have told querying locals that he came in search of Christians and spices (Boxer, *Portuguese* 37)—a quest that would have made absolute sense to the locals given that Thomas Christians were well known as producers and merchants of spices, foremost of which was black pepper. The Portuguese, as Christians, dreamed of befriending the Indian Christians and, through them, the rest of the population; they dreamed of becoming sole traders of their produce. In this way, they would put an end to the trade not only of the Muslims but also of the Christians West of India.

In a groundbreaking study of documents (“the India Book”) from the genizah or storeroom of the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Old Cairo, Egypt, Shelomo Dov Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman establish that there was a “predominance of merchants from North Africa in the India trade” (21) from the ninth century onwards—even as Indian trade continued with Persia, Iraq, and Syria. In the fifteenth century, these middle-men ruled the seas. To have to purchase Indian exports from them—and worse, through the Venetians—had simply become too expensive for the West. Having been swindled of any profit far too long, the Europeans' foremost goal in explorations under royal patronage was to gain Indian trade monopoly. Indian Christians were seen as a plausible gateway for the venture. In fact, it could even be said that in the envisioned unity between Portuguese Christians and Indian Christians, colonialism could rightly be labelled a Christian mission, if it were not for some of the historic alliances between the native kings and the Portuguese that proved detrimental to the Thomas Christians. In the collections of the Torre do Tombo, Genevieve Bouchon came across sixteen documents, one of which she considers to be “the oldest account of the Carreira da India” (48). She records that

for the first time, the names of some Malabari merchants appear: the Mappilla Cherian and Mammali Marakkar from Cochin, who had at first been reluctant to supply the Portuguese fleet because of the debts run up by a few captains of the previous expedition, but who yielded to the order of the Raja of Cochin; and the Christian Matias who gathered up the cargo of two Portuguese ships in Kayankullam. (49)

Bouchon does not identify Mappilla Cherian as a Christian, but the name clearly indicates that he, like Matias, was a Thomas Christian.

While Indians are not ignorant of the presence of Christians in India in the precolonial period, European colonialism has given their understanding a certain twist. As a result, key words in Indian discourse on Christians in India include the terms “foreign” and “conversion.” Foremost in historical narratives about Indian Christians are largely discussions on

conversions enforced by colonial missionaries—Viswanathan’s *Outside the Fold* but one instance of this trend. Where Indian Christians are not colonial converts, they are foreigners. The Malayalam feature film *Urumi*, a box office hit that was translated into other South Indian languages, presents Christians of India as Syrians, not Indians. Along the lines of this narrative, the rest of the Christians in India were converted by European colonial missionaries after the fifteenth century. Church historians, in general, agree that the liturgical language and rite of the native community from at least the fourth century was Syriac, and that “Syrian,” as against “Latin,” was an appellation the Portuguese bestowed on the Thomas Christians on account of this liturgical rite (Menon 17; Zupanov 29). Domenico Ferroli narrates a fourth-century visit to India by a bishop who was sent by Constantius II:

It is interesting to note that a native of the Maldives, Theophilus by name, lived at the court of the Arian Emperor Constantius, who, in the year 354, sent him on an embassy to Arabia, Abyssinia and India. After having visited his own native islands he passed on to the mainland. He noticed with disapproval that the Christians there heard the Gospel squatting down. He corrected them, and instructed them in the faith . . . The abuses referred to by Theophilus imply that the Christians there were a resident congregation; services were regularly held at which the Gospel was read, and consequently they had a ministering clergy. Everything goes to show beyond a reasonable doubt that the Christian community in India in 354 was an indigenous community. (77)

Ferroli suggests that the fact that Indians typically squat to study was evidence that the Christians Theophilus met were indeed Indians. However, the prevailing narrative in India is that Indian Christians either succumbed to colonial pressures to convert or else were non-natives.

Were they colonized?

To be a convert or an alien is to be unpatriotic and anti-nationalist. In “The Role of Christians in India’s Freedom Struggle,” Pala K.M. Mathew responds to what he identifies as attempts to “propagate the falsehood that Christians were supporting British imperialism” (28). Mathew goes on to list eminent persons and important anti-colonial efforts of the community during the British colonial struggle. In fact, the volume in which Mathew’s paper appears—*Christian Contribution to Nation Building: A Third Millennium Enquiry*—is one of a handful of editions on the theme of the role of Indian Christians in nation building. *Songs of Silence: Christians in Nation Building* (by Arokiasamy and Chathanatt), *The Christian Community and the National Mainstream* (by Louis D’Silva et al.), and *India’s Christian Heritage* (by Snaitang and Menachery) are some of the books that discuss the

Thomas Christians in anti-colonial movements; however, they focus exclusively on the British colonial period. Obviously, a Eurocentric view of the term “nation building” would zoom in on the nation as a product of British colonization—which may account for the choice of period in these books. No doubt, such focus provides a strategic reply to the labelling of Indian Christians as unpatriotic.

However, other scholars—such as Placid J. Podipara, Jacob Kollaparambil, Xavier Koodapuzha, Cyril Malancharuval, George Menachery, Joseph Thekkedath (see his *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S. J. Archbishop of Cranganore [1641–1659]*)—have presented a seventeenth-century rebellion—the “Coonen [Bent] Cross Revolt”—as a noteworthy reaction by the Thomas Christians to the Portuguese powers, specifically the Padroado. Paul Pallath defines the Padroado:

In Church history this word indicates the sum total of the rights, privileges and obligations which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Roman Pontiffs conferred upon the kings of Portugal and Spain for the Christianization of the newly discovered lands in Asia and Africa. . . . It included the right of deciding the erection of new dioceses, presenting bishops to the Roman Pontiff for appointment in all the dioceses under their authority and of nominating suitable persons to all ecclesiastical offices in those dioceses. (*Provincial* 248–49)

The Padroado thus reflected the ambitions of both the State and the Church, and the native populations sometimes resented its formal interventions. According to most of the above-mentioned authors, the Thomas Christians moved en masse against their ecclesiastical rulers—Bishop Garcia and the Jesuits—who not only represented the Padroado but also denounced Mar Atallah³ “a metropolitan of the Syro-Antiochian patriarchate, who had passed over to the Catholic Church in 1631” (Thekkedath, *History* 91). Mar Atallah had been sent to the Thomas Christians by Pope Innocent X. As proof that the reaction was never against the pope, the authors present primary sources ranging from letters of Garcia to Fr. Hyacinth of St. Vincent, the papal commissary to the Thomas Christians, to Silveira Menezes, the Portuguese captain (extract of source reproduced in Koodapuzha 504), to various documents available at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu and the Historical Archives at Goa. Garcia’s letter to Silveira Menezes reads that he, Garcia, was requesting the captain “in the name of the King, of the Viceroy and of the Inquisitors” not to agree to meet with Mar Atallah and the archdeacon (Koodapuzha 504).

At the “Coonen Cross Revolt,” according to oral tradition, a large crowd of Thomas Christians took an oath to reject the rule of Garcia and the Jesuits and to submit themselves only to their archdeacon by holding onto ropes tied to an open-air cross in front of the church of Mattancherry—which bent under the physical and spiritual force applied. The outdoor

Table 1.1 Churches within the Thomas Christian tradition today

	<i>Churches within the Thomas Christian tradition</i>	<i>Liturgical language^a</i>	<i>Rite</i>	<i>Communion with</i>
1	Syro-Malabar Church	East Syriac	Chaldean	Catholic Church
2	Syro-Malankara Catholic Church	West Syriac	Malankara (Antiochian)	Catholic Church
3	Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church	West Syriac	Malankara (Antiochian)	Oriental orthodox
4	Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church	West Syriac	Malankara (Antiochian)	Oriental orthodox
5	Mar Thoma Syrian Church	West Syriac	Malankara (Antiochian)	Independent oriental orthodox, reformed, Anglican Church
6	Malabar Independent Syrian (Thozhiyur) Church	West Syriac	Malankara (Antiochian)	Independent oriental orthodox
7	Chaldean/Assyrian Church of the East in India	East Syriac	Chaldean	Church of the East

a Language of worship until the introduction of Malayalam in the liturgy.

ritual was orchestrated in an effort to synchronize the oath-taking of the entire community with the formal ceremony of the oath occurring inside the church, where space was limited. The above-noted scholars have variously discussed the incident and the resulting internal discord as the first major schism in that Church and a reaction to the colonial infrastructure and its consequences. As evidenced in the literature, then, the Coonen Cross moment marked the beginning of official separation in the Thomas Christian Church—into Catholics and Orthodox.

Many communities of Latin rite and Reformed Christians in South India claim a Thomas Christian heritage but suggest they were Latinized through Portuguese and other European missionaries. The first known European missionary to sail through the Persian Gulf to India was John of Monte Corvino, who arrived in Quilon in 1291. Despite the fact that India is currently home to many diverse groupings of Eastern Christians (see Table 1.1⁴), I refer to them using the generic term “Thomas Christians” for two reasons: first, this is the name popularly applied to these Christians regardless of their divisions, and second, this volume concerns the period before any known schism in that community.

This study focuses on key occurrences before the seventeenth century in a bid to show that the West’s image of a Christian East was tied to investment in trade and the long-term goal of defeating the Muslims, or “the Moors,” as they were referred to. Thus, the relationship of Indian Christians with European missionaries, merchants, and the military was a colonial one.

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire asks what he characterizes as “the innocent first question”:

[W]hat, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies. (10–11)

Césaire prompts us to expand our imagination once we pose the question. The question, guiltless as it is, always sits on the brink of ignorance and naivety. What is colonization? Césaire tells us first what it is not: not Christianizing, not charity, not education, not welfare, not a divine mission, not the rule of peace or law. Then, he culls images of the invader that rarely find space in textbooks on the colonial period: the pirate, the grocer, the shipowner, the gold digger, the merchant. If these arrived on our shores and impacted economies and lives, then, according to Césaire, we are talking colonization.

The question of whether Vasco da Gama’s arrival in India in 1498 signalled that country’s colonization has divided scholars and the public in India, Portugal, and elsewhere. Contradicting scholars who took the position that “Gama’s arrival heralded western dominance,” Sanjay Subrahmanyam maintains rather that it was Islamic dominance that was picking up speed at the time of Gama’s arrival on the south-west coast of India (“With Mixed Signals”). Zayn al-Din Malibari’s *Tohfut-ul-mujahideen*—“an offering to warriors who shall fight in defence of religion against infidels” (8)—written in the latter part of the sixteenth century, however, noted that the Muslims did not have their own Amir in Malabar. These Muslims, he suggested, were proceeding successfully under “infidel” rulers who were delighted that not just trading ports but whole new cities were sprouting owing to their commercial activities; the arrival of the Portuguese with guns thus posed a major threat. The author, furthermore, lamented that powerful Muslim rulers failed to come to their aid when the Portuguese invaded (8). The book was written to arouse believers to engage “in a holy warfare against the worshippers of crucifixes” (7). We must remember that not long before Zayn al-Din Malibari wrote his book, the First Provincial Council of Goa, of 1567, had ordered Muslims “to live in special quarters apart from the Christians” (Melo 25). Carlos Mercés de Melo reproduced the text of the ordinance issued by the crusader King Dom Sebastian on 4 December 1567.

The divide-and-conquer principle was clearly having intended and unintended effects, contributing to communal disharmony and anti-colonial rhetoric and strategies. Under the tried principle that only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, the testimony of Zayn al-Din Malibari proposes that the arrival of the Portuguese in south-west India marked the beginning of European dominance and colonialism.

By 1515—eighteen years after Gama stepped onto India's shores—the Portuguese appear to have intensified their tactics of control and domination such that another sixteenth-century source, reproduced in the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and Its Dependencies* in 1817, narrates,

The person who was then Tamuri [Zamorin] had been some time dead, and the Elia [junior] Raja had succeeded, who considered that it might be good policy to be at peace with the Fringis [Portuguese], that it would cause both his city and the trade of the Mapillas to flourish in the same way that the traffic of Cochin and Kananur did; that on these conditions, if their differences were made up, it would be beneficial to Korikote [Calicut]. In this treaty an article was inserted by the Tamuri, that the Mapillas in his dominions should every year load four vessels with ginger and pepper, and sail for Mecca, without any hindrance given by the Fringis, to which the latter assented. And when the Fringis began the building of the fort, the Mapillas commenced their voyage for Arabia with the four ships; they sailed under the flag and passport of the Fringis:—this was in the year of the Taliha 921, or 689 Malabar style [1515 C.E.]. The above vessels disposed of their cargoes and returned again to Korikote, at which time the Fringis had finished the fort; after which they would not permit the ginger and pepper to be carried to Mecca, but prevented every other power from trading in these or any other articles, except themselves. . . . They then began to consider how to seize and carry off the Tamuri Raja, but their deceit did not succeed. (“Translation” 30)

The callousness with which the Portuguese made and broke promises, forced flag and passport upon competitors to determine the flow of traffic, and even directed machinations on the person of the supreme ruler, the Zamorin, all denote the early start of Portuguese colonialism in Malabar.

Among those who felt the colonial pinch were the Thomas Christians. As either legend or reality, they were the hope and dream of Europeans in pursuit of commerce. If Gama's arrival was punctuated by references to Indian Christians whose very existence has been challenged by scholars time and again, then a strategic narrative of the proper Christianizing of Indian Christians by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century has proven to be the foundation of the discourse of the civilizing mission. This volume focuses on key texts to allow for in-depth analyses of the ways in which

Indian Christians reacted to colonization, in this way presenting the struggles of the Thomas Christians as an exchange between individual texts and the larger concerns.

Overview and arguments

Following this introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 examines medieval texts, their reception in the later periods, and, particularly, the role of an early modern figure, the archdeacon, in responding to those perceptions. Thus, it discusses the medieval perception of India as the native land of a community of Christians, the promise of hope and encouragement this view offered the West in its fight against Islamic communities, and the importance of remembering this in the context of the Thomas Christians of India and the post-colonial period when it comes to rethinking studies in Christianity, the Middle Ages, the early modern period, South Asia, and postcolonialism. The chapter revisits narratives and debates on Prester John of India and traces the colonial discourse of modern-day scholars in their attempts to categorize as legend not only the “letter of Prester” but also the very thought that Prester could have been from India. Given the potential of the sociocultural texts of the Thomas Christians of India, especially of the early modern period, to unsettle Western medieval narratives, I present the discussions in the context of an investigation on what alterity signifies.

The third chapter focuses on Thomas Christians in the global early modern period, closely reading select primary sources to trace patterns of collusion and resistance among the Thomas Christians when the Portuguese arrived in India. Its main sources are the *Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and His Viceroyalty*, which includes encounters with Thomas Christians, and “The Narratives of Joseph the Indian,” which concerns a Thomas Christian priest who travelled to Lisbon with the famous explorer Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1501. The chapter considers the initial confusion arising from the fact that Thomas Christian merchants looked like “moors” and further examines the ambiguous role the priest, Joseph, played as an informant, thus setting the stage for colonialism in India. The chapter’s purpose hence is to offer a rarely considered and alternate context to discuss the relationship between Indian Christians and colonialism at the moment of first contact.

The fourth chapter offers a close reading of the *Jornada* of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes, a travel diary mainly of his excursions among the Thomas Christians, annotated, edited, and published in Portuguese by Antonio de Gouvea in 1606. Translations in other European languages appeared later. I will be using two English translations: the first by Geddes in 1694 and the second, a fuller edition, by Pius Malekandathil published in 2003. I engage with this text to prove that the Padroado’s control of Thomas Christian communities was nothing less than full-scale colonization and to highlight the strategies these communities exercised to negotiate between their kings and the foreign powers. The chapter traces the ways in which

Catholic sacraments were strategized by the Portuguese colonial powers and how the Thomas Christians promptly interpreted the sacrament of confirmation as a colonial tactic; how the Portuguese used military alliances, especially the brother-in-arms contract, with native kings as a means to subdue Thomas Christians; how the Western notion of the “amok” evolved from the Portuguese witnessing Thomas Christian fighters and their supporters; and ultimately, how and why the labelling of Thomas Christians as heretics was primarily a political move.

The final chapter considers both the academic (publishing) and popular scenarios concerning Indian Christianity: asking how and why the categories of South Asia and India studies tend to drop the Thomas Christian community by default from calls for proposals as well as from definitions of the nation. The chapter brings this volume to a conclusion.

One of my intents with this book is to move the focus of India studies to the study of the peninsular—a much-needed shift to counter the trend in Indian historiography to label anything that occurs in North India as “Indian” while to a great extent ignoring similar or other events of major importance occurring in South India. The formation and growth of Eastern Christianity in the first millennium is a proceeding unique to South India. Thus, this project investigates the impact of South India’s Eastern Christianity on colonialism. It brings together essays that trace the history of the Thomas Christians during the early part of the European colonial period within the framework of postcolonial theoretical approaches. In this way, it zooms in on how this Indian community was, to use the well-worn term, “othered”—that is, ideologically marginalized within both Western and Indian colonial discourse.

The discussion, however, does not end with this, rather it paves the way to understanding how this native Christian community facilitated one of the strongest anti-colonial movements of the times. The implications of this movement of the Thomas Christians against European colonialism are far-reaching, extending to the need for a reassessment of how the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences perceive the role of Christianity in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. In a Spring 2009 forum of the American Society of Church History, on postcolonial theory and the study of Christian history, Elizabeth A. Clark introduces three distinct approaches to the topic taken by three different presenters—Jeremy Schott, Denise Kimber Buell, and Randall Styers (Clark 847–48). In each of their views of the relationship between Christianity and postcolonialism, Christianity remains essentially Western and the convert, therefore, essentially non-Christian. Stuart Hall begins by asking, “When was ‘the postcolonial’? What should be included and excluded from its frame?” (242). I would argue that for canonical and non-canonical studies to gain a more realistic perspective of the cultural impact of colonialism, we must examine encounters between the colonizers and the colonized on shared grounds, here Christianity. Such an analysis can unravel the complex and

disparate processes that generate difference and, to employ Emmanuel Levinas' thesis, the ethics of the face of the other. Hence, this book consists of essays covering some of the highly imaginative precolonial and colonial renderings of the Thomas Christians and their equally innovative responses.

Methodology and significance of the project

When both the anti-clericalist, enlightenment foundation of postcolonial studies and the practice of those in a post-colonial world take the historically mistaken view that colonialism and Christianity are difficult to differentiate, it is somewhat naive to propose to utilize a postcolonial critical framework to study Christian encounters with colonialism. Yet, the Thomas Christians are a community that has survived the centuries as a minority and held onto not only its faith but also its culture and tradition, sometimes against tremendous odds. The struggle of this community for not simply survival but also abundance is a record also of the precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of the Indian peninsular, the Church, and the world. A theoretical approach that effectively deciphers the location of power and exposes its complexity and nuances can assist in understanding narratives of a minority community and the intersecting dominant or colonial narratives. Yet, considering that the findings here may at times question the assumptions of that very framework, we can perhaps turn to Edward Said's term, "secular criticism," as a challenger of orthodoxies (*World* 1–30). Viswanathan, in formulating and reflecting on Said's methodology, regrets that Said neglects the history of secularism itself ("Legacies" 6). Yet, a project such as this one is indebted to Said as far as it can provide insights into the historiography and ideology of secularism when it reconsiders the role of Christianity in colonialism.

The methodology of this project is defined by analyses of key primary sources combined with studies in the history of the Indian Church. My methodology begins with literary analysis, closely reading narratives and engaging with wider socio-historical contexts and multiple disciplines, and from examining how diction and genres impact chronicles and how one comprehends the chronicles. The next step of the methodology is postcolonial critique, which comprises a persistent reading and rereading of events of the colonial period within the hermeneutics of suspicion, which Paul Ricoeur explains as the "willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigour, vow of obedience" (27). Finally, the methodology involves rethinking the postcolonial framework itself in the context of studies in religion and specifically Christianity. Such methodological focus dictates an analysis of selected primary and secondary sources rather than a comprehensive study of the period. I show how an examination of colonial texts on interactions between early colonizers and native Christians fundamentally challenges pro- and anti-colonial narratives around colonization's purpose of enlightening,

civilizing, and ultimately Christianizing, regardless of whether these verbs are put in quote marks. Whereas this challenge itself is not blameless, it can actuate a reconsideration of the role of native populations during colonialism in India and a review of the times in general.

The book focuses on the colonial and post-colonial periods and, therefore, begins with preparatory imaginings about Indian Christians in the medieval period. The colonial period, beginning with the “discoveries” of Vasco da Gama, would be, in Western terms, the early part of the so-called early modern period. I use the term “early modern period” with reservations and acknowledge Goldstone’s caution:

In a word, the “early modern” world wasn’t. That is, it was not in any way “modern,” and certainly not an “early” form of modernity. Somewhat as the Holy Roman Empire, in a famous aphorism, was neither Holy, Roman, nor an Empire, so I would now say a rigorous review of evidence would show that the “early modern” world was neither “early,” nor “modern,” although arguably, in its trade relations, a single “world.” (249)

In such terms, the colonial period would refer to exploits of discovery, mercantilism, and colonization, privileged as these are in the victor’s perspective. John F. Richards contends that, contrary to the widespread notion that India before colonialism was “nearly static” (208), this country has a very important place in the study of early modern world history. In support, he points to India’s important location in “the global system of sea passages” (205); its economic self-sufficiency, which made it “the ultimate sink” (206) for the exchange of precious metals, especially silver and gold; and the deployment of technologies of the period, including gunpowder and the printing press (208), within its borders. This study, therefore, considers the impacts of this early modern Indian period on the initial Portuguese and Thomas Christian encounters.

Furthermore, some would consider this period not only early modern but also the first period of globalization, given the unprecedented flow of goods between Europe and Asia (see Flynn et al.; Gunn; Chakravarti, “Vibrant”). Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giraldez, and Richard von Glahn contend that the history of globalization can only be understood through an interdisciplinary approach, disagreeing with those such as Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson, who base their studies solely on economic factors to suggest globalization’s rather late start in the 1820s. Flynn and Giraldez, considering factors beyond the economic and introducing Asian economic history into the formula, see the sixteenth century as the beginning of globalization (Flynn et al. 359). Scholars such as Andre Gunder Frank, Kenneth Pomeranz, and Steven Topik reject belief in a European exceptionalism and instead present the early modern period as the time when European nations were slowly catching up to the levels of Asian

standards of living. It is also important to remember the sheer number of ancient trade routes with the West and the rest of the world, as Jan De Vries asserts, “The European trade with Asia after Da Gama was an appropriation and elaboration of the earlier trade routes, and remained superficial, being limited to a trade in luxuries” (713). The economic and cultural history of the Thomas Christians is thus undoubtedly shaped by international exchanges of the time. As Said reminds us, one cannot afford to ignore the shared experiences and coexistence of the East and the West (*Culture* xx). While Said’s focus is, of course, on the nineteenth century, his words hold true for much of the known past. Insofar as Western colonialism has any significance for an understanding of world history, the encounter between Christians of Portugal and the Thomas Christians of India is of grave import on a global level.

This is so especially because the encounters on which most Western and Eastern colonial studies focus are between Christians and non-Christians, with the colonizers always the former and the colonized always the latter. “Asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination,” what Mary Louise Pratt terms a “contact zone” (4), are also relations of difference. One unchanging and foundational difference is of religion—the colonized are never Christian except when converted by the efforts of colonial missionaries, at which point the hapless converts are perceived as both victims and inauthentic, awaiting restoration to freedom and their original faith by zealous nationalists. Indian Christians then become fodder for theorizing colonial hybridity as, for instance, famously executed by none other than the guru of postcolonial theory, Homi K. Bhabha (see “Questions”). According to Bhabha, the first Indian pastor made his appearance in the nineteenth century and the Bible is the English book.

The irony is how well this “postcolonial” view nonetheless suits the pro-colonial view that the purpose of colonization was to Christianize—that is, to civilize. Even mainstream attempts to go beyond the pro-colonial and the religious nationalist assume that the Bible is the English book. The Telugu blockbuster *Gopala Gopala*, directed by Kishore Kumar Pardasani, for instance, is the story of an atheist in India developing a healthy faith in Lord Krishna. Here, the central Hindu text is the Bhagavad Gita, which is correctly recited in Sanskrit; the central Muslim book is the Quran, again appropriately recited in Arabic; the central Christian book, the Bible, however, is read in English, even though, of the three religious books in India, it is the Bible that is consistently read in the language of the congregation—that is, in English to an English-speaking congregation, in Telugu to Telugu speakers, and so on. In the colonial and post-colonial periods, to ascribe foreign origins to a community or to list them as “converts” is to stamp them as unpatriotic and anti-nationalist. Given this context, a discussion on the Thomas Christians in the context of colonialism has the potential to raise some important queries for orientalist and/or anti-colonial scholarship and curriculum.

For students of literary and cultural studies, a critical postcolonial reading of selected texts offers rare instances of interactions between society, imagination, and representation; moreover, the power politics played out in the context of early colonialism and native Christianity will be of interest to this community. Students of colonial studies, whether interested in mainstream canonical texts or indigenous/subaltern/postcolonial marginal texts, will find these re/readings of metropolitan and provincial texts of Portuguese colonization of Indian regions relevant. The anticipated audience also includes students of religious studies interested in the dynamics of a religion shared by the colonizer and the colonized; students of medieval and early modern studies who dare to open up the canon and the period to history and geography; readers of South Asia texts and its diaspora around the world, particularly students of India studies, who are interested in the continued impact of colonial history on their lives and cultures; and finally the general reader interested in relationships of religion and society in the sixteenth-century colonial period. Again, this title will speak to scholars in the area of studies in Christianity by providing ample reasons to reconsider the current boundaries of their discipline in the face of living traditions of Christianity with origin in precolonial India.

The texts discussed in this book throw additional light on the complex relationship between Indian Christians and Portuguese Christians, pointing to the role of both religious and secular politics in shaping the injustices that marked the period; moreover, the introduction to the very notion of an “Eastern” Christianity in the context of European colonialism is relevant for those who denounce Christianity as at once colonial and Western. In the academic field, studies in so-called World Christianity revolve mainly around colonial missions and Western missionary movements in the non-West. Given that a professor of World Christianity is typically someone specialized in Western Christianity, the history, culture, and texts of a community such as the Thomas Christians tend to be absent from schools, colleges, and universities. It is my hope that this project can remedy some of the biases arising from such a system. Finally, in these times, diasporas in the West are seeing increasing numbers of Christians from the Middle East landing on Western shores. Their history, as it relates to the Thomas Christians, narrated in these pages provides a nuanced awareness of a Christian missionary world that is different from that of colonial Europe.

Notes

- 1 This book will not employ any diacritical marks.
- 2 George Kurukkoor notes that the term was derived from the portmanteau “malavaram” (meaning “mountain-slope”) (31).
- 3 “Mar” is an honorific title in East Syriac meaning “my Lord.” It is here assigned to a prelate.
- 4 I have summarized information from selected entries in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Christianity in India* edited by Errol D’Lima SJ.

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2 Prester John of India

Imagination first, (con)quest next

Elizabeth Harbwick asked V.S. Naipaul the meaning of the “dot” on Indian women’s foreheads and received an infamous reply: he announced the dot declared “my head is empty” and got the negative attention he asked for (Harbwick). Harbwick, on the other hand, was taken to task for anthropologizing Indians (Bewes 79). However, what Harbwick, Naipaul, and their critics shared was the notion that all “Indian” women in general wore the *pottu* or *bindhi*, the “dot,” an assumption that lends itself to imagining India as Hindu. But in the precolonial period, the West imagined India as the land of, among others, Buddhists, Brahmans, and Christians. In fact, the West imagined the Christian community in India would be their panacea against all the ills of the times, including the major problem for them of Muslim dominance over their much-desired trade routes. At the heart of this imagining of a Christian India rose the figure of Prester John, an image that soon adorned books and masts.

In 1986, the Portuguese Ambassador to South Africa unveiled a monument of Prester John—sitting in consultation with a Portuguese navigator at the centre of a raised Portuguese imperial cross—in Port Elizabeth’s Fleming Square, just across from the City Hall. The accompanying plaque, reading, “In memory of those seafarers who searched for Prester John 1145–1645,” appears in English, Afrikaans, Portuguese, and Zulu. The memorial is thus not to the mythical Prester John himself, but to all those real people who fared the tumultuous seas for five hundred years in search of him. The location of the monument, at the south-east tip of Africa, marks the region of departure to the much-anticipated India; yet, it also suggests the debates over the native place of Prester John: Ethiopia, China, elsewhere?

Contemporary popular culture, the media (both Eastern and Western), and scholars who directly or indirectly work on India tend to represent India as a monolithic and eternally Hindu entity. In their understanding, Indian Christians are a recent (British) colonial aberration. But as the stubborn instance of Prester John suggests, this was not how Indian Christians were perceived before the age of European colonialism. While even the remotest links between the figure of Prester John and India have been questioned in the colonial and post-colonial periods, the undeniable fact exists

that the European West began its search for India in the name of Prester John, who was assumed to be the Christian king of India, as early as the eleventh century.

My study here on Eastern Christians and India considers how India was imagined by the West in the period leading up to the arrival of Vasco da Gama—more specifically, the link that exists between imagination and (con)quest. Pramod K. Nayar sums up this connection as follows:

Narratives, whether fables, fantasies, or travel accounts, were instrumental in producing the cultural imaginary (a set of images, discourses, and narratives that enable a community to share a fantasy, an anxiety, or a collective desire, and influence the ways in which the community would acquire knowledge or interpret the world—it is a social condition that influences the unconscious of an entire community.) This cultural imaginary in turn spurred the quest for the East. (*Colonial* 14)

One cannot underestimate the imaginary, whose reach is material—defining an entire community’s perspective and ideology and, thus, its interpretation of lived life. Both quest and conquest draw direction and substance from the imaginary. How the West imagined the East before the fifteenth century impelled them to the oriental mission in the fifteenth century. The religious and political components of this mission thus manifested in imaginings of India as heretical and apposite for colonization.

Imagining a non-Christian India

James Mill’s *The History of British India* of 1817, which went on to become the seminal reference of nineteenth-century colonial administrators and scholars, breaks India’s history into three periods: the Hindu, the Muslim, and the British. Most postcolonial scholars have religiously adhered to this tripartite division, fostering the perspective that the colonial period is synonymous with the British colonial period and that Indian society is mainly Hindu–Muslim. To acknowledge India as a Hindu majority nation is also to acknowledge other religious communities as minority groups in the Indian nation. Yet, inexplicably, cultural critiques and historical narratives of India increasingly tend to represent that country as devoid of certain minority communities prior to colonization, including the community of Indian Christians. I will consider here the absence in scholarship of any representation or imagining of the existence of Indian Christians prior to the most recent instance of European colonialism. I suggest that this tendency is driven by colonial ideology even within so-called postcolonial studies and that it has serious implications for related minority communities as well as for studies in related disciplines.

In an interview titled “Christianity Didn’t Damage India Like Islam,” Naipaul describes India as a Hindu India. According to him, Christianity’s

incursions came with British colonization. When the interviewer asks, “What do you make of the school of thought that asserts these invasions, and later influences, actually enriched Indian culture and life?” Naipaul responds,

Here again I find in the question an element of political politeness. Christianity did not damage India the way Islam had. There are two sides to Christianity in India. There is the fine source of the New Learning that came with the British. There is another, more petty Christianity that came as the personal faith of the rulers and then the missionaries.

In other words, given that the history of India has been marked by colonial religions, that is, Christianity and Islam, Christianity has—from a “politically incorrect” perspective—been less harmful for India. A precolonial Indian Christian community is entirely outside Naipaul’s paradigm. In fact, Naipaul appears to be either ignorant of or he finds no use for the historical fact of the Portuguese, Dutch, and French colonizations that saw varieties of Christianity enter the shores of India, and he tips his hat to a New Learning (modern?) Christianity made in England. Naipaul, it appears, has bought into the colonial discourse that the purpose of colonialism is one of Christianizing or civilizing. And the fact that his default awareness of Indian Christianity begins with British colonialism narrows that discourse further to the British colonial mission. There is no doubt that the views of Naipaul, as a Nobel laureate and a prolific writer, have a major place within the humanities and particularly within postcolonial studies.

As far as Christianity is concerned, most postcolonial scholars take the default position that the condition of India is defined by British colonization and its civilizing mission, where civilizing is just another word for introducing Christianity. In Said’s view, this was not a British but a French introduction in the nineteenth century, but it was still a response to British colonization (*Orientalism* 169). In *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Nayar points to the policies of British colonial administrators and thinkers such as William Bentick, Jeremy Bentham, and James Mill, according to whom Hinduism and Indian society as a whole had to be civilized (read Christianized) (38–39). In the section “Colonial Cultures and Intervention II: Religion,” Nayar is more specific. He cites William Bruton’s description of the spectacle of the “Jagganath” and David Smith’s and Fanny Parkes’ views on the “sati” to support his overall argument that the responses of these colonialists marked only the beginning of “evangelical proselytizing and ‘civilizing’” (63). Nayar concludes, “The colonized were moulded into citizens of a new political order through Christianity, English education and European cultures” (66). He is right to cite these several instances of colonial responses to Hindu rituals and traditions as well as the mindset of converts as evidence of the impact of British colonial “civilizing” strategies. However, to assume as he does that “Indian Christians” are products of

British colonialism is not only far from the historical reality—in that it offers no account of precolonial or pre-British Indian Christians—but also a symptom of the continuing interpellation of the postcolonial scholar by that very British colonial discourse.

Bernard Cohn argues that British colonial policies harmed contemporary traditions in Africa and India when the colonial “conceptual scheme reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms” (162). Cohn is here referring to colonial mechanisms of stereotyping that entered policymaking as well as the pedagogy of the times. Nayar quotes this line of Cohn and rightly points out that “this ‘reduction’ was achieved by ignoring overlaps, contradictions and shared legacies within native cultures” (*Postcolonialism* 68). But Nayar, like other postcolonial critics such as Gauri Viswanathan and Ania Loomba, limits Indian Christians to “colonial converts”—a term emphasizing that Indians were converted to Christianity during colonial times under colonial pressure. But the term also means that Indian Christians are “converts”: that is, people who were somehow able to renounce their “overlaps, contradictions and shared legacies.” Given Nayar’s theorizing: “What postcolonial societies inherit as ‘their’ tradition, postcolonialism argues, was what *colonialism* identified, codified, valorized and thus produced as tradition” (*Postcolonialism* 68), one cannot but take a step back and wonder at the similar helplessness of “postcolonialism” in the face of Indian Christians.

The work of Western historians of India such as John Keay and John McLeod also demonstrates the problem of privileging British colonialism in discussions of Indian Christianity. Keay’s *India: A History*, published in 2000, contains very few and scattered references to the colonization of India by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French. The second edition of McLeod’s *The History of India*, which appeared in 2015, restricts the story of Portuguese colonialism to a single paragraph. Furthermore, in discussions of Indian Christianity, all of the above scholars emphasize the region north of the Deccan. These two points of foci of postcolonial historiography—on British colonialism and on Northern India—effectively keep both precolonial Indian Christianity and pre-British Indian Christianity out of postcolonial studies, and, by extension, out of scholarship and pedagogy in the humanities and the social sciences as a whole. In an article published in 1992 in *Representations*, Dipesh Chakrabarty formulates an argument that he later goes on to develop in *Provincializing Europe*:

[I]nsofar as the academic discourse of history—that is, “history” as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, “Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Kenyan,” and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.” (1)

Chakrabarty cautions that Europe continues to dominate Indian historiography, such that even subaltern Indian history is defined by the history of Europe. I would add to his argument that in the case of Indian historiography, not only Europe but also North India needs to be “provincialized,” and until then, South India and the history of its precolonial Christians should be strategically exempted from that process.

Brian Stanley, in his review of Charles Farhadian’s edited collection of essays, *Introducing World Christianity*, states, “Publishers are fast catching up with the fact that Christianity is no longer primarily a religion of the Western world. ‘World Christianity’—however that entity may be defined—is now a modish topic that is beginning to generate textbooks and not merely a host of specialist monographs” (282). The fact that Stanley feels compelled to commend publishers in the second decade of the twenty-first century for being “fast” in “catching up” with the reality of World Christianity is a symptom of the persistence of colonial discourse that made Christianity a Western monopoly. In this context, I am reminded of Albert Memmi’s statement in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: “[T]he most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history” (91). Memmi is reflecting on how European colonialism alienated African populations not only from their past but also, and as a result, from their present choices and their own, as well as the world’s, future. Similarly, as a result of colonialism, not just India but the world has been estranged from its own Church history, a history that ought to encompass the Western *and* Eastern churches. These efforts of authors such as Brian Stanley, Charles Farhadian, and others to “introduce” World Christianity into a postcolonial world such as this are, as regretful as they might seem, also timely and valuable. Whether such introductions will serve to undermine colonial discourse of Christianity as fundamentally Western is another question. We require extraordinary effort these days to even imagine India as precolonially Christian.

Prester John of India and the discourse of sameness

The hunt for Prester John was stamped by a search for shared grounds, especially Christianity. It is true that Church history as it unfolded in the fraught relationship between Rome and Byzantium made each side suspicious of the other’s orthodoxy. This difference could for now be set aside, at least by the West, in the prospect of direct trade with India by ending what they claimed to be the monopoly of trade by Muslims. Subrahmanyam, referring to the history of Indian Ocean trade from the eighth century onwards, points out that

other non-Muslim Asian merchant groups participated in this trade on a large scale as well and often wholly or largely on their own terms. These included Gujarati *vaniyas* [baniyas], Tamil and Telugu Chettis, Syrian [Thomas] Christians from south-western India, Chinese from Fukien and neighbouring provinces, and others besides the Jews. (“Of Imarat” 755)

For the time being, however, idolators and heretics were considered less of a threat than outright infidels. The narrative that evolved through the early part of the first millennium as a result was that Western Christians could benefit by linking with Christians of India who, as symbolized by Prester John, were wealthy and powerful. This discourse of sameness grew out of the West and as a need of the West.

The period of about five hundred years that preceded the European colonial “discovery” of India was marked by imaginations of India. India was imagined by the West as a country of abundance in merchandise: spices and stones, animals and military resources, medicine and miracles. For the most part, these products and services were not created out of thin air, but had become familiar to Europeans through trade with the Venetians, who either directly or through merchants of Africa, Turkey, and the Levant traded with India. Early sixteenth-century travellers to India, such as Fernao Lopes de Castanheda and Duarte Barbosa, traced the land and sea routes of merchandise from India. But well before the sixteenth century, communities in the West sought the day when they too would trade directly with India, and their imaginary of India sustained that goal. And to that end, it was a Christian India that they imagined: an India that would consequently support them over any Islamic merchant or mariner. A core text that sustained this imaginary of a Christian kingdom of India is the figure of Prester John and his letter.

In *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources*, Keagan Brewer provides a summary of the occurrence:

In 1122, a mysterious man calling himself John, Patriarch of the Indians, appeared in Rome and narrated before Pope Calixtus II stories of marvels and miracles which took place in his homeland, especially in connection with St. Thomas, who in Christian tradition was supposed to have converted India. Twenty years later, when a tremendous battle took place in the Far East (the Battle of Qatwan near Samarkand in 1141), Europeans would cast their mind back to this earlier John. . . .

Around two decades later, an anonymous European writer adopted the persona of Prester John and wrote a humorous letter describing his marvelous kingdom. This work was widely read in the Middle Ages, and survives in many different versions. . . . (29)

Brewer’s narrative inevitably carries the mark of the uncertainties that surrounded this phenomenon and its narrative down the ages: The man who called himself “John, Patriarch of the Indians” is “mysterious.” He narrates to the pope “marvels and miracles.” Decades later, medieval Europe is mistaken in assuming Prester John to be the hero of a battle. When Prester John’s letter arrives forty years thence, the author turns out to be someone else. This text had the unique predicament of holding the space of two extreme poles: “it was sometimes held as *verissimus*, ‘the highest truth’, a

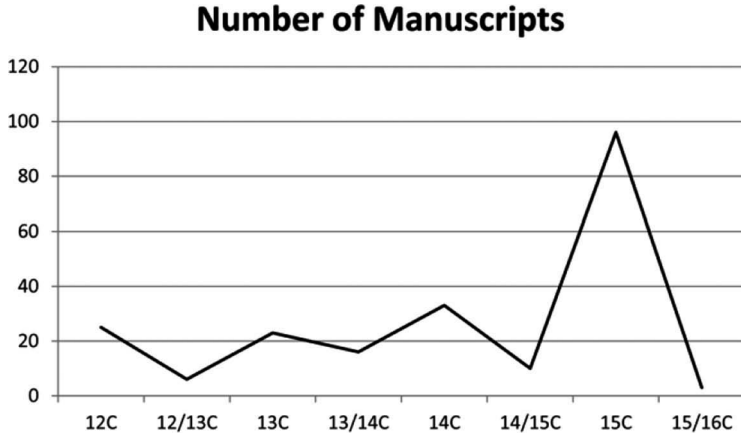
factual diplomatic artefact brought to Europe from the hand of Prester John himself, and sometimes presented as a *pseudepistola*, a ‘fake letter’” (Brewer 25). However, a remarkable aspect of this event, which now includes not only Prester John and his letter but also the narratives on and allusions to responses to them, is the impulse towards a Christian India.

One of the earliest manuscripts to mention Prester John of India is *De Adventu Patriarchae Indorum sub Calixto papa secundo* (On the Arrival of the Patriarch of the Indians to Rome under Pope Calixtus II) of 1122. In it, the anonymous author declares,

Truly, when the patriarch of the Indians arrived in Rome, specifically of that India which makes up the farthest end of the world, with his coming he performed a miracle for the Roman court and almost all of Italy to wonder at, since no one had come here from that place through the course of innumerable years, nor had anyone from such distant lands and barbarous regions ever been seen throughout almost all of Italy besides this aforesaid Patriarch of blessed life. (Brewer 34)

That is, although the patriarch’s narratives about St. Thomas and his miracles were well received and wondered at, what the contemporary society found astonishing was the testimony that the very person of the patriarch gave in presenting himself alive and whole after the unimaginably difficult journey from India—“specifically of that India which makes up the farthest end of the world”—to Rome, in the twelfth century.

The letter itself—allegedly written by Prester John, King of India, to Pope Calixtus II and the King of France in about the year 1123—is a greeting from across this vast geographic space. It begins: “Prester John, by the Grace of God most powerful king over all Christian kings, greetings to the Emperor of Rome and the King of France, our friends” (Slessarev 67). The next sentence is an invitation to “learn about us,” that is, people, places, and beasts. Then follows a declaration of the Catholic faith of the Nicene Creed, of the orthodoxy of Prester’s faith even when there are rite and cultural differences: you say we do not “pray to God the way you do in your country, we let you know that we worship and believe in Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one Deity and one true God only.” He offers the recipients of his letter any help they might require of him and promises gifts of “lands, manors, and mansions” if they desire to visit his country. This is followed by several pages of narrative displays of the wealth and wonders of his land. One also finds here what almost reads like an early version of what we know as “the great American dream”: “[N]obody can be poor in our country who wants to earn his living” (Slessarev 75). As the long letter draws to a close, it refers to some of the miracles of St. Thomas of India. The letter concludes with Prester John once again offering promises of help (“do not hesitate to ask, for we shall do it gladly” [Slessarev 78]), the hopes that his addressees will have the courage to conduct “the holy



Graph 2.1 The letter of Prester John of India goes “viral” in the fifteenth century.

pilgrimage” (presumably to the Holy Land; but, perhaps to the tomb of St. Thomas), and prayers that they be protected by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

This piece of literature was one of the most frequently referenced texts in the medieval and early modern periods of Western history. Brewer provides the above graph (313) registering the number of “hits” the letter received between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries (Graph 2.1).

Brewer explains the “gone viral” stage of the letter in the fifteenth century as triggered by Portugal’s lead in maritime adventures, especially in Ethiopia, which proved to have a Christian king. Other reasons for the “spike,” according to Brewer, were demographics and the spread of education. He links the later drop to the introduction of printing. According to Kim M. Phillips, extant copies of the letter exceed most travel writings of the period, and its readers were as varied as laypeople who wished to be entertained and monks who perhaps sought to be edified by Prester John’s utopian world (47).

The letter can also be said to have shaped an entire genre by becoming the Ur text of travel writing. Many characteristics of later Western travel writing find their prototype in the letter of Prester John of India: the presentation of the epistle by an exotic author, first-hand witnessing and testimonies, convincing descriptions of extraordinary sights and events, the revelation of unimaginable wealth, and the efforts of the author to endear or at least gain the trust of the reader. Phillips declares, “The *Letter* was a major source for both Mandeville and Witte and indeed in some ways a foundational text for all later medieval travel writing” (46). She notes that some of these travel writers (such as Sir John Mandeville and Johannes Witte de Hesse) have themselves been declared figments of the imagination, and some have claimed to have visited all three: the shrine of St. Thomas, Prester John’s kingdom, and India. But a host of other writers who are taken

more seriously have also been influenced by Prester John's letter, including William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, Jordanus of Severac, and others. Prester's travel writing thus supported and to some extent triggered the numerous precolonial seaborne adventures of the West in search of a Christian India in the twelfth century.

The abundance of wealth the East promised, especially at a time when the West was experiencing religio-economic struggles, had a powerful impact. The dawn of the twelfth century saw reinforced attacks on the first Crusader state—the County of Edessa—and its neighbouring regions. Prester John's promise of assistance in what could become a second Crusade was indeed timely. But his letter, addressed to the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel I Comnenus, with copies forwarded also to the Holy Roman Emperor among a couple of others, swayed the ambition of merchants and navigators of the West well into the colonial period. To quote Phillips, “The *Letter's* evocation of a spectacularly rich Christian kingdom in the distant East, presided over by a ruler who was at once priest and king, possessed a powerful and flexible appeal for European readers well beyond the reign of Frederick Barbarossa” (17). The historical fact is that in the end, the West found these intimations of wealth to be real enough for colonialism to begin. According to O'Rourke and Williamson, the Cape route caused spice prices to fall in Europe resulting, finally, in “a more competitive Euro-Asian trading market, with European consumers the ultimate beneficiaries” (30). By the time the British arrived in India, rather late in the narrative, the colonial net profit from the sale of salt alone in 1803–1804 would be over two million rupees (Martin 336). While this information might add some “value” to Mahatma Gandhi's “symbolic” salt *satyagraha*, it undoubtedly reflects on almost half a millennium of precolonial trade plans of the West and later its formidable colonial expansion. The figure of Prester John, as an Indian Christian priest and king, and his letter can be said to have done better than the world's best blockbuster movies: both of them captivated the West for centuries and in turn shaped the destiny of the East, even if in ways the latter may have neither dreamed of nor desired.

By noting that the figure of Prester John offered the West the hope of linking up with a Christian India, I want to emphasize again the West's search for similarities in the East in the medieval and early modern periods. In other words, this was a search for shared grounds. Christianity was central to this search, promising a community that was like the West in the matter of religion at a time when a defining factor of the enemy of the crusades was precisely religion—Islam. That is why Prester John was such a powerful figure and, as Ian Burnet points out in *Spice Islands*, “all of Christendom was in awe at the possibility of a powerful ally in the East, ready to help recapture the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem” (56). In some recent scholars' review of this history, the excitement and enthusiasm manifest in the West over India's offer of wealth, outlined above, fall flat. Christopher Taylor argues that if the West took an interest in Prester John and his kingdom, it was not for

material gain but to form “an expansive global Christian network” (445) that would ultimately keep the Muslims out. He terms this “the imperial logic of Christian expansion” (446). The medieval and early modern attempts to communicate with Prester John underscore, for Taylor, “the epistemological importance of the unknown” (446). As he argues, “the legend proffered an expectation that the known world would succumb inevitably to the will of a global Christendom, within which alterity threatens to become a productive force, once and for all” (446). Since the West recognized the East as similar to itself in its religion, the East as other had unprecedentedly gained (“become a productive force”) in the positivity of the self.

In theorizing the “other,” two French philosophers hold somewhat opposing views on the relationship between the self and the other: Paul Ricoeur, bringing together hermeneutics and phenomenology, argues for the priority of the self in this relationship; Emmanuel Levinas, for whom ethics is first philosophy, prioritizes the other. Similitude is central to Ricoeur’s position, so that, as Ricoeur writes, “*Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other” (3). Here, Ricoeur describes the process in Hegelian terms as interflows and, therefore, as expelling difference. Furthermore, according to him, ethics resides in the fact that “the *autonomy* of the self will appear then to be tightly bound up with *solicitude* for one’s neighbour and with *justice* for each individual” (18). Levinas, on the other hand, cautions against placing the self at the centre and sees the self’s so-called commitment to the other as inevitably an aspect of “being” rather than ethics (*Otherwise than Being* 140). The theory that underlines Taylor’s thesis seems to privilege the other before the self and as such promises a future that is anti-colonial.

However, not only did history prove otherwise—that is, it was the proto-colonial or colonial self and not the other that dominated, to the misfortune of the other—but current scholarship such as Taylor’s also goes against an ethics of the unknown and the other, even as it makes a claim for “the epistemological importance of the unknown.” On one hand, the Christians of the West in the medieval and early modern periods proposed a long-lasting trade relationship and friendship with Indian Christians, and on the other hand, postcolonial scholars struggle against the notion of an Eastern Christianity that does not also border on heresy. Whereas the first promises success within a Ricoeurian understanding of sameness and sharedness, the second provokes us to reconsider this theory in the post-colonial period where mutuality continues to be unattainable.

One cannot but be alerted to the discourse of sameness and its role in shaping the West and the East as politically loaded concepts, making Europe/West and India/East. Phillips misses this function of sameness when she writes, “The *Letter of Prester John* seems at first glance to be the definitive account of eastern alterity—and has been plausibly construed as such by recent scholars—yet the biblical imagery and cadences of its prose fasten

it securely to the traditions of the European, Latin imagination. Indeed, it could be said to evoke Sameness as much as Otherness” (48). Here, Phillips construes sameness as some kind of a fraternity. Along with that, she categorizes biblical imagery and—something stylistically vague—the “cadences of its prose” as Western. In this way, she ends up confirming rather than refuting Michael Uebel’s argument: “Prester John’s place—the place of the utopic—at the origins and boundaries of the thinkable affords us the opportunity to construct a model of how otherness became the crucial myth by which Latin Europe organized and conceived of itself” (53). But then, central to undermining the ethics of the unknown is the assumption that Eastern Christians during the medieval and early modern periods were Nestorian by default. Later in this book, I show the deep and lasting negative impact of this kind of branding on Indian Christians in the colonial period. Here, I simply wish to point to specific premises and conclusions that modern-day scholars such as Taylor resort to in their investigations of the unknown other.

Prester John: a Nestorian heretic?

The Christology of the Persian Church—as presented by its most important theologian, Babai the Great (604–28)—uses the formula, “one person, two hypostases, two natures.” This is the so-called Nestorian position. However, not every doctrine held by an autonomous church is necessarily heretical—as Geevargis Chediath argues in his doctoral dissertation, “The Christology of Mar Babai the Great (551–628),” when defining diphysitism. Indeed, according to Mundadan, Mar Babai the Great’s position indicates “a particular Christology of a particular Church contributing to the richness of the one Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ” (*History* 500–01). In explaining the history of the early Church, Mundadan suggests that “[t]he approach of the West (Churches of the Roman empire) became increasingly juridical from the 4th century onwards. This led to a tendency to stigmatize any attempt at legitimate autonomy as ‘schism’ and any theological difference as ‘heresy’” (493). This would certainly have also been the case during the period of Portuguese colonization in India; however, scholars of the post-colonial period once again resort to labelling missionary Christianity from the Middle East with the single “heretic” brush of Nestorianism.

In this vein, Taylor claims that Prester John “as an Oriental Christian would likely be, if he existed, a Nestorian heretic” (449). Otto of Freising reports that Bishop Hugh of Jabala told him personally that “a certain John, a king and priest who dwells beyond Persia and Armenia in the uttermost East and, with all his people, is a Christian but a Nestorian” (Mierow 443). Editors Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp, in the footnote to Otto’s statement, note that according to Ibn al-athir, the Arab historian, John was a Manichaean. And so it does not appear that Taylor, when he refers to an oriental Christian as a Nestorian heretic, is culling from Otto. Rather, Taylor

categorizes the figure Prester John under Nestorian heretic simply because he is an Eastern Christian. He then uses this as a premise to trace additional connections between Islam and Eastern Christianity—links that are further strengthened, for Taylor, through their association with another figure, that is, the apostle Thomas (450). Taylor thus makes the argument, and it appears he is repeating a position taken earlier by his mentor Geraldine Heng regarding *Mandeville's Travels*, that the West drew these links for the sake of a global Christianity (see Heng 20). One sees the same kind of argument taken up in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (see 273–74). The role of trade in all of this is, curiously, ignored.

Another author who similarly labels Prester John a Nestorian is Charles Nowell, for whom the idea of Prester John as an Eastern Christian “is not utterly fantastic, for Nestorianism did exist in Asia” (436). That is, if Prester John is assumed to be an Eastern Christian, the reason for such an assumption lies in the fact of the spread of Nestorianism in Asia. Thomas Hahn goes a bit further—even the concept of “Christian values” is alien to the East: “The idealization of the Indians clearly reflects Christian values, and it does not provide very reliable information about Eastern life” for the medieval West (213). Accordingly, when the East is considered Christian, the East ceases to be the East. In such “Western” reasoning, if the East is to be imagined as Christian it can only be as heretical or as a part of Western expansionism.

While the motive is apparently good, defining the East in the image of the West—seeing in it a certain sameness—proves to be a problem that persists in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Briefly, the (Ricoeurian) expansion of the self into the other becomes colonialism. To apply Levinas' theory of ethics: it is a problem because the assumption of sameness involves self-aggrandizing generosity rather than justice for the other; furthermore, the other is submitted to stereotyping—in this case, as “Moors.” Even the place of the other can never be identified. Briefly, the East as Christian and as colony are both cartographic and ideological products of the West.

“Which India?” and the discourse of difference

A scene in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (c. the fourth century) sees the apostles being allocated the kingdoms of the world by lot for mission work. When India falls to Thomas, he begs Jesus, “Whithersoever you will, our Lord, send me; only to India I will not go” (Klijn 18). (It appears Thomas knew enough about India to fear going there.) The *Acts*, of course, goes on to tell the story of Jesus selling his apostle to a merchant of King Gondopharnes—of “the south country” (Syriac text) or “India” (Greek text) (20). A.F.J. Klijn comments that the original manuscript must have read “from the south country, from India” (20). However, other scholars, including Eric Herbert Warmington and Philip Mayerson, often ask “which

India?”—almost always suggesting that the referenced India of the precolonial period is any place but India. Here, I will focus on the question as it comes up with regard to Prester John of India, for the identification of Prester with a particular region reflects not only the West’s geographical sense of India but also the West’s own colonial ambitions and ideological position regarding the other.

To begin, let us take another look at the initial mention of Prester in the West. Brewer presents an anonymous text found by Friedrich Zarncke in the late nineteenth century dated from around the mid-twelfth century. The author’s stated purpose in delivering the event in writing is to communicate to posterity what was narrated at Rome about St. Thomas, the apostle. The anonymous writer then begins:

So, at the time of Pope Calixtus the Second, specifically in the fourth year of his papacy [i.e. 1122], may you know that something worthy of being remembered in new annals took place in the Roman fatherland.

Truly, when the patriarch of the Indians arrived in Rome, specifically of that India which makes up the farthest end of the world, with his coming he performed a miracle for the Roman court and almost all of Italy to wonder at, since no one had come here from that place through the course of innumerable years, nor had anybody from such distant lands and barbarous regions ever been seen throughout almost all of Italy besides this aforesaid Patriarch John of blessed life. Indeed, if anyone wishes to know the reason for his visit, may he know that it was this: with the death of his predecessor, the Patriarch of the Indians of happy memory, all the Indians were calmly brought together, and they eventually elected him high-priest although he was unwilling and for a long time resistant, as is proper. Then, after the custody of the holy place had finally been given by election to this aforesaid Patriarch John, he began to diligently inquire about how he might at some time come to Byzantium, as procedure demanded, in order to receive the pallium and the other insignia of confirmation and rank. (Brewer 35)

According to the report, this was someone who had newly been made patriarch by the ecclesiastical authorities of Byzantium. After Byzantium, he visited Rome, where, at the Lateran Palace, in the presence of the pope and a large group of clergy and laity and with the help of an interpreter, the patriarch described his city as well as the miracles of St. Thomas the apostle whose body he claimed was preserved in a nearby church.

The question that has come up again and again in the late medieval and colonial periods is which India the author of the report is referencing here. As if to forestall any confusion on the matter, the anonymous scribe clarifies, “specifically of that India which makes up the farthest end of the world.” However, in the late medieval period, this “farthest end” could be any place beyond Europe. The appearance of the patriarch even as Europe

considered a second crusade did not go unnoticed or unremembered. Later, when first Aleppo and next Edessa fell to the Muslims, many leaders in the West would remember this Christian leader from the farthest end of the world. Of course, the later letter of Prester John of India revived their hope, and the search for India began in earnest.

But India was not unknown to the West before the twelfth century. Cosmas Indicopleustes is believed to be one of the last to have travelled from the West to the East, before Islamic conquests in the Levant during the seventh century made access to the East difficult if not impossible. H.G. Rawlinson cites several historical figures who visited India. He mentions Pythagoras (fourth century B.C.E.) who, according to his biographer, “travelled widely, studying the esoteric teaching of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and even the Brahmans” (4)—the reference to the “Brahmans” clarifying which India, indeed, Pythagoras visited. There was close relationship between the Greek and Indian courts during the periods of Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara, and Asoka: “Ambassadors from the Greek monarchs of the West resided at Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital. The most important of these was Megasthenes, who wrote a detailed account of Chandragupta’s empire, much of which has been preserved” (10). During the time of Asoka (Asoka is believed to have died around 232 B.C.E.) “a flourishing trade was being carried on between Syria and India” (11). Alexander invaded parts of Northern India around 326 C.E. (9).

Church Fathers in the early part of the Common Era also testify to their awareness of the geographical location of India. Xavier Koodapuzha lists some of these personalities and their documents in *Bharatha Sabha Charithram (Indian Church History)*. He notes that St. Ambrose (333–97 C.E.) knew much about India through Latin sources and that he translated a document on the customs of the Brahmans from the Greek to Latin called “De Moribus Brachmanorum” (146). In describing the travels of a Theban scholar in India, Ambrose mentions that at the end of many days of sailing in the sea, he arrived at Muzziris, the most important port of India on this side of the Ganges (Koodapuzha *Bharatha* 146). Koodapuzha points to Ambrose’s comments on the Brahmans of the region, the gymnasts of India, the Indian Ocean, and the river Ganges as evidence that he does not confuse India with Egypt or Ethiopia but rather intends the region of what was considered the present India. Regarding St. Jerome, Susan Weingarten writes, “Britain (or the Scythians) in the north, the Atlantic Ocean in the West, Ethiopia in the south and India in the east mark for him the farthest extents of the world”—which was also the prevalent understanding of the world map among authors (*Bharatha* 197). George Nedungatt cites Weingarten, as well as numerous contemporary and ancient authors and documents, to establish that Church Fathers such as Jerome knew exactly which India they were referring to. He observes Jerome’s references to Brahmans and the practice of sati as clear evidence that these Church Fathers did not confuse India with other countries (*Quest* 77).

In the twelfth century, the Mongol conquests of the period facilitated travel to the East. A certain St. Bernard the Penitent is said to have visited the tomb of St. Thomas in India in the 1170s; two decades later, a Saxon king by the name of Henry Morungen too made the pilgrimage; and, of course, the most famous visitor to the tomb in the thirteenth century was Marco Polo. William of Adam, in his proposal *How to Defeat the Saracens*, written around 1317, got his India right in his discussions of meeting with a former Christian there. In the fourteenth century, Odoric of Pordenone and John of Marignolli visited St. Thomas' tomb in India, as did Nicolo Conti a century later. Ian Gilman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit mention some of these individuals and others who visited India and the tomb of St. Thomas in the Middle Ages—all of these references and those above standing in evidence that the medieval West was not entirely ignorant of the geographical location of India.

The *Mirabilia Descripta* (c. 1340) of the Dominican friar, Jordanus Catalani of Severac, provided the West with one of the most detailed accounts of India in the fourteenth century. Between 1321 and 1328, Jordanus visited both Greater (“India Major”: i.e., regions of present-day South India) and Lesser (“India Minor”: i.e., regions of present-day North India) India, where he learnt of the martyrdom of his four companions in Thana (in Maharashtra) at the hands of Muslims, suffered persecution there himself, and travelled to Quilon (in Kerala). Although *The Travancore State Manual* records “a Mahomedan invasion from the north under Malik Kafur (1310 A.D.)” (Aiya 274), the rulers of Quilon appear to have successfully repelled Kafur and any other Islamic invasions and the region enjoyed trade relations with Persia. Quilon also contained a thriving community of Christians with their own local chief, whom Pope John XXII, in a letter (commending Jordanus), addressed as “dominus Nascariorum” (the lord of the Nazaranis)—an appellation that appears accurate given that the community of Thomas Christians were called Nazaranikal or the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The community was originally referred to as Tarijanes (from “Tarutaykal,” meaning “orthodox”) and later as “nasrani,” chiefly by the Muslims and the Turks (as the Jesuit, Francis Roz, who later became prelate of the Thomas Christians, explains) (see Nedungatt, *Quest* 370). Mundadan cites the letter of John XXII as well as a Chinese document in which this Christian chief is mentioned as “sort of an ambassador” of the local ruler (*History* 134).

Jordanus returned to Europe and had an audience with the pope in 1329. He then went back to India with letters from the pope dated between 21 August 1329 and 8 April 1330 addressed to various rulers of India: “to the sultan of Delhi, to the king of ‘Lesser India’, to the rulers in Quilon and Ethiopia; finally there was a letter, the one noted above, meant for the leader of the ‘Nascarini’ (Nazarani) Christians and his community” (Mundadan, *History* 135–36). Referring to volume 3 of Girolamo Golubovich’s fourteen-volume *Bibliotheca Bio-Bibliographica della Terra Santa e dell, Oriente Franciscano* (Quarrachi, 1906), Mundadan makes the rare observation that in the Middle Ages, the name “Ethiopia” was often used (presumably

by the West) for the region lying between the rivers Ganga (Ganges) and Godavari (*History* 136). Phillips also refers to the confusion of sources that conflate “Ethiopia” and “Middle India,” thereby making African monsters into Indian ones (20). Jessica Keating and Lia Markey present case studies on the application of the term “Indian” to “objects of remote and sometimes obscure manufacture” (297) in even the early modern period. Pope John XXII’s letter to the ruler of Ethiopia, dispatched through Jordanus who was headed to India to take over as the newly appointed bishop of Quilon, however, counters deliberations on the geography of India by suggesting rather another question: which Ethiopia?

It is clear that when Jordanus refers to “Lesser India,” he means neither Africa nor the Middle East. Mundadan observes that fourteenth-century Western missionaries used this term in reference to the part of India under Muslim rule. Lesser India proved difficult for mission work, unlike other regions of India conducive to entry by missionaries, which were called “Greater India” (*History* 142). Ongoing debates (notable among whom is Henry Yule) over the reference to “Lesser India” in *Mirabilia Descripta* elicits the following footnote in Mundadan: “The Indian coast from Sind to Kanara (sic). Some authors maintain that Lesser India did not begin in Sind or the Indus Valley, but at Ormuz in the Persian Gulf. Thana, Broach and Coga (Cogola) mentioned by Jordan [Jordanus Catalini] are all located on what was then called the Konkan coast” (*History* 135). The martyrdom of Jordanus’ companions in Thana in particular serves to reconfirm that Jordanus did reside in what is the present state of Maharashtra, that is, part of the then “Lesser India.” Jordanus is not confused about which India he had visited, suffered in, or established a diocese in. Phillips, however, citing medieval writers such as Jordanus and Niccolo dei Conti (as per Bracciolini Pogio, secretary to Pope Eugene IV) among a few others (Marco Polo and Mandeville), arrives at a different conclusion: “Medieval ‘India,’ however conceived, constituted a vaster range of territory than implied by its modern reference to the Indian subcontinent and potentially encompassed south, east, and southeast Asia as well as east Africa” (19). Phillips is here summarizing the vagueness that is thought to have prevailed in the medieval period about the location of India, basing the geographic uncertainty of medieval writers regarding India on travellers such as Jordanus and dei Conti. But these travellers painstakingly delineate directions, distances, and place names that can easily be verified in the twenty-first century. Richard Henry Major, for example, presented Pogio’s report of Niccolo dei Conti’s journey:

Proceeding onwards the said Nicolo arrived at a maritime city, which is named Malepur, situated in the second gulf beyond the Indus. Here the body of Saint Thomas lies honourably buried in a large and beautiful church, it is worshipped by heretics, who are called Nestorians, and inhabit this city to the number of a thousand. These Nestorians are scattered over all India, as the Jews among us. (7)

This maritime city is none other than Mylapore, where to this day pilgrims throng to visit the tomb of St. Thomas. Indeed, Mundadan clarifies that Major's "gulf beyond the Indus" is the Bay of Bengal (*History* 143)—a level of specificity ignored in Phillips' conclusions. In a similar vein, Phillips, commenting on Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hiberniae* (c. 1185), writes, "Gerald's references to gems, silks, and spices indicate a concept of the East extending to China" (22). But gems, silks, and spices had been some of the main exports from India for over a millennium even in the time of Gerald of Wales. Indeed, according to Procopius, Byzantine historian of the fifth century, Emperor Justinian learnt the secrets of sericulture from Indian monks.

My point is not that Gerald of Wales either did or did not refer to China, but that there appears to be an ideological burden that prevents some scholars from making India one of the possibilities of the Prester John terrain, which may be linked to the problem of having to deal with a precolonial Christian community of India of import. Brewer, for example, favours the view that Prester John refers to the hero of the Battle of Qatwan in 1141, the Mongol military leader Yelu Dashi (29)—an a priori stance that appears to have influenced his selection of sources for translation. However, several of the sources that he has not actually included but simply lists in an appendix table do refer to Prester John's location as India. In a few instances, Brewer offers a paraphrase or a translation of a brief passage from such sources. For example, he quotes a short passage from a letter to Pope Innocent IV, dated 31 March 1249, by Odo, Bishop of Toscolano:

You should also know that in the land of India, which St Thomas the Apostle converted, is a certain Christian King, who was placed in great strain amongst other Saracen Kings. Indeed, they attacked him from all sides, right up until the hour at which the Tartars came to that land, and he became one of them. And he rallied his army and the army of the Tartars, and invaded the Saracens. (278)

It must be remembered that the period of this attack on the Christian king and his people is marked by some diversity in the designation of allies and invaders. The "Saracens" are attacking, whereas the "Tartars" are supportive. In the thirteenth century, Tartars could be shamanists/animalists, Christians, or Muslims. The Delhi Sultan, Shams-ud-din Iltutmish, had refused to align with Jalal ad-Din Mingburnu against the Mongols. Is Odo suggesting that the Christian king made the mistake of joining a military expedition with the Tartar, whom the Mongols were decimating? Did he proceed with a relic (Andreas I reports to the pope that King David carried the "body") of St. Thomas? John of Joinville, chief chronicler of Louis IX of France, insists in a letter that Prester John was killed by Mongolians. This *plausibility* simply is not to be found in Brewer's analysis.

As unsound as it may seem to pursue the plausibility of a myth, the myth of Prester John played a significant role in determining the route of trade,

invasion, and colonialism in the late medieval and early modern periods. Waiting for Prester is said to have been one of the chief reasons for the failure of the second crusade. Prester's relocation to Ethiopia is believed to have been initiated by Giovanni da Carignano (1250–1330), who, in an incident reported in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* (1483) of Jacobus Philippus Foresti da Bergamo, interpreted visiting ambassadors from Ethiopia—offering military support to the West—as the people of Prester John. The other important source locating Prester John in Ethiopia is Francisco Alvares' report of *Pero a Covilha* (c. 1460–1526), one of King John II's most trusted subjects, who had been dispatched on secret errands before. Alvares describes Covilha's mission to the East:

When he [Covilha] arrived, the king spoke to him in great secrecy, telling him that he expected a great service of him, because he had always found him a good and faithful servant, and fortunate in his acts and services, and because he knew Arabic well; and this service was that he and another companion, who was named Afonso de Paiva, should both go to discover and learn about the Prester John and whether he bordered on the sea, and where pepper and cinnamon are to be found, and the other spices which from these parts went to Venice through the countries of the Moors . . . he requested Pero da Covilha to accept this journey, to do it as a special service, promising so to reward him that he would be a great man in his kingdom and all his people should ever live in contentment, and to do this service with the said Afonso de Paiva. To this Pero da Covilha answered that he regretted that his capacity was not as great as his desire to serve His Highness, and that as a faithful servant he accepted the journey with alacrity. (Brewer 218)

The “great secrecy” of King John II's conference with Covilha on the search for Prester John is the mark of the colonial seal of secrecy, enjoining delegates to silence about plans, products, places, and names. Covilha went to the land “where pepper and cinnamon are to be found,” that is, India, and on his way back dispatched a letter to his king through the Jewish contact, Joseph. He then, as advised by the king via the same person, proceeded to Ethiopia, where pepper would be introduced only during the colonial period. Historically, south-west India, specifically Malabar or the present-region of Kerala, was famed for its pepper: Odoric of Pordenone was astonished that “pepper is as abundant as grain in our land” (*Cathay* xlvi) and Ibn Battuta labelled it “the land of pepper” (Battuta vol. 4, 870). Covilha had no trouble alluding publicly to the Ethiopian king as Prester John. He may have done so with some zeal. Covilha possibly held the view that if Prester John's kingdom existed it was more likely to be outside Ethiopia, perhaps in India where he had witnessed Muslim ships (or ships from Africa and the Levant) being loaded with “pepper and cinnamon.” John II's hasty dispatch of Gama in search of India, not Ethiopia, suggests to some

scholars (Maddison 62–63; Beckingham 308; O'Rourke et al. 4; Prange 152) that the king of Portugal was privy to some information in Covilha's letter. It is also likely that the Portuguese inner circle deliberately cooked up the story of Prester John being in Ethiopia precisely to delay other nations or prevent them from reaching India.

Mundadan points out that "it still remains to be discovered precisely how and why at the beginning of the fourteenth century the identification of the Prester turns toward Ethiopia" (*History* 235). According to Cates Baldridge, "The imaginative relocation of Prester John to the Horn of Africa was aided by the fact that from time to time a reciprocal interest could be detected emerging from that region" (22). The reverse is also true. As the Carignano example shows, he, not the Ethiopians, interpreted the Ethiopian ambassador's offer of military help to mean the fulfilment of one of the promises in Prester John's letter. But what is more curious is that even though the Ethiopian king was called "Prester John," most historians considered the appellation false. Editor and translator of *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, Rebecca Catz, notes, "Paradoxically, at the same time that the sixteenth-century chroniclers refer to the *negus* [the king of Ethiopia] as the prester, they [for instance, Castanheda and Barros] reject his identification with the legendary Christian priest and monarch" (533). Fernao Lopes de Castanheda writes, "Alonso de Payva [was] passing over to the emperor of Ethiopia, erroneously called Presbyter John" (Kerr 242–43). Luis de Urreta's *Historia Ecclesiastica, Politica, Natural y Moral* (1610) concludes that Prester John is falsely linked to Ethiopia (see Brewer 291). And finally, in the seventeenth century, the work of German orientalist Hiob Ludolf contributed to removing Prester John from Ethiopia altogether.

Others locate Prester John in West or East Asia. According to Vsevolod Slessarev, the improbability of Prester John coming from India establishes that he came from Edessa (25). But for Jesuit philosopher and mathematician Philippe Avril, Prester is elsewhere—the title of his 1693 article says it all: "The Dalae-lama Is the Famous Preste-Jean." Avril's only reservation is that "*Preste-John* and the people under his subjection were Christians, whereas the Country that lies between the *Mogul* and *China* is now full of *Mahometans* and *Idolaters*" (Brewer 256). For Sir Richard Carnac Temple, "Prester John . . . was a universal name in medieval Europe for a mysterious Christian potentate somewhere in the Asiatic wilds, including Ethiopia or Christian Abyssinia. In reality, he and his Christian people were the Tartar . . . in China" (xli). In *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal*, dated 24 April 1880, Charles Dickens wrote an article titled "Who was Prester John?" (521–24). While Dickens' report is about a rare Stradivarius violin in China, he links that topic to the Asian Prester John:

But if the [Stradivarius] violin could only retort now upon its ignorant possessors, and tell something of its past, what hideous disclosures

there would be of music murdered in the convivial evenings it spent in the black felt tents of its Mongol keepers!

From Prester John of Mongolia to Stradivarius of Cremona, what a curious link it is between medieval and modern times! (524).

The conclusion, intended to be humorous, is built very effectively on orientalist stereotyping of the Chinese as uncivilized—devoid of the finer skills of playing or listening to a violin. They are, Dickens stresses, if Christian, Nestorian. If they themselves are not black, certainly their tents are. This is thus also an instance of how the Prester John figure functioned as colonial discourse that privileged the colonial self at the expense of the increasingly objectified other. In a sense, it exposes the discourse of difference or the ideology of othering that accompanied discussions on the location of Prester John, often taking the form: “Which India?”

In 1660, the Portuguese writer Balthazar Tellez wrote, in *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, “[T]hey [the West] to this Day expect the discovery of the hidden king of Cathay [Prester John of China]” (source reproduced in Brewer 244).¹ In the contemporary period, popular representations of Prester place him both in the West and in the East. Arthurian comics produced by Marvel Comics locate him, as in *The Fantastic Four*, in the long-lost apple country, Avalon, in England (Lee and Kirby). Several depictions of the Prester in popular genres in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries also place him in East Asia. The evasive Prester John, king of an evasive East Asia, is now creatively sought out in movies such as *By the Will of Genghis Khan* and Netflix series such as *Marco Polo*.²

What is interesting in this displacement of Prester John, from India to West and East Asia, via Ethiopia, is that to an extent it traces the proto-colonial and colonial aspirations of the West. The West’s need to attack and defeat Muslim strongholds resulted in a return to the memory of the Patriarch of India who visited the pope in the twelfth century, and linking his later letter to this visit helped to flesh out any missing details in order to enhance the potential alliance. As missions and trade occurred both ways, between the West and the rest, the figure of Prester John, at least according to later Western narratives, began to move towards Africa and then to East Asia. But, strangely enough, even as this figure was “located,” Western traders and scholars were always searching *elsewhere* for Prester John. The historical context of this map suggests that Prester John becomes a proto-colonial and colonial alter ego of the West, an other *of* the West, upon whom is thrust the inordinate religious, trade, and military—ultimately unsatiated—ambitions of the West.

That Western trade was oriented towards India well before it actualized can be seen in fourteenth-century cartography, but what is also evident is the dream of a Christian power, a Christian king preferably, located in India, set to fully support the West against its enemies. Pietro Vesconte’s map of the world, the *Chronicon* of 1320, had the East at the top and located Prester

John in India. Marino Sanudo Torsello's *The Book of Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross (Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis)* (1321) included a copy of the *Chronicon*, and for a while Torsello was even considered the author of the map. Torsello's book, interestingly enough, sought to influence civic authorities in Europe to undertake yet another crusade. The world map by Raulf Higden in 1350 was similarly oriented with the East at the top. The Catalan Map of 1375 depicts a Christian "King Stephen of India." Over the centuries, cartography and investments of the royal treasury inclined towards India precisely because the hope was for Christian kings of the West to bond with a Christian king of India against the Muslims. Don Manuel expected to gather Christians of the East, "perhaps Prester John" (Subrahmanyam, *Career* 249), against the Mamluks. Gama's arrival on the coast of Calicut in search of "Christians and spices" testifies to the unbroken lingering of this hope into the fifteenth century.

Henry the Navigator was also compelled towards India by narratives of the Christian king of the East, Prester John. Charles Raymond Beazley writes that Henry, who had been made Lord of Covilham, accompanied by his friends began from Lisbon "to settle the course of the future sea-route to India by an 'observation of all the coasts of the Indian Ocean,' to explore what they could of Upper Africa, to find Prester John, and to ally the Portuguese experiment with anything they could find of Christian power in Greater or Middle or Further India" (319). The "legends," as they are called, of Prester John served if nothing else the historical purpose of prompting the trade chase of the Portuguese with high hopes of striking a deal with even an Indian Christian king. If one result of this search led to Vasco da Gama's acceptance of the royal insignia of a Christian king presented by a delegation of Thomas Christians, another ideological and thereby material consequence has been the making of a legend of the history and life and very existence of precolonial Indian Christian communities, around whom "Prester John" revolved for a while. The broad categorizing of Indian Christians as "Nestorian" or heretical is a related process. Nowell's 1953 article, "The Historical Prester John," traces the narrative link between Prester and the Nestorians of Asia (436). Even after "Prester John" moved to Ethiopia, the stigma of a legend, that literary category, continued to contribute to the mythical status of even Indian Christian historiography.

The archdeacon of All India

Whereas the Thomas Christian community and their ways have come under scholarly scrutiny, one figure within this Eastern Christian context who has not received any sustained attention, especially in the West, is the "Archdeacon of All India." This person, a priest, was next only to the reigning bishop or archbishop and enjoyed both ecclesiastical and temporal powers over the Church of India. He was held in the highest esteem not only by his Christian community but also by reputed members of the nation at

large. In what follows, I will present this figure in the context of ancient, medieval, and early modern history and sociocultural changes in India. I suggest that the prince-priest often alluded to in the West's memory of the original Prester John figure can somewhat meaningfully invoke the figure of the Archdeacon of All India, even when the reverse is both unlikely and unnecessary.

When Alexis de Menezes took up office as archbishop of Goa, he became acutely aware of two formidable figures among the Thomas Christians: the Persian archbishop, Mar Abraham, and the native archdeacon, George of the Cross. The Padroado tried more than once to bring Mar Abraham under his subordination by controlling him through the Provincial Councils of Goa and the Portuguese army. According to the *Jornada*,

Neither was he prepared to come nor to give any reason except repeating a saying which he communicated from his native land, that the cat bitten by the snake is afraid of the rope, thus declaring that he did not trust the Portuguese, nor the Latin bishops, who had already arrested him once, and would do so again. (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 45)

In short, the Portuguese failed in their attempts. Luckily for them, however, Mar Abraham died in January 1597; this news reached Menezes the very next month and he immediately sent letters appointing the Jesuit, Roz as apostolic vicar and governor of the Thomas Christians. The Jesuits, who were living among the people, communicated some of the complexities of the situation, including autonomous nature of that Church and the popular and rightful authority of the community's archdeacon, George of the Cross (see *Jornada* 53–54). They proceeded to “approve” this authority “until the Archbishop's [Menezes'] coming” (54). In the words of the Scottish Anglican missionary, bishop, and scholar Stephen Neill, “As it appeared that the reaction of the Thomas Christians to this [Menezes'] proposal was likely to be violent, the archbishop found it prudent to give way and to accept the appointment of the archdeacon” (208).

Upon his arrival among the Thomas Christians, and as part of attempts to Latinize and thereby bring this community under the Portuguese royal patronage of the Church or Padroado, Menezes made Archdeacon George of the Cross the “Governor” according to Latin and Lusitanian customs and, furthermore, bridled him with Latin assistants, all of which the archdeacon challenged. Consequently, he was labelled not simply a colonial rebel but also a heretic. In order to subordinate this archdeacon, Menezes threatened to divide the community by proposing another in his stead. Sensing the zealous obedience ordainees gave their ordaining prelate, he also sought to increase the number of his supporters by ordaining a high number of candidates to priesthood (Thaliath 22–25). The extraordinary and colonial measures that Menezes adopted reflect the formidable nature of the position of the archdeacon in the sixteenth century.

The archdeacon's position was part of the tradition of the Thomas Christians. Generation after generation, and with very few exceptions, the candidate was presented from the Pakalomattam family (Kollaparambil 80). Because this family is native to India, historians such as Neill, Mundadan, and Kollaparambil presume that if not the office at least some earlier form of authority resided with the family and the community even before the third century. As in the pre-Christian period, these early times were marked by foreign trade, the arrival of merchants and, in the Christian era, missionaries from West Asia. Periods of persecution in Persia, as for instance under the Zoroastrians and later the Arab Muslims, also prompted migration of Christians to India. By the fifth century, when the East Syrian or Chaldean Church extended its influence in India, their ecclesiastical structure and hierarchy shaped the Indian Church. The position of the archdeacon is thus believed to have been instituted by the Chaldean Church in India in the fourth century.

One of the most sustained studies on the position of Archdeacon of All India is by Jacob Kollaparambil. His dissertation of 1972 aimed to uncover the confusion and vagueness that surrounded the position as it once existed in India and also to propose its revival among the Thomas Christians of India. Simeon Bar-Sabae, who died in 344 C.E., is known to have been an archdeacon of the Chaldean Church. But it was not until a synod invoked in 410 C.E. that the Chaldean Church formulated its own legislation pertaining to the office of archdeacon. Accordingly, every bishop was obliged to have a qualified archdeacon: "The synod qualifies the archdeacon as the hand, tongue, and glory of the bishop, a torch before the bishop and the whole Church" (Kollaparambil 58–59). The physical and spiritual metaphors of qualification alluded to the archdeacon's role in ministering to the poor and the needy, his eloquence and scholarship, and his preparedness and skill in serving the bishop in ecclesiastical matters.

Kollaparambil cites several of the Canons of the synod to show the extent of the archdeacon's powers. The following from Canon 15 reveals the archdeacon's superiority even to the priests:

The archdeacon has the complete care of the clerics. He assigns each one his part in the sacred functions. He can punish them, if they go against the rules and fail in their duties. Over the priests also the archdeacon has certain powers. For example, he makes them take their respective seats; he distributes to them the weekly obligations and remuneration; he selects one of them to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice in the absence of the bishop. Without his permission none of them is allowed to leave the home-town for any purpose. When the bishop is present, the archdeacon makes the proclamations (Karozhtha), and reads the Gospel. (Can. 15). (59)

The Indian archdeacon thus assumed powers above and beyond those available to the office in the West, based on the canons, which were accepted by the synod as originating in the Council of Nicaea. Kollaparambil affirms:

“Various recensions of these canons exist in the Churches of the East, adapted to each one’s canonical discipline. The authority of these canons is very great among the orientals, as their origin is attributed to the council of Nicaea” (60–61). Although Kollaparambil acknowledges the findings of scholars who reject the Nicæan origin of these canons, he concludes that “the Chaldean recension attributes greater authority to the archdeacon than the other recensions do” (61). He explains,

Canon 21 defines the absolute precedence of the Archdeacon in the eparchy next to the Bishop. All categories of persons in the Church are subordinate to him. Every crime and quarrel of the subjects among themselves or with strangers are to be brought to the archdeacon for a just decision, and not before the bishop, unless with the permission of the archdeacon. All affairs of the Church should be handled through the archdeacon, so that there might rise no rebellion, by which the bishop be scorned and despised. (61)

Duties of the archdeacon, furthermore, include recording the number of ordinations to ensure they correspond to the ministry’s financial capacity and requirements. Other canons signify the archdeacon’s power through rules obliging religious superiors to visit the bishop and the archdeacon a certain number of times a year and prescribing the place of honour to the archdeacon: for example, he sits next to the bishop and walks on “the right side of the bishop” (the chorbishop walks on the left side), and at the funeral of the bishop, he and the chorbishop walk “as sons” before the coffin (63, 64). One archdeacon of the metropolitan even examined a bishop (who, as prescribed, visited the metropolitan three months after ordination), declaring, “If only the bishop can recite all the canons of the Episcopate, he will be allowed to exercise episcopal powers in his eparchy” (64).

The Chaldean archdeacon had the unique characteristic of being a priest, a custom that, according to Kollaparambil, existed even before the synod of 410 (Kollaparambil 68). The fact that this was unique to the Chaldean Church, with the Latin Church appointing priests to the office only much later, points to the “the much higher position” and “greater authority” of the Chaldean archdeacon (68). Kollaparambil introduces the text of the archdeacon’s ordination as further proof that only a priest could be promoted as archdeacon, with the titles ascribing the office of the archdeacon as follows: “chief of the priests; head of priests, deacons and the whole flock; elected vessel for God’s honour” (71). Finally, the archdeacon was appointed to a particular see for life (71). These unique privileges of the archdeacon became significant issues during Portuguese colonization.

The Thomas Christians were for the most part under the ecclesiastical authority of the Chaldean Church from about the fourth to the late sixteenth centuries, that is, until the Portuguese colonial Church took over. This was also the period when the archdeacon held sway over the community. We

have very little historical evidence from the precolonial period of the life and times of the Thomas Christian community or the operations of the Chaldean Church in India. According to P.N. Chopra (196) and others, the historiography of South India on the whole is rather erratic in the ancient and early medieval periods. This opinion, on the other hand, could have been prompted by Portuguese colonial policies such as the auto-da-fe that resulted in the burning of entire libraries in the name of heresy (Thekkedath, *History* 72–74). Angela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Zupanov consider the auto-da-fe as an aspect of what they term “Catholic Orientalism” (135), which they define as “the Portuguese imperial ‘information order’ established in Asia” that denotes application and documentation (xxii). In some ways, colonial policies on Thomas Christian libraries stood in stark contrast to the libraries’ function in Portugal to “spread information on the discoveries and explorations in the Americas, Africa, and Asia” (Musser 117). Unlike Chopra, Sebastian R. Prange establishes that “[e]vidence for the Malabar Coast shows a very deliberate and highly organized effort by local rulers to collect and preserve the records and chronicles of their kingdoms” (152), citing Barbosa and François Pyrard of Laval in support. While Prange’s specific interest is in the documents related to the life, culture, and trade of Muslim populations of the early modern period in India, his observations shed light on the parallel situation of other communities, including the Thomas Christians. With the loss of much native documentary evidence, the power and function of the archdeacon in India can best be understood in terms of the practices in the Chaldean Church and as outlined above.

On the other hand, it can be deduced from the historical circumstances that since the reigning bishop was from Persia, the archdeacon, as a native ruler, had even more powers. Mundadan explains the situation this way:

As regards the Archdeacon of All-India, he was vested with even greater authority than the East-Syrian archdeacon, owing to the special organisational structure of the Church of India, namely, the East-Syrian metropolitans at the head of the hierarchy were foreigners in a new land quite different from theirs in language, customs, religious beliefs, socio-political set-up and so on. (*History* 181)

The result was that the bishop was entirely dependent on the archdeacon for the administration of the Church in India. The latter, therefore, had “a free hand” in the governance of the Thomas Christians and “enjoyed very great authority among the Christians of St. Thomas in India” (181).

The earliest document that references the Archdeacon of All India is from about the ninth century. Around the year 800 C.E., Patriarch Timothy I (780–823) wrote to the archdeacon, “Head of the Faithful in India,” on procedures for ordaining “priests, bishops, metropolitans and Patriarch.” The document sought to correct abuse of procedures in the custom in India and China of laying the letter of the patriarch over the head of the elected

“as if the very hand that wrote the letter were laid upon the ordained” (Kollaparambil 80; also see Mundadan, *History* 182). The letter clarified for the Thomas Christian community that only a superior could ordain. It also may have, in a sense, rationalized the long travel candidates undertook to obtain ordination at the hand of the Patriarch in Persia or, if that was impossible due to the political situation, another more accessible prelate. Perhaps what appeared to the West as an extraordinary visit by “the Patriarch of India” to Byzantine and then Rome in 1022 gestures towards this document of Patriarch Timothy I to the Archdeacon of All India. But for our purposes, the letter represented the esteem with which the archdeacon, as apparent addressee of Patriarch Timothy I, was held in India.

Decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) considerably reduced the rights and responsibilities of the office of the archdeacon (see De Souza 196–99), paving the way for the vicar general to eventually take over its several duties and privileges. Not surprisingly, Menezes, with the full might of the Portuguese colonial government to back him up, applied the decrees of the Council of Trent as he saw fit to try to subjugate Archdeacon George of the Cross. Menezes succeeded in interfering in and interrupting other aspects of the Thomas Christians’ tradition, rite, and discipline. However, in the decrees of the synod (the synod of Diamper) he convoked in 1599 in Thomas Christian territory, the one office he could not allude to in order to subjugate was that of the archdeacon. He had no doubts about the extent of power retained in this office in India.

Mar Abraham—either aware of the colonial powers’ potential to disrupt (and even end) the Thomas Christians’ ancient ecclesiastical and civic traditions or under the influence of non-Portuguese missionaries—had recommended Archdeacon George of the Christ to the pope for episcopal ordination and appointment as bishop of Palur and suffragan of Mar Abraham. On 4 May 1580, the pope confirmed this election. But the brief was not executed, likely because, first, neither Mar Abraham nor the archdeacon and his community intended to break the tradition of the rule of Persian bishops in India; second, one or both knew that the colonial ecclesiastical attempts at Latinizing could be checked more effectively by the continued presence of Persian bishops supported by the archdeacon; and third (this according to the missionaries), the archdeacon was humble and reluctant to take on the episcopal office.

Kollaparambil cites several letters addressed by the missionaries of the time to their community in Europe and even to the pope that highlight the “humility” of the archdeacon and recommend him for episcopal ordination. But these letters also testify to other qualities and roles of the archdeacon in the sixteenth century. In a letter addressed to the Jesuit General, dated 2 January 1578, Fr. Francis Dionysio wrote,

There is in this Christianity a priest, native of this country belonging to the Malabar Caste, approved for his virtues and habits, learned and experienced in ecclesiastical matters. He knows the Sacred Scripture and

understands and speaks Chaldean. He is esteemed very much by these Christians, and before the gentile kings and lords he holds influence and recognition. (Qtd. in Kollaparambil 87)

This description depicts someone highly qualified for his ecclesiastical and civic duties. He is “a very powerful person among them,” according to a letter from Fr. Matheo Ricci to M. Goem on 18 January 1580 (qtd. in Kollaparambil 88); and yet another letter states, “The Archdeacon is considered the ‘*ex officio*’ teacher of all . . . The Archdeacon is *the highest and the only dignity after the Archbishop* among them” (qtd. in Kollaparambil 87). The archdeacon himself in a letter to Jesuit visitor Fr. Valignani, requesting him to inform the pope of certain matters, wrote that “the whole Christian community of Malabar rested on his shoulders both in spiritual and temporal matters” [“*toda esta Christiandade assi no spiritual como no temporal esta sobre meus ombros. . .*”] (Kollaparambil 88–89). Between 1576 and 1581, Pope Gregory XIII wrote five briefs to the archdeacon. And, as can be gathered from other letters, the archdeacon’s office made him responsible for ensuring the orthodoxy of his church, collecting money to arrange for the marriage of orphans, releasing captives, lending to the poor without interest, maintaining churches, and so on (Kollaparambil 89–90).

When the archbishop travelled abroad—as Mar Joseph and Mar Abraham did more than once under pressure from the Padroado—it was the archdeacon who governed the community on his behalf. The archdeacon paid a certain remuneration to the archbishop. And, as Jonas Thaliath observes, “even when there were more than one foreign bishop, there was only one Archdeacon for the entire St. Thomas Christian community, and he was always one of them” (5). Documents address him as the *Jathikku Karthavyan* [the head of the caste], that is, the head of the Thomas Christians (Kollaparambil 82), “having the title *Archdeacon of All India*” (Koodapuzha *Christianity* 75). The archdeacon was the jealous guardian of the tradition and exclusive privileges enjoyed by the Thomas Christians.³ Drawing on information from the *Annuae Litterae Societatis Jesu anni 1584*, Kollaparambil narrates an event that illustrates how far Thomas Christians were willing to go under the leadership of their archdeacon in order to safeguard their privileges:

The Church of Vaipicotta was burned down in 1584 by Muslims in a quarrel with the Christians, after the king of Parur had granted to the Muslims certain privileges formerly enjoyed exclusively by the Christians. The Christians led a battle against the king of Parur [Paravoor] and the king was constrained to make satisfaction for the outrages and loss suffered by the Christians. (95)

This event also reveals the extent of the Thomas Christian’s military power. They could engage in this civil strife because they had their own army.

Thomas Christian men were trained from childhood to about the age of twenty-five in the martial art of *kalaripayattu*, which included feats with and without weapons. The *Jornada* of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes claims that, like their “gentile” counterparts, Thomas Christian masters of fencing, known as “paniquial” [*panikkar*], trained as many as “eight or nine thousand” disciples, both gentile and Christian (117). Citing Pimenta and the *ARSI*—Jesuit archives in Rome—Thaliath writes,

The king [of Cochin] suspected from the very beginning that the visit of Menezes was designed to take the Christians away from his influence and make of them a strong arm to advance the Portuguese cause in Malabar. At that time the St. Thomas Christian community was in a position to put easily in battle array 30,000 trained warriors (22).

In the strikes between the king of Mangate (Alangad) and the king of Paru (Parur) in central Kerala, the latter gave orders to attack the Christians of Mangate because he knew that the Thomas Christians “made up the strength of the arms of the king of Mangate” (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 358). George Mark Moraes writes about the military reputation of the Thomas Christians:

They were the finest soldiers in the whole of Malabar, being the very best shots, and so, were matchless in the chase. They were reputed to be dour in the face of the enemy. In consequence, the greater the number of Christians a prince had in his armies, the more was he feared and respected by his neighbours. It was for their prowess no less than for their loyalty and their truthful nature, that the princes cherished their presence so much. They always went well-armed, some carrying swords and sheaths and others muskets and lances, the use of which they knew to perfection. The majority, however, was content to carry a naked sword in the right hand and a shield in the left. When they entered a church they left their weapons in the porch which then wore the aspect of a veritable guard-house (178)

At a time when religion and state were integrated, then, the Thomas Christian military functioned at once as an arm of the native kingdom and of the Church. Joseph Albert Lobley records that in 1505, Gama “sent into Malabar two engineers whom he had brought with him from Europe, who taught the natives, especially the Christians, the use of artillery” (8–9). Even Thomas Christian priests enrolled themselves as soldiers of the king—a practice that was forbidden by Menezes’ synod of Diamper in the late sixteenth century (Thekkedath, *History* 72). Moraes’ description of the routine depicts the unhindered movement between religion and state, where the church’s “guard-house” remains as the visible meeting ground of this flow. When the traditional authority of the archdeacon in the Chaldean Church is transcribed to the Indian situation, where the archdeacon becomes the

natural head, then he also becomes the military leader of the Thomas Christians. Like Western Christendom at the time of the crusades, the colonial government had its eyes on this Christian army.

Finally, in his relationship with the king and the community, the archdeacon was like a prince. Several missionaries testified to the civic powers of the archdeacon. Of Mundadan's relevant sources in this respect, one citation points in particular to the extraordinary nature of the office of the archdeacon. According to a report submitted by Bishop Sebastiani to the Propaganda Congregation in 1681, "the archdiaconate was the only dignity among the ecclesiastics, and was conferred freely by the archbishop or any other prelate actually governing that Church" (qtd. in Mundadan, *History* 184). The report also stated that "the one who possessed such dignity was like the head and prince of all the Christians of St. Thomas, and therefore, he had great power, and was greatly esteemed by the kings and princes of Malabar" (Mundadan, *History* 185). The archives of the Congregation of Propaganda fide, in Rome, also contain testimony of the importance of the archdeacon:

Among the Christians of St. Thomas the position of the Archdeacon is next to the Archbishop. It is a very ancient privileged position which comes down in succession from the same family. It is a great dignity as it is according to the Greek Church. There is no other indigenous dignity[—]neither secular nor religious, greater than the Archdeacon who is considered to be the prince and Head of the St. Thomas Christians. (Qtd. in Koodapuzha, *Christianity* 76)

The archdeacon was given royal honours. Kollaparambil infers that the privileges due to the archdeacon were a continuation of the ancient power exercised by the Thomas Christian community wherein they had "a certain independence in civil administration" (108). Thomas Christian tradition holds that at one point in their history they were ruled by a member of the now extinct Christian royal family of Villarvattam. When Vasco da Gama arrived on the shores of Calicut, he was met by an assembly of Christians who submitted to him an insignia of their royal past—"a red staff like a sceptre"—which they claimed belonged to their historic king (Correa, *The Three Voyages* 354; Joseph 8; Thaliath 1; Mundadan, *History* 161). One view—which Mundadan prescribes to (see 163–64)—is that this king may not have been a Christian himself, but belonged to a dynasty committed to the protection of the Christians. K.M. Panikkar refers to this ruler as possibly having been either a Christian or a Brahman and of the Christian community as having held several "important communal privileges" (22). The princely status of the archdeacon recalls Prester John.

In "An Indian Prototype for Prester John," Andrew Athappilly goes so far as to conclude, "[W]ith an Indian Prester John as Malabar archdeacon, we need not look to Central Asia or Ethiopia" (23). In the fourteenth century, however, another figure also stirred the imagination of the West. This

was “King Stephen” of Greater India. The Catalan map of 1375 carries the legend of this king. Commenting on the role of both Prester John and King Stephen in world history, Mundadan concludes, “The ‘Christian King Stephen’ just as ‘Presbyter John of India’ before him, and the ‘majority Christians of Greater India’ were all the fruit of a fertile medieval imagination which, however, served to continuously inspire the West to set out in search of India” (*History* 144). The figures of Prester John as at once prince and priest and of St. Stephen as archdeacon in the realm of charity towards orphans and widows (Acts of the Apostles) certainly prompt discussions on the Archdeacon of All India—and hence on the Thomas Christians and the West’s urge towards both quest and conquest.

Notes

- 1 I will note here that with regard to Prester’s move to China, however, Gerardus Mercator’s map of the sixteenth century did locate the Ganges of India in Eastern China (see Taylor 202).
- 2 Netflix cancelled seasons 3 and 4 of the *Marco Polo* series; but, the fact that they planned for the series registers the popular trend in the twenty-first century to see Prester in East Asia. Season 2 introduces Ron Yuan as Prince Nayan, the Nestorian, aka Prester.
- 3 According to Gouvea in the *Jornada*, the privileges enjoyed by the Thomas Christians included “that only the Christians when they got married could adorn the hair on their [men’s] heads with a flower of gold, and that they could go about on elephants’ back, a privilege which was given only to the heirs of the kings, or that they could sit on carpets, and other honours which no other caste had, and which are very valuable and esteemed among the Malabaris” (see Malekandathil 17–18).

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3 The narratives of Gama and Joseph

Unsettling the global early modern period

In his entry “Early Modern Philosophical Systems” in *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World*, Wiep van Bunge provides a list of the important philosophers who shaped the early modern period in World History. These range from Giordano Bruno, “a defrocked monk” (649), to Christiaan Huygens, “who remained distrustful of metaphysical speculation” (652) and John Locke, author of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. As varied as these philosophers are, a central thread runs through the list, namely, the priority of religion, specifically Western Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant), in events and subsequent studies on these events in the period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. In this chapter, I investigate how and why this privileging of Western Christianity has determined interpretations of a key early modern narrative—the narrative of the Portuguese “discovery” of the sea route to India—that have erased the presence of Eastern Christians. I will also ask how and why an Indian Christian narrative that sits at the heart of an early Portuguese travelogue finds even fewer readers in the late colonial and post-colonial periods. The texts in question are references to Indian Christians in the travel writings of Vasco da Gama and Pedro Alvares Cabral.

On one level, these are testimonies to the exchange between European Christians and Indian Christians, that is, testimonies to “contact”: “the state or condition of touching; the mutual relation of two bodies whose external surfaces touch each other” (*OED*). Accordingly, the Christians looked at each other, proclaimed each other brother. Coming as they did from different geographical regions, they shared a vocabulary of Jesus, the papacy, priests, churches, prayers, and the Bible. The two sides celebrated the meeting and the greeting. Each sought to become better through the other: the Portuguese sought to realize the Prester-dream, at the core of which now was the spice trade; the Indians sought reprieve from the pressures of surviving in a nation as a minority.

But books written and published in the centuries immediately following the events do not consider this possibility; they suggest rather a relationship of dominance and inequality, and their translations in English underscore this view. Thus, Hernan Lopez de Castanheda’s book, *Historia do*

descobrimento e conquista da India pelos Portugueses, translated by Nicholas Lichefield, has the telling title, *First Booke of the Historie of the Discoverie and Conquest of the East Indias, Enterprised by the Portingales, in Their Daungerous Navigations, in the Time of King Don John, the Second of That Name*. Manuel de Faria y Sousa's *Asia Portuguesa* has been translated as *History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese, between the Years 1497 and 1505*, in three volumes. These sources do not downplay the conquest side of the "discovery."

In other words, early modern sources do not shy away from announcing, and not just acknowledging, the story of conquests in the fifteenth and later centuries, even as these are overdetermined by the hermeneutics of the subsequent periods. More than the primary sources, this exegetical history defines the colonial bent of the so-called post-colonial period and becomes evident in the face of the other Christian, the Thomas Christian. Global Early Modern Studies aspires to rectify the Eurocentricism of traditional Renaissance and Early Modern Studies, commendably expanding its reach to beyond Europe, to a non-Christian Africa or to the Africa that was subjected to conversion to Christianity during the colonial period (Ryan Dunch's "Beyond Cultural Imperialism" is typical), to a Hindu or Muslim India or, again, to an India threatened with conversion during the colonial period. John-Paul Ghobrial provides a twist in the prevalent (Western) missionary narratives by acknowledging the role of Eastern Christianity in India, but he dates the earliest arrival of Christians from the Ottoman Empire to the sixteenth century. In general, the goal of Global Early Modern Studies to go *outside* Europe places it also outside Christianity. The marginal presence of non-European Christians, the Thomas Christians, in Gama's and Cabral's—Europe's—narratives poses a problem for Global Early Modern Studies because it is a signifier that is not European but Christian. The presence of the other Christian, the one who is not European, thus presents a challenge.

This chapter will, therefore, closely read Gasper Correa's *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama, and His Viceroyalty*, specifically Henry E.J. Stanley's translation of 1849, and zoom in on references to sightings of Indian Christians. William Brooks Greenlee's *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India* is an edition of contemporary sources, chief of which, for our purposes, is the document known as "The Account of Priest Joseph." An analysis of this text, like that of Correa's, provides a close-up of the complex nature of the initial dealings between the Portuguese trader and the Thomas Christian. The scenario, far from providing "colonialism" alerts, may rather impress us with the mundaneness of life, including trade and even battle. Yet, the perseverance of the signifier that is not European but Christian and the trouble to which translators and editors have gone to disown it may imply the potential for a civilizing mission that is also a colonial mission. The sources—Gama's and Joseph's—show how and why the relationship between Christians, one

Western and the other Eastern, deteriorated and the role that colonial ambitions played in the pattern. Furthermore, this chapter reflects on related studies and suggests how postcolonial hermeneutics sustains colonial discourse.

Painting empire at the turn of the fifteenth century

Gama's entry into India marked the beginning of European colonialism in India. Within six years of Gama's landing in India in 1498, the first viceroy, Francisco de Almeida, took up his position in Cochin. In Gama's famed second journey to India in 1502, the fourth Portuguese armada to India bombarded the entire coastline of Calicut, just as the British would do to Cochin in 1806—"blow up with gunpowder the fortifications, public buildings, etc., etc." (source reproduced in the translator's footnote in Correa 429). The Portuguese armada had been ordered by King Manuel I and placed under the command of Gama, upon whom he bestowed the title, "Admiral of the Seas of Arabia, Persia, India and all of the Orient."

Gama himself became the viceroy in 1524, in what was his third voyage to India; he was preceded by one viceroy and four governors. When Gama arrived with letters from King John appointing him as viceroy, Dom Duarte de Menezes was governor. As Joao de Barros narrates the events that transpired soon after, Gama applied the dictates of the king of Portugal to the letter. Characteristically, Gama added neither patience nor mercy to the manner in which he ordered not only Duarte but also Duarte's brother, Dom Luis, who had pleaded on behalf of his brother, to embark immediately on the ship of Gama's choice, even before Duarte could touch the food he was about to eat. The auditor was ordered to be present at all times to oversee the two brothers. The parting words of both brothers to their viceroy though, marked by restraint and regret, underscore the colonial ambitions of their nation. Duarte's to the auditor were "Go in peace, and say to him who sent you here, that his will is done, and shall be done in this country, which is now *his empire*" (Correa 420; emphasis added). Dom Luis, who was escorted by Gama's captain, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio, had this message for Gama: "Sir, say to the Viceroy that *this kingdom is his*, and later it will belong to another" (419; emphasis added). The capital of Portuguese India would be transferred to Goa from Cochin only a decade after Gama became viceroy, in 1534. During the governorship of Duarte, Antonio da Fonseca wrote from Goa to his king on 18 October 1523: "Neither do Canannore, or Calicut, Cochin, Coulan, Ceylon, or Chaul serve any other purpose than to shew your claim in the land, to shelter and to favour us" ("Letter from Antonio" 203). In each instance, the words of both Duarte and Luis to Gama were of one Portuguese administrator to another, marked by the presumptions of internal communication, and central to their shared understanding was the idea of the Indian Empire, the Estado da India, which—for them—included the region that they stood on, Malabar.

The hierarchizations and designations that feathered positions were initially both effective and efficient, at least to the extent of bringing in profit to the colonial power. Mundadan lists the supreme Portuguese civil authority in India beginning in the 1500s as the captain of the fleet and later as the governor and/or viceroy, with the next in rank being superintendent of the royal treasury. A captain and a procurator oversaw the military and treasury in the lower rank in the several localities, and the navy was headed by the captain general, under whom were the captains. Ecclesiastical authority was also bestowed upon persons by the Portuguese king, who was ultimately responsible for paying for the support of those authorities and the upkeep of their ecclesiastical possessions (Mundadan, *History* 241–42).

But often, as far as the actual workers—civic or ecclesiastical—were concerned, the quality of personnel remained suspect. In *Twilight of the Empire*, Anthony R. Disney, citing from Ribiero's *History of Ceilao* of 1909, explains the problem: "Many recruits were 'scoundrels from the prisons of Portugal' It was also common for men arriving in India from Portugal to evade military service by joining a religious order" (21). Again, A.J.R. Russell-Wood writes in *The Portuguese Empire, 1415–1808*, "Merchants, traders, and financial speculators were part of any fleet to Portuguese India or Portuguese America. Sometimes they engaged in licit practices, on other occasions they dealt on the wrong side of the law" (96). Luis was murdered by French pirates (Correa *Three Voyages* 424). Duarte, on the other hand, landed safely in Lisbon but was promptly jailed on charges of misappropriation of funds (Subrahmanyam, *Career* 307–09). If the motives behind colonization were theoretically idealistic, what played out on the streets of the colonies attempted to approximate that ideal, albeit in an inferior mode. It was thus by virtue of the parodial role of law and order rather than any classic creation of it that the civic and ecclesiastical worlds functioned in India during the Portuguese colonial period.

The fourth viceroy, D. Joao de Castro, commissioned Gaspar Correa to paint administrators and other chosen figures "naturally" in efforts to compensate for poor presentations by Portuguese soldiers—who were reported to have gone about "stripped and naked on the roads, seeking alms" during seasons of unemployment (qtd. in Disney, *Twilight* 21). This is a noteworthy point, considering that the middle of the sixteenth century marked the only time Catarina founded a portrait gallery in the palace (Disney, *History* 192). Correa's indication that the paintings be done in "natural" style suggests a goal of accuracy and detail that could also be open to exaggeration. As Correa writes, Castro engaged an Indian artist to do the actual paintings who "painted their faces so like nature, that whoever had seen them, at once, on seeing the paintings recognized them." This "nature," however, was also studied and posed for particular effect: for example, Castro was painted "armed as if he was figuring in a triumph." As a footnote explains, "This refers to the palm he holds in his hand, and the palm leaf crown on his head in the picture" (Correa vii), which invoked at once the Roman Empire, the

classical Olympian champion, and even the Prince of Palm Sunday. Thereby, in a representation that combines in a single pose power, talent, and divine right, the viceroy presents himself as a figure to reckon with.

Naturally, Gama was painted. Portraits of lay figures, depicted with axes or “halberds, and with awful features,” were placed strategically in hallways in order “[t]o inspire dread in the Moors who saw them” (viii). In this array of frightening visages, Gama’s appears benign. Subrahmanyam describes the painting as it appears in *O livro de Lisuarte de Abreu* (1558): “Correa’s portrait has a rather well-dressed full figure, favouring his left profile, leaning on a long cane, with one hand on the hilt of a sword that peeps out of his cloak” (*Career* 355). He proposes the caption, “The Admiral in his Autumn.” Whether the admiral is in his winter or his autumn, there is no suggestion of the “awful features” meant to be the nightmare of Muslims in the early modern period. The portrait also contains no trace of the famed cross and badge of the Commander of the Order of Christ, which Gama attained in 1507. It is possible that Correa’s portrait was purposely painted “naturally,” rather than in manierismo. Yet, appearing some decades into the sixteenth century, Gama’s mannerist painting, like that of Castro’s, signifies the complacency of empire even as relentless efforts continued to subdue the Muslim powers.

In both their fearsome and benevolent expressions, the paintings point to one of the primal motives of Portuguese colonization: the fear of the Moor. The fear of the Moor is certainly the fear that belonged to the Muslim, which the paintings were meant to evoke, but it is also the Portuguese peoples’ own historic fear of being invaded by Muslims. This fear that the Portuguese colonial administrators in particular felt towards Muslims was a constant in the trade situation, where the latter enjoyed trade with the East, especially with the pepper coast of India. It might also explain why Gama decided to kill those who looked Muslim. In this manner, the paintings ironically not only aroused, if they did at all, “dread in the Moors,” but also reflected the Portuguese dread of Muslims that underlay colonial activities in India.

The Muslims of Calicut, of course, had their own response to the initial reception extended to Gama and his men in India, which they promptly communicated to their king, the Zamorin of Calicut:

We are astonished that you should debase yourself by receiving into your country these enemies of your law and strangers to the customs of your kingdom Their country is almost five thousand leagues from hence and the voyage out and home is attended by many dangers through unknown and storm seas, besides the great cost of their large ships with so many men and guns. Hence at whatever prices they might dispose of their spices in Portugal, it is obvious that such a trade must be carried on with great loss, which is manifest that they are pirates and not merchants, who come here to rob and take your city. (Krishna 156–57)

According to Annette Thottakara, the Zamorin and his non-Muslim subjects “were moved by no special love for the foreigners but by the principles of hospitality and honesty on which they put a great value and they were ignorant of the real power that lay behind these vessels” (84). Scholars such as Mundadan (*History* 239–40) and Thottakara (80) further maintain that the Portuguese did not arrive in India with a view to colonial conquest, but that stiff competition from the Muslims more or less pushed them into the colonial mode. Mundadan cites Kavalam Madhava Panikkar to support this position.

However, Panikkar himself appears to endorse the view that the initial aim of the Portuguese was trade—hence the need to defeat Muslim traders—and political expansion rather than “converting the heathen” (45). Tellingly, he calls the period from 1498 to 1750 the “age of expansion” (n.p.). Scholars such as John M. Hobson who have accepted the narrative of the civilizing mission of conversion may see things differently. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had a more-or-less clear programme of conquest, following victories in Ceuta, Ksar es-Seghir (1458), and Arzila and Tangier (1471). The Treaty of Alcacovas (1479) and the Treaty of Tordesilhas (1494) sealed such conquests on behalf of the Portuguese. It is thus possible that the words of the Muslims to the Zamorin were not merely prophetic, but a verifiable summary of history as they knew it or had heard. A sixteenth-century source, dated around the 1530s and assumed to have been written by a Brahman with Muslim collaborators, according to Sebastian Prange (“Pagan King” 159–61), provides another perspective: in 1500, the Portuguese returned

with six ships, and came to Korikote [Calicut]. They landed, and while they were trading in a merchant-like manner, the Fringis [Portuguese] said to the Tamuri’s [Zamorin’s] Karjakars [ministers], “if you will put a stop to the trade of the Arabs and Mappillas [here, Muslims of Arab descent], we will give more money to the Sircar [government], than they do.” (164)

In the latter narrative, the Portuguese started the quarrel. The fact was that neither the Muslims nor the Portuguese could view the other as legitimate competitors in trade. Hyperbole, not without some truth, hence, suited the group that had the upper hand. Ultimately, though, it was the Portuguese hand that ruled.

Fear of “the Moor”

The element of exaggeration that sat at the core of Portuguese colonial ambitions was triggered by an age-old hostility towards Islam, which, as I will show later, extended itself to the one presumed to be a Thomas Christian. Of the several factors that may have motivated the Portuguese colonization of India, “the fear of the moor” is a recurring one, and this determined to a

great extent how colonial responsibility, whether civic or ecclesiastical, was meted out. Sometimes, as in the case of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes or Bishop Lewis de Britto, the civic and ecclesiastical authorities were one and the same. Raymond Beazley, in his *Prince Henry the Navigator, the Hero of Portugal and of Modern Discovery, 1394–1460 A.D.*, lists several of the motivations of the famous royal navigator:

First of all was his desire to know the country beyond Cape Bojador [in Western Sahara], which till that time was quite unknown either by books or by the talk of sailors. Second was his wish that if any Christian people or good ports should be discovered beyond that cape, he might begin a trade with them that would profit both the natives and the Portuguese, for he knew of no other nation in Europe who trafficked in those parts. Thirdly, he believed the Moors were more powerful on that side of Africa than had been thought, and he feared there were no Christians there at all. So he was fain to find out how many and how strong his enemies really were. Fourthly, in all his fighting with the Moors he had never found a Christian prince to help him from that side (of further Africa) for the love of Christ, therefore he wished, if he could, to meet with such. Last was his great desire for the spread of the Christian Faith and for the redemption of the vast tribes of men lying under the wrath of God. (158)

All items on Beazley's list are directly or indirectly a response to Islam. In fact, the lands beyond the coast of the Sahara were not unknown to the West. Pope Nicholas V in his Bull *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) to King Afonso V of Portugal repeats the king's belief that "not within the memory of men, had it been customary to sail on this ocean sea toward the southern and eastern shores, and that it was so unknown to us westerners that we had no certain knowledge of the peoples of those parts . . ." (Davenport 21). The pope, with the king, then hopes "if by his effort and industry that sea might become navigable as far as to the Indians who are said to worship the name of Christ, and that thus he [the king] might be able to enter into relation with them, and to incite them to aid the Christians against the Saracens and other such enemies of the faith. . . ." (Davenport 22).

But this total lack of knowledge about the East, and particularly about the Christians of India—whose presence is relegated to rumour at best—is puzzling in Nicholas V, considering that Dominican and Franciscan missionaries were in India in the thirteenth century, and moreover, Pope John XXII had appointed Jordanus Catalani the first Latin rite Bishop of Quilon (in Kerala) in 1328 (Rae 194). Mundadan mentions also the possibility of a successor to Jordanus:

[T]he name of one episcopus Columbensis (bishop of Quilon) named James is found in three letters which record a cumulative list of

indulgences given at the Avignon court for the years A.D. 1363–64. Nothing can be said as to whether this reference is to a missionary bishop on a visit to Europe or whether to a titular bishop who had never functioned in the East. (*History* 137)

Perhaps, the Black Death, killing about a million people in India alone, partly explains the later disappearance of the Latin missions in the following century. Beazley, on the other hand, in his list above, simply does not mention the possibility of Christians outside Europe. His fourth point, therefore, assumes the odd logic that since the prince had never been able to meet Christians “from that side (of further Africa),” he simply “wished” to meet Christians there. But what is of particular relevance, especially in the papal Bull, is the hope that Indian Christians can be engaged to fight “the moors” and “the pagans.” This hope or wish inevitably continued and shaped colonial ambitions in the following centuries.

Ironically, though, the hatred and fear of “the moor” also made it difficult for the Portuguese to recognize the Indian Christian because *the Indian Christian looked like the moor*. A passage from the account of Gama’s second voyage to India presents a key incident:

In this occurrence with these Malabar vessels, there happened a case which it seemed to me, in reason, ought not to be forgotten. There came in these vessels of Moors of Choromandel, natives of the country, who, seeing the executions which were being carried out,—for they hung up some men by the feet in the vessels which were sent ashore, and when thus hung up the captain-major ordered the cross-bow men to shoot arrows into them, that the people on shore might see it; and when it was intended to do the same to these men of Choromandel, they called out that they should make them Christians, naming Thomas, who had been in their country; and they shouted this out, and raised their hands to heaven. This, from pity, was repeated to the captain-major [Vasco da Gama], who ordered them to be told, that even though they became Christians, that still he would kill them. They answered, that they did not beg for life, but only to be made Christians. Then, by order of the captain-major, a priest gave them holy baptism. They were three, who entreated the priest, saying that they wished for once only to say our prayer; and the priest said the *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*, which they also repeated. When this was finished, then they hung them up strangled, that they might not feel the arrows. The cross-bow men shot arrows and transfixing the others; but the arrows which struck these did not go into them nor make any mark upon them, but fell down. This having been seen, in the case of many arrows which they shot at them to confirm themselves,—for it was always so,—and no arrow wounded them, it was told to the captain-major, and grieved him much; and he ordered them to be shrouded and put into baskets; and the priest commended

them with his psalms for the dead, and they cast them into the sea, all saying prayers for their souls, as for faithful Christians, which the Lord was pleased of His great mercy to show in those who were Gentiles, who went in the company of the Moors gaining their livelihood. (Correa 333–34)

This is a translation of the Portuguese historian Gaspar Correa's *Lendas da India* (Legends of India), one of the several books that was delayed for centuries on account of the strict censorship that accompanied the Inquisition (see Disney, *History* vol. 1, 192). The original manuscript was printed by the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon in 1858 (part 1) and 1864 (part 2). I cite from Henry E.J. Stanley's translation published by the Hakluyt Society in 1849.

In a brief footnote, Stanley interprets the three men's mention of "Thomas" and their insistence that they be made Christians: "These men *probably* were Christians of St. Thomas" (Correa 334; emphasis added). The conditional clause is indeed a valuable, often strategic, tool of scholarship; yet, the externally declared or imposed uncertainty that can seal the marginalized person's identity and history can often be unethical and oppressive. Correa's narrative, when it touches upon the Thomas Christians, is riddled with more than doubts about their identity. In this quoted passage, for example, they are—and paradoxically, there is no doubt about this—"Moors" and "Gentiles." Christian is not an identity that can arise from or between those labels. When it does in Stanley's commentary, it is circumscribed by a theory of probability. Neither does Stanley ponder on issues of language barrier and translation under extreme pressure that arose in that particular circumstance. The desperate cries of the three companions stand sufficiently apart from those of the Muslims, because of the magical name: Thomas. Obviously, these men, and these men alone, wanted to be identified with the apostle of India. Their cries—the naming of Thomas, the raising of hands to heaven, all somehow but clearly signifying Christianity—compel the pity of the subordinates of Vasco da Gama.

But even to those Portuguese knowledgeable of the presence of the Thomas Christians of India and capable of pity in that sea, their entreaties are construed as the desire to become Christians rather than an announcement that they already were. The probability theory precludes recognizing the three to be Christians but marks them as "natives," for example. One important reason for such othering of Indian Christians is, of course, the trade rivalries with Muslims, who in racial appearance, and as stated in "The Narratives of Joseph the Indian," are not much different: "Christians dress like the moors, namely in cotton clothes" (Vallavanthara 178). The Thomas Christian moors' declaration of their Christian identity is misconstrued as a request for baptism, colonial style: there is no preparation of the "catechumen" to speak of, even if the situation of impending death is one well prepared by the baptizing party. The main prayers are rolled out in Latin,

repeated (it is recorded) by the three men. The time for one Our Father and one Hail Mary, after the hasty baptism, is all that is permitted to the men before they are killed with—it must be noted—mercy, strangled so that they might not feel the arrows. Gama has kept his word: neither baptism nor re-baptism would exempt the men from being killed.

It is as if within the structure of imperialism, the other is always a “moor” and, therefore, always to be struck down. The killing of the moors is, furthermore, dramatic. It is purposefully spectacular. The natives have to be taught the first colonial lesson, of terror: so that natives on the shore may witness, victims are hung upside down and shot with arrows. The corpses of the three Christians are joined to the living men poised to die. It seems that providence participates in the drama to present a “miracle,” for the arrows do not scathe the three. So, the drama intensifies and confirmation is sought from providence itself through repeated shots with arrows. Thereupon, the genre moves from horror to tragedy as the captain-major grieves. Whereas the others are chopped up—their limbs and head transported in a boat with a letter and the limbless trunks cast in high tide as a warning to the residents of Calicut—the three are given a decent burial in the sea. The scene thus is graphic and appropriately violent in its colonial determination.

Gama and the Indian Christian connection

According to the *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and Its Dependencies*, the port into which Gama sought entry in the name of Christ was Pandaranykollam, in Calicut (“Translation” 28). In the early fourteenth century, Battuta compared Calicut (and Quilon) with a famed city further west:

At length on April 5th (1326) we reached Alexandria. It is a beautiful city, well-built and fortified with four gates and a magnificent port. Among all the ports in the world I have seen none to equal it except Kawlam [Quilon] and Calicut in India, the port of the infidels [Genoese] at Sudaq in the land of the Turks, and the port of Zaytun in China, all of which will be described later. (Battuta and Gibb, Book 1)

In the period between the devastations caused by the earthquake of 1323 and by the Crusaders in 1365, Alexandria was the port of choice for the West, especially Venice. Quilon and Calicut, Battuta testifies, were equally magnificent. In 1498, Gama was no less impressed or determined to access Calicut, and he carefully chose to communicate his goal in religious terms. As Stanley cites Joao de Barros in a footnote: “He [Vasco da Gama] had required nothing of them [the Gentile kings and princes, and as he tells the Zamorin of Calicut], except to instruct them in the faith of Christ Jesus, in whose service he undertook this enterprise of new discoveries” (Correa 201). The utter disregard to this initial commitment, to the other extreme

of guaranteeing the murder of natives even if they should receive baptism, belies even the claims to the most narrow-minded Christian orientation of colonialism.

Stanley echoes this sentiment with reference to another incident:

Osorio, Barros, and San Roman . . . describe a mission sent by the Christians of St. Thomas from Cranganor, four leagues from Cochym, whose number might be more than thirty thousand souls. These envoys came to offer themselves as subjects of the King of Portugal, and gave to Gama, in sign of obedience, a red staff like a scepter with silver ends, and at one end three little silver bells; they asked to be visited and protected from the infidel people who vexed them. The admiral, however only gave them good words, and a promise to recommend them to the care of one of his captains, who would remain, as he had no time, and was returning to Portugal, and that for his part he would represent their case to the King, so that with the first fleet he should be able to take measures for their consolation.

If these envoys had come to offer trade in spices instead of only to ask for protection for their religion their mission would have been more successful. (Correa 354)

Typical of narratives of many historians of other colonizing nations, especially of the colonial period, Stanley's concluding comment points to the ills of colonization when the colonizers belong to a nation not theirs. The cited passage also contains rare historical proof of the period of the presence of Thomas Christians in large numbers in India (also see Schurhammer 4), of their predominance in Cranganore, of their having a past—as they claim—under a native king, and of the Villarvattam family (who according to them was a Christian), whose sceptre at least they had preserved so far and now would hand over to another Christian king even if of another country.

Stanley's passage above also exposes the inevitable structural chasm between Christianizing and colonizing. Gama, presented with the best of opportunities, is too busy to engage with the envoy in the name of Christ. His promises are in the name of the Portuguese king instead, and good words fill in for drawn deeds. This contrasts sharply with the sentiments in Luis de Camoens' epic, *The Lusiad*, which narrates the arrival of Gama on the shores of India as the occasion not of trade but of the prospect to hear the message of Christianity again after all the time that had passed since the time of St. Thomas:

Here shone the gilded towers of Meliapore.
Here India's angels, weeping o'er the tomb
Where Thomas sleeps, implore the day to come,
The day foretold when India's utomost shore
Again shall hear Messiah's blissful lore. (330)

The sentiments suit the epic well. They also align with King Manuel's claim, as he expresses it in a letter to the King of Calicut, that none have crossed the ocean since time immemorial as the Portuguese have, and that, therefore, it was the grace of God that permitted voyage (Cabral 188). In Stanley's passage, however, Gama himself shows little interest in the religious side of the Eastern Christians.

Yet, if we return to Correa's murder scene, noted above, on Gama's ship, the figure of the grieving *capitao mor* tends to soften the brutality of the events, but it also strives to establish the "ethical agenda" within colonial processes. It is highly likely that Gama was weeping visibly: as will be seen in later sources of the period (Gouvea's *Jornada*, for instance), Portuguese men in the colony shed tears openly when the situation demanded. The curious weeping of Gama at the plight of the three "Christians"—who, in their death, are now like himself and his men through baptism—strategically introduces the "Christian" element into colonial trade and conquest. After all, his boats bore "forked streamers of white and red damask with the cross of Christ" (Correa 229–30). The weeping Gama returns meaning to the famous painting by Gregorio Lopez of 1524, now preserved at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, of Vasco da Gama looking very Christian, with the cross of the Order of Christ hanging from his necklet. It not only reinterprets Gama's exploits in trade as Christian enterprises but, in fact, confirms its place within the colonialism-is-Christianizing discourse, brushing under the colonial carpet scenes of scales, not crosses, mounted outside the Portuguese factories in the colonies (Correa 197) along with the persistent rumour that "Portuguese were robbers" (Correa 216). One cannot help asking: What did Gama expect other than Christianizing through baptism that he should be shocked into tears when presented with transcendental evidence in the form of arrow-proof corpses? Had he, after all, doubted the efficacy of the hasty baptism on the ship? Does it signify remorse at ordering the killing of three Christian men? Or rather, does his grieving betray the artifice, even vulgarity, of making ethical claims for profitarian colonialism?

Three readings of Gama

If Gama was suspicious of the men who professed the name of St. Thomas, scholars of later years have been no less sceptical. They share the same discourse of the Christian West and the non-Christian East and of colonial converts, a discourse that has shaped the translating and editing of *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499*. I prove this point here through a close reading of three editions: first, Henry E.J. Stanley's translation published by the Hakluyt Society in 1849 (based on Gaspar Correa's *Lendas da India*), from which I have already quoted a scene above; second, E.G. Ravenstein's *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499*, issued by the Hakluyt Society in 1898 (based on the anonymous "Roteiro" or Journal); and third, Glenn Joseph Ames' *Em nome de Deus: The Journal of the First Voyage*

of *Vasco da Gama to India, 1497–1499*, published by Brill in 2009 (based on the anonymous “Roteiro” [rutter] or Journal). The three editions record, among other things, encounters between Gama’s crew and “Indian Christians.”

For the Portuguese, meeting the Indian Christians in the fifteenth century was momentous. The figure of Prester John of India, that Christian king, was still in the collective memory of the Catholic Portuguese. They had not forgotten that Europe had waited, to their own detriment, for reinforcements from Prester during the Crusades. Their hope in him had not waned, even when the non-Christian East manifested itself as threatening Muslims. As late as 1492, Christopher Columbus wrote,

Acting on the information that I had given to your Highnesses touching the lands of India, and respecting a Prince who is called *Gran Can*, which means in our language King of Kings, how he and his ancestors had sent to Rome many times to ask for learned men of our holy faith to teach him, and how the Holy Father had never complied, insomuch that many people believing in idolatries were lost by receiving doctrine of perdition: Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians and Princes who love the holy Christian faith, and the propagation of it, and who are enemies to the sect of Mahoma and to all idolatries and heresies, resolved to send me, Cristobal Colon, to the said parts of India to see the said princes, and the cities and lands, and their disposition, with a view that they might be converted to our holy faith; and ordered that I should not go by land to the eastward, as had been customary, but that I should go by way of the west, whither up to this day, we do not know for certain that any one has gone. (Columbus 16)

Columbus clearly links his quest with the Prester figure, here the *Gran Can* (Grand Khan) whom he believed was of India. His letter also presents the culmination of the period that sought Christian brethren in India to rally against the Muslims.

Not long after Gama and his men entered the port of Calicut (in present-day Kerala, India), they visited a “church” with “statues” of Mary and Jesus. Inexplicably, the priests of this “church” all wore strings across their arms:

These quafees wore some threads over the shoulder (the left shoulder) and under the shoulder of the right arm, as our evangelical clergy wear the stole. . . . Many, many other saints were painted on the walls of the church, wearing crowns. But their painting was in a different style . . . each saint had four or five arms. (Ames 75–80)

Today, readers have no doubt that the “church” was a Hindu temple (Subrahmanyam identifies it as a Vishnava temple [*Career* 132]) and that “Mary” was a Hindu goddess, perhaps Parvathi (Ames) or the mother or nurse of Lord Krishna (Ravenstein), or perhaps a local and lesser-known goddess—Mariamma (Ravenstein).

This Gama episode confirmed once again for many scholars not only that the Prester John of India was a legend but also that Gama never met any Christians of India who claimed an ancient apostolic heritage. According to them, Christian merchants or refugees—mainly Syrian—moved into India between the fourth and tenth centuries. The rest of the Christians in India were converted by European colonial missionaries after the fifteenth century. Mundadan complains that even the first colonial prelate of the Thomas Christians, Roz, was reluctant to recognize the nativity of Indian Christians, insisting rather on an immigration theory (Mundadan *History* 43). But Mundadan later points out that Roz himself identifies four families—“Cotur [Kotoor], Cataval (Katavil?), Onamthuruth and Narimattam” (73)—as having existed even before the arrival of Thomas Cana (c. fourth century), the leader of the extant and endogamous Knanaya community of the Thomas Christians.¹ Subrahmanyam refers to George of the Cross (George Parambil), who was the archdeacon at the time of the synod of Diamper, as “the Syrian archdeacon” (“Dom Frei” 42). As way of explanation, he writes that neither he nor Mar Abraham responded favourably to Menezes, as neither belonged to the prestigious family of Pakalomattam (36). There is no doubt that Mar Abraham did not belong to any native family of India; the prelate was always from the Levant. However, George of the Cross belonged to the Parambil family and was the nephew of the late Archdeacon George of the Christ (see Kollaparambil 96–97). Subrahmanyam goes further and assigns the prelate’s and his archdeacon’s resistance to Menezes to both of their being “Syrian”: “The Synod [of Diamper] obliged the Syrian archdeacon to cut off ties with the Mesopotamian church, and continue earlier attempts to wean the Syrians away from what was seen as ‘Nestorian’ practices” (42). Although Subrahmanyam does not elaborate on what forms of “indigenizing” were expected from Menezes’ reforms, in keeping with his presumption that the Thomas Christians were or are alien, the title of his article announces “the failure of attempts to indigenize the Christians of India” (21). Martha Howell, who recommends the work of Subrahmanyam for studies on the maritime trade of the Portuguese in South Asia, states it plainly:

When Vasco da Gama’s man stepped onto the shores of western India in 1498, he is reported to have eagerly announced that his ships were in search of “Christians and spices.” The Portuguese found both, but not quite in the way they expected. Christians were already there, *but they were men from Syria who had arrived long before*, and they were not subjects of the mythical Prester John about whom medieval Europeans had fantasized for centuries . . . (153, emphasis added)

According to both orientalist and postcolonial scholars, then, Indian Christians were either colonial converts or else non-Indians and mainly Syrians.

These scholars also insist that Gama did not come across any Thomas Christians. But we see another instance of an alleged meeting between Gama and Indian Christians recorded in all three editions. In Malindi (in present-day Kenya) on the east coast of Africa, Gama is said to have met with men who showed eagerness to worship at the altar in his ship. Stanley introduces the topic in a footnote:

Barros says that some gentiles from Cambay, whom they call Banians, came to see the ships, and that seeing a picture of Our Lady in Da Gama's cabin, and that the Portuguese revered it, they made adoration to it with much more ceremony; and next day they returned to it. The Banians and Portuguese were mutually pleased, and the Portuguese imagined that these people were samples of some Christian community in India from the times of St. Thomas. (137)

Narrating the same incident, Ravenstein translates his source as follows:

We found here four vessels belonging to Indian Christians. When they came for the first time on board Paulo da Gama's ship, the captain-major being there at the time, they were shown an altar-piece representing Our Lady at the foot of the cross, with Jesus Christ in her arms and the apostles around her. When the Indians saw this picture (44) they prostrated themselves, and as long there they came to say their prayers in front bringing offerings of cloves, pepper, and other things. These Indians are tawny men; they wear but little clothing and have long beards and long hair, which they braid. They told us that they ate no beef. Their language differs from that of the Arabs, but some of them know a little of it, as they hold much intercourse with them. On the day on which the captain-major went up to the town in the boats, these Christian Indians fired off many bombards from their vessels, and when they saw him pass they raised their hands and shouted lustily Christ! Christ! That same night they asked the king's permission to give us a night-fete. And when night came they fired off many bombards, sent up rockets, and raised loud shouts. These Indians warned the captain-major against going on shore, and told him not to trust to their "fanfares," as they neither came from their hearts nor from their good will. (45)

Ravenstein's footnote runs: "Of course they looked upon these Romish images and pictures as outlandish representations of their own gods or idols" (45). Again, Ravenstein comments,

Burton (*Camocns*, IV, p. 420) suggests that they cried Krishna, the name of the eighth Incarnation of Vishnu, the second person of the Hindu Trinity, and the most popular of Indian gods. Sir J. Kirk knows of no word resembling 'Krist' likely to have been called out. (45)

Finally, Ames' edition translates the tale:

Here we found four ships of Indian Christians. The first time they came aboard Paulo da Gama's ship, where the Captain was, they were shown an altarpiece, with Our Lady at the base of a cross holding Jesus Christ in her arms, and the apostles around her. The Indians, when they saw this altarpiece, prostrated themselves before it; and as long as we were there, they came to make their prayers and brought offerings of cloves, pepper, and other things.

These Indians are tawny men; and wear but little clothing. They wear long beards and very long hair which they braid. They told us that they do not eat beef. Their language is different from that of the Moors, but some of them know a little Arabic since they have constant interchange with them. On the day when the Captain went up to the town in his boats, these Indian Christians fired many bombards from their ships; and they raised their hands when they saw him pass by, all of them shouting with much joy "Christ, Christ!"

On this day, they asked the king for permission to give us a night fete. And when night came; they heartily celebrated, and fired off many bombards, sent up rockets, and raised loud shouts. Moreover, these Indians told the Captain major not to go ashore, and that he should not trust their displays since they came neither from the heart nor good will. (66–67)

Ames includes a footnote as follows:

It is significant that at least at the outset, both Vasco da Gama and the author believed that the Hindus they encountered on the voyage were indeed "Christians." It is not clear if their Muslim prisoners described them as such, or if the Portuguese in seeking to find Christians "beyond the land of the Moors" simply decided that since they were certainly not Muslim they were potential co-religionists. While it is possible that these ships carried St. Thomas Christians from Kerala their refusal to eat beef suggests otherwise. Barros DI C.VI (149ff.) wrote that these ships held "merchants from India" and "Banyans from Gujarat"; Castanheda LI C.XI (29–31) described them as "Indian Christians . . . tawny men, with good physiqués, and well disposed" who when asked if they were from Calicut responded "no, that they were from another city further on called Cranganor"; and Góis PI C.XXXVIII (79) referred to them as "Indian Christians . . . from Cranganor [on the Malabar coast] tawny men, with long hair, dressed in Persian style." (66)

Stanley does not say whether the visitors were Thomas Christians or not. But Lodovico de Varthema, in his *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia*,

A.D. 1503 to 1508, records encountering merchants who were Christians: "In this city [a place called Kayamkulam, some distance from Cranganore] we found some Christians of those of Saint Thomas, some of whom are merchants, and believe in Christ, as we do" (180). Ravenstein, on the other hand, without providing any reason for his interpretation, concludes that the Indians were Hindus who saw the statues of the Latin Catholics as a foreign version of their own gods. Perhaps, Ravenstein's reason lay in Burton, whom he cites interpreting the shouts of the Indians as the name of Lord Krishna.

However, the references to Fernao Lopes de Castanheda and Damiao de Gois, both agreeing that the men were natives of Cranganor, bring to mind *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, first published in Italian in 1563. Duarte Barbosa, who spent time in Malabar between 1500 and 1516 or 1517 as a scribe and translator, writes about Cranganore: "In these places dwell many Moors, Christians and Heathen Indians. The Christians follow the doctrine of the Blessed Saint Thomas, and they hold here a Church dedicated to him, and another to Our Lady. They are very devout Christians, lacking nothing but true doctrine . . ." (89). Barbosa's opinion of the Christians likely reflects the view of the clergy who engaged with the Thomas Christians; it also anticipates decades of struggle between the Thomas Christians and the Europeans on matters of liturgical rite. However, Barbosa's observations, like Castanheda's and Gois', support the view that the Portuguese recognized Thomas Christians when they saw them (Thottakara 103). Ravenstein's scepticism, on the other hand, betrays the persistence of colonial discourse.²

Writing in the twenty-first century, Ames, unlike Ravenstein, provides a reason for not believing that the Indians were Christians: they said that they did not eat beef. He annotates, "while it is possible that these ships carried St. Thomas Christians from Kerala their refusal to eat beef suggests otherwise." In short, Ames dismisses any suggestion that the ships carried Thomas Christians. Ames' interpretation and conclusion make sense in the context of an orientalist understanding of Indians, who, as worshippers of the cow, abstain from beef. But it ignores the sociocultural aspects that determined the culinary habits of other communities. The practices around eating are fundamental to other social, cultural, political, and economic interactions: a majority Hindu community would have defined the menu of others. Ames thus overlooks the fact that precolonial Christians of India survived as a minority precisely by respecting and abstaining from killing or eating the holy cow of this majority community. The anonymous scribe of "The Narratives of Joseph the Indian" (Vallavanthara n.p.) notes that the Thomas Christians ate all kinds of meat, "except the oxen, which the Gentiles worship" (Greenlee 106). Ongoing occurrences of Indian Muslims being lynched under mere suspicion of having consumed beef signify the seriousness of the situation (Ayyub). In fact, during the second voyage to India, even Gama and his men desisted from purchasing beef from Muslim merchants in order not to offend the religious sentiments of the king of Cochin (Subrahmanyam *Career* 217). Thottakara interprets this incident to

suggest that whereas the Portuguese were intolerant of the religious practices of Muslims, they were more embracing of Hindu ways (116). Although Gouveau's *Jornada* does not spell it out in similar terms, he alludes to the Thomas Christians' preference for a vegetarian diet:

And very seldom they eat meat, except when they came to the land of the Portuguese or shelter them in their homes, and not because they abhor it like the gentiles and the Nairs, but because they do not fare well with them, and the other provisions are more used in their lands. Therefore if sometimes they eat it they fall sick, whereas with the other food they are robust, strong and forceful, and the best warrior people in the whole of Malabar, and thus the kings in their wars bring many Christians of Saint Thomas, of them consists the strength of their army. (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 252)

The *Jornada* thus describes a diet and lifestyle of the Thomas Christians that tends towards a meat-free regime. Notably, the travelogue also makes a curious connection between that diet and the vocation of these Christians in the armies of the native kings.

The plausibilities that I have put forward here may not necessarily prove that the Indians were Christians—or Thomas Christians for that matter. However, these alternative interpretations underscore that such reflections can introduce a much-needed complication into the term “Christianity,” that is, an element of diversity in Christianity that Early Modern Studies, Global Early Modern Studies, and Postcolonial Studies currently disregard.

“The narratives of Joseph the Indian”: a proto-national account

In the Gama narrative and interpretations discussed above, the Indian Christians appear (to the extent that they do) as a group. Moreover, any statements from them are reported as the communication of a group. The text of “The Narratives of Joseph the Indian,” on the other hand, provides an opportunity to get closer to the person and personality of the Thomas Christian speaker. This, in fact, is how Cabral himself got to know the Thomas Christians during his time in India. Mundadan sums up the meeting in a translation of Barros' *Decada primeira da Asia*:

[A]fter having established friendly relations with the king of Cochin, [the Portuguese] started swiftly loading their ships, in twenty days' time, in the port of Cochin and in the river of Cranganore five leagues from Cochin. In this port of Cranganore the Portuguese were approached by many Christians of St. Thomas. Of these Christians two brothers named Mathias and Joseph, who had been educated by the Armenian bishops who resided there, wanted to go with Cabral to Portugal and Rome and from there to Jerusalem and Armenia to see their patriarch. (*History* 261)

Armenia, here, does not denote the present nation of that name but rather refers to regions where Aramaic was spoken. Cabral agreed to the request of the two brothers, and the Portuguese, like the readers of the narrative today, became somewhat acquainted with the Thomas Christians.

In his 2013 essay, “Subaltern Studies in Retrospect and Reminiscence,” Dipesh Chakrabarty shares that he was initially surprised but later convinced when he saw his mentor, Ranajit Guha, linking nineteenth-century acts of oppression and ideologies of landlords against peasants to the ancient and religious legal text, the *Manusmriti*. An awareness of how deep structures of oppression pervade systems across time caused the change in Chakrabarty’s reaction. He concludes that “the problem of the archaic in the modern is not just a problem for less developed countries” (26), meaning that the West too is susceptible to the issue. But the point I wish to make is that the “archaic” texts in India Studies force enquiries on the Indian Christian outside the shared cultural code. This is not because Indian Christians do not share the culture but because the experience of colonialism intervenes at the point of Christianity to remove it from the presumed shared cultural code, at least where subaltern and postcolonial scholarship is concerned. In the West, when this archaic text is the “English Bible” or other privileged religious or secular texts, even the Christian element in India remains alien, regarded as either post/colonial missionary accounts or simply irrelevant. Eric Wolf phrases this problem cleverly:

We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. (Wolf, *Europe* 5)

“The Narratives of Joseph the Indian” (henceforth the Narrative), on the other hand, disrupts the priority of Christianity for colonial events in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not by removing Christianity from the equation but by shifting the spotlight to the figure of an Eastern Christian.

This is important because in the Narrative readers hear an otherwise unheard voice: the voice of a Thomas Christian at the turn of the fifteenth century. It is a mediated voice, as all voices ultimately are mediated by the speakers, the media, and the listeners. Mundadan writes in the “Foreword” to Vallavanthara’s critical study that the Narrative, “[D]espite the fact that it was written down by a European and that too not without some distortions, [it] is the only early source which can be called Indian in origin” (xvii). The

trick is to hear the narrative of Joseph in a European context. Compared to the representations of the Thomas Christians in the Gama journal, it is a voice up close.

Joseph, the Indian

The speakers in the Narrative are Joseph “the Indian” and his anonymous scribe and commentator, a textual situation that presents readers with the necessary information and yet warns of some interference. Joseph must have communicated with his scribe in Portuguese (Vallavanthara 84–87). The name the scribe uses—Joseph—is only a partial rendering. The fact that the Narrative is missing Joseph’s family name, or *kudumba-peru*—which Thomas Christian families take immense pride in and, therefore, would not waive—reminds us that we are reading a heavily mediated text.³ According to the scribe, however, the Narrative can be trusted. He informs us that Joseph was a resident of Cranganore, “the See of the Metropolitan of India” (Vallavanthara 267) and the same locality where Gama’s Thomas Christians came from. We are told that Joseph was not alone boarding Cabral’s ship but accompanied by his co-religionist and brother, Mathias, who died en route. Cabral’s ship left Cochin on 24 November 1500 and arrived, laden with spices, in Lisbon sometime in June 1501 (Vallavanthara 77). At the end of January 1502, Joseph sailed for Rome with a companion given to him by the king of Portugal. After visiting Rome, he and his companion arrived in Venice in June 1502.

According to Michael Geddes, it was during Joseph’s time in Europe, specifically at Venice, that his responses to interviews were recorded and published by the anonymous writer (2; also, Greenlee 98–99). Vallavanthara, on the other hand, concludes that the Narrative was written down after the visit to Venice—“later than June 1502” (84). In any event, following his time in Venice, Joseph likely proceeded to Jerusalem and to his patriarch in Babylon (Vallavanthara 81). This voyage abroad was at least Joseph’s second, as testified by another source—a letter written by four bishops of India to their patriarch Mar Elias in Mesopotamia (Schurhammer). Wilhelm Germann as well suggests that Joseph travelled abroad in 1490 (for his ordination) and then again in 1492 (to bring gifts to the Catholicos) (Vallavanthara 59), which would make his voyage with Cabral his third such journey.

Mar Abraham Mattam’s suggestion that Joseph was a monk (78–79) supports the note in the Narrative that Joseph was celibate, even though it was customary for Thomas Christian priests to marry before their ordination. The Narrative provides the following character report on Joseph: “According to the judgement of those who have seen him and spoken with him he is an ingenuous man, truthful, and of the highest integrity; and in so far as could be understood by them, he is of exemplary life and may be said to be a man of very great faith” (Greenlee 99). Mundadan has called attention to “some distortions” in the Narrative (“Foreword” xvii), although he does not

list any. One notable of these, reported by Greenlee, is Joseph's statement that the "figs" in India are "very large." So large, the anonymous scribe continues, that "whatever might be written about them would seem a thing incredible than otherwise" (Greenlee 107). It turns out this was an innocent reference to Malabar's favourite produce, the jackfruit (*chakka*), which would be somewhat more disproportionate than concluding that a cabbage was a large Brussels sprout. Such slight misrepresentations notwithstanding, Joseph is said to have had an ethical and a moral core that would make his words and actions reliable.

The publication, as titled in three known sources, refers to "Joseph the Indian." The *Paesi Nouamente Retrouati* (1507; also Greenlee's source), which is in Italian, mentions "Joseph Indiano" (Joseph the Indian) in the title of the first chapter, translated here as "How Joseph the Indian approached our Caravels, came to Portugal and the king made him to be accompanied to Rome and to Venice" (Vallavanthara 146). The *Itinerarium Portugallensium* (1508), in Latin, mentions "Iosephs Indus," again in the title of chapter 1: "How Joseph the Indian Came to Lisbon and Was Received by the King with Honour and How He Went to Rome and Venice in Our Company" (Vallavanthara 147). A little further, the *Paesi* mentions that "two brothers, Christians, came from a city called Caranganor"; the parallel lines from the *Itinerarium* read, "two brothers, Indians as well as Christians, came from a town called Caranganora, about twenty miles from Cuchin" (Vallavanthara 149). An important thesis of Antony Vallavanthara's is that there was a common source, likely "in some Italian dialect" (10), for the *Paesi* and the *Itinerarium*. (Vallavanthara furthermore believes that this common source was, in turn, derived from a Portuguese original—a proposition that Mundadan challenges ["Foreword" xvi].) I recently came across a manuscript of the Narrative dated 1503 that is in the Venetian dialect of Italian. The item forms part of a collection that otherwise includes reports between 1501 and 1503 on the journey of Columbus and of Cabral, among others. The manuscript shows a single hybrid hand. Notes provided by the Library of Congress, which holds the manuscript, indicate that it was written in Venice and that it is the source of the *Paesi*. In this manuscript, Joseph is not simply an "Indian," but rather the "Indian priest of Cranganore." He is, in other words, recognized as an Indian at the moment he is identified as a Thomas Christian—from Cranganore, when it held the title of the Metropolitan See (Vallavanthara 275). The references to "Joseph the Indian" in the three sources thus indicate how the foreigner came to be comprehended as a member of a community and how the larger collective, the nation, tended to replace the immediate and local affiliation in colonial Europe. However, the manuscript of 1503 precedes that Narrative both chronologically and ideologically in its uninhibited reference to the (precolonial) Indian Christian hierarchy.

Several of the editions of the above sources took on the name *The Narratives of Joseph the Indian*. For instance, the *Novus Orbis* (1532), which is

based on the *Itinerarium*, is a collection of travel accounts. Book VI (section 1) uses the (Latin) title, *Navigatio Josephi Indi* (*Narratives of Joseph the Indian*) (Vallavanthara 48). The German translation reads, *Den Boecxken der Schipvaerden Josephi des Indianers van der Stadt Caranganora* (*The Book of the Navigations of Joseph the Indian from the City of Caranganora*; Vallavanthara 49). A third source for the Narrative is Peter Vander Aa's chapbook in Dutch, *Sonderlinge Reyssen van Joseph den geboornen Indiaan; Bevattende een Aanmerklijke Beschrijvingh der Landen, Steeden, en Inwooners van Caranganor. . . .* (*Remarkable Travels of Joseph, Born the Indian, Containing Remarkable Descriptions of the Countries, Cities, and Inhabitants of Caranganor. . . .*) (1706) (Vallavanthara 50–51). The chapbook was published again the following year as part of a larger volume, which Vallavanthara describes, "The whole collection consists of 28 parts in 29 bands. The Narratives of Joseph the Indian is given here as the travel of an Indian with the index 'IN' standing for India. It is clearly stated in the table of contents . . .": "the letter, which stands before each voyage shows from which nation the Navigator is sent or is himself born" (51). Vallavanthara, furthermore, provides an extant list of primary and secondary sources that variously refer to "Joseph the Indian" (262).

The labelling of the Narrative as "The Narratives of Joseph the Indian" suggests an important stage in the evolution of the concept of the nation during colonial times. According to "Westphalian sovereignty" (based on the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648), the world political system shifted from empires in the 1500s to nation-states in the 1900s (see Robert Young 67). Robert C. Young argues that Westphalian sovereignty exemplifies that "colonialism was central to the development of the nation-state" (69). Classifying Joseph as an "Indian" thus intimates a proto-national identity, an identity that, according to Eric Hobsbawm, "could mobilize certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations" (46).

Joseph's being Indian was thus a part of his role as a representative of the Thomas Christians. As a very important person of his community, "a man prominent in the religious life of Cranganore" (Greenlee 95), Joseph was the emissary to his patriarch in Mesopotamia; he also had audiences with the king of Portugal, the pope, and the Signora of Venice. During formal meetings, as well as in routine conversations with the laity, merchants, and interviewers, Joseph imparted information about his community and his country—matters pertaining to his Church and society, other communities and their social and religious practices, trade, geography, and shipbuilding. In his studies on the twelfth-century trade between India and Aden, Goitein identifies "Abd al-Masih the deacon—shammas" as "probably of the Syrian Church of India." About this deacon, S.D. Goitein writes, "While traveling from Aden to India, he acted as an agent for two Jews" (54). It is possible that Joseph, at least on earlier travels, similarly engaged himself as

a merchant, which might explain his level of technical experience. Writers such as Faria y Sousa (59), Geddes (2), and the Franciscan, Soledade (qtd. in Vallavanthara 67), on the other hand, suggest that Joseph had little agency and that he undertook the voyage as directed by either Cabral or the Portuguese church in India. In general, scholarship on the Narrative does not consider the ambivalent role that Joseph played—as both colonial informant and advocate of his community—whereby he exposed the colonizer’s mission as something other than claimed.

Joseph, the agent

At several points in the Narrative, Joseph is unwittingly made a facilitator for colonial trade or a *comprador* (“buyer” in Portuguese). Readers, for instance, are given a list of herbs and (cash) crops and informed of the monetary worth of animals: “And because he wanted particularly to know the value of some things, Priest Joseph was shown hens and a ducat. He replied that a hundred hens could be had for a ducat” (Greenlee 106).⁴ The anonymous writer proceeds to compare the details Joseph provided with that obtained from historical sources such as Strabo and Marco Polo and vouches for the accuracy of Joseph’s information—quoting for instance, from Strabo’s *Geography* on the multiple uses of coconut to verify Joseph’s description (Greenlee 107). The Narrative was a source of information for other works, as well. According to John Duncan Martin Derrett, Thomas More, during his research for what would become *Utopia*, referenced the Latin translation, *Itinerarium Portugallensium e Lusitania in Indiam & inde in Occidentem & demum ad Aquilonem* of 1508 by Archangelo Madri gnani of Clairvaux, which contained the Narrative (Derrett 25). Derrett’s (as well as More’s) chief interest in the Narrative was as a source for information on Hindu populations. When Peter Vander Aa’s chapbook, noted above, was republished in 1707 in a larger volume titled *Naaukeurige Versameling der Gedenk-waardigste Zee en Land-Reysen Na Oost en West-Indien* (A Precise Collection of the Most Memorable Sea and Land-travels to the East and the West Indies), it contained Joseph’s accounts of Hindus on pages six and seven, as well as an insert between pages six and seven, “showing the sacrifice of the Hindus in the temples” (Vallavanthara 51). Joseph’s words were thus duly noted by European merchants, traders, and scholars.

The Narrative puts the spotlight on the littoral space, specifically, the maritime commerce and trade in the Indian Ocean, which according to Arab geographers of the medieval age, who referred to it as the Bahr al-Hind, was the largest sea (Hartmann and Dunlop, “Bahr al-Hind”). In “‘Measuring by the Bushel’: Reweighing the Indian Ocean Pepper Trade,” Prange studies the role Muslim merchants played in defining the south-west coast of India but without any mention of the role of the Thomas Christians in this venture. In what follows, I will fill this gap by revisiting the Narrative

as an opportunity to reconsider the significance of the coastal regions in the fifteenth century and their relationship with the inland regions as well as nations abroad.

The “seascape,” Gabriel Clooney recounts, “provides a new perspective on how people in coastal areas actively create their identities, sense of place and histories” (323). According to Joseph, the coastal city of Calicut is a cosmopolitan space where people of different faiths are given equal opportunity in the palace of the “idolatrous” king:

He has a very large palace in which he has four separate audience chambers: one for Gentiles, one for Moors, one for Jews, and one for Christians. And when it happens that any one of these four nations wishes an audience, he goes to the place assigned to him, and there they are heard by the king. But first they are obliged to wash themselves, for otherwise the king would not speak to them. (Greenlee 109–10)

Here, “Gentiles” would comprise the following: the Hindus, upper-caste local as well as those from other kingdoms of the subcontinent; the “Moors,” both the native Muslims and Muslims from the Middle East; and the “Jews,” including communities that settled in Malabar from at least the first century (Basham 344) and those arriving to trade from the other kingdoms of India or from abroad. The “Christians” would refer to: the Thomas Christians who were famed to be cultivators, brokers, and traders of spices; the native people converted by European missionaries; and Christians from the Middle East, China, and, more recently, those such as Cabral who arrived from Europe. Joseph’s narrative, thus, highlights the inevitable connections between the waters and the ways of coastal populations and how the coast shapes the interior.

We do not have the details of the conversations between Joseph and the king of Portugal, but on 29 July 1501, referring to Cabral’s troubles on his voyage, King Manuel of Portugal wrote to the regents of Spain that Calicut was a city “of many nationalities and of extensive population, in which the king can, with difficulty attend to the tumults of the populace” (Greenlee 47). Furthermore, he mentions Cochin:

In this city of Cochim there are many ships, and he learned that two merchants alone had as many as 50 ships. In that kingdom there are many true Christians of the conversion of Saint Thomas, and their priests follow the manner of life of the apostles with much strictness, having nothing of their own except what is given them as alms. And they practise celibacy and have churches in which they say mass, and they consecrate unleavened bread, and wine which they make from dried fruit with water for they cannot make other. (Greenlee 49)

Unlike the former excerpt, this one seems to have come from information provided by Joseph. The size of the “two merchants” fleet—of fifty

ships—indicates the extent of trade happening in the region at the time. Prominent merchant guilds such as the Anchuvanam and Manigramam had complex trade networks in India and abroad. According to R. Champakalakshmi, the “Anchuvanam” initially “referred to Jewish traders who came to the west coast [particularly Kerala] and acquired settlements. Later, however, it also came to denote Arab Muslim traders” (328). Elsewhere, Champakalakshmi cites K.V. Ramesh who supposes that the guild “represented Arab-Persian merchants” (329) and argues for a link with the Zoroastrian community. The authors do not consider the Anchuvanam as including Christian Arab-Persian merchants, even though the guilds appear to have been region oriented. Mundadan reports that the manigramam consisted of Nairs or perhaps lapsed Christians (*History* 168). For his theory of the latter, he relies on Whitehouse (1873), as well as on M.G.S. Narayanan (1972), who writes, “in spite of all the later criticism, the original suggestion of Dr. Gundert that the *Ancuvannam* [Anchuvannam] and *Manikkiramam* [Manigrammam] were corporations of the Jews and Christians respectively, stands vindicated by all the additional sources of evidence” (35). This recalls William of Adam’s recounting of interactions with a lapsed Christian in India in the early fourteenth century, and Mundadan likewise notes references in Portuguese records to backsliding Christians of Toda, Bepur, and Travancore (“Traditions” 109–11).

In his letter to Spain, King Manuel also reproduces what appears to be parts of Cabral’s conversations with Joseph:

And he also learned certain news of great Christian nations which are on the other side of that kingdom, who come on pilgrimage to the aforesaid house of Saint Thomas . . . The land is called Malchima [Great China], and from it comes porcelain, and musk, and amber, and aloe-wood, which they bring from the river Ganges, which is on this side of them. And there are such fine vases of porcelain there, that a single one of them is worth a hundred cruzados. (Greenlee 49–50)

This quoted passage appears at the end of the king’s account of Joseph and his brother visiting Portugal, the Thomas Christians, the tomb of Mylapore, and so on. He thus links information about China to the visit of Chinese pilgrims to Mylapore. That the king derives the worth of the porcelain from these narratives indicates once again how the association with Joseph exposes the commercial interests of the Portuguese during this period of early modern globalization.

It is possible that the Narrative had some impact on colonial policies. By 1504, the Portuguese court seriously considered ending the India voyages. “Instead,” as Malyn Newitt observes,

the decision was taken to put the whole enterprise on a new footing, a decision which was to provide a template for future European empires

and for European maritime supremacy throughout the world. Plans were drawn up to create a new kingdom for the Crown of Portugal, which would be administered by a viceroy and would be governed from a permanent base in the Indian Ocean. (68–69)

Portugal highly valued its potential in India. As A.J.R. Russell-Wood notes, “The fortuitous landfall in Brazil by Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500 was a minor diversion in the move toward the consolidation of a Portuguese presence in India and beyond in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.” In 1505, Dom Francisco de Almeida was sent out with an army and matching fleet to establish the *Estado da India*.

In this political climate, the words of Joseph, as co-religionist and clergy—even if not as a representative of the Thomas Christian community—had weight. In his consideration of the date of the Narrative, Greenlee points to excerpts of it in the letter that Dom Manuel of Portugal wrote to the king of Castile in 1505 (96). Maria Augusta Lima Cruz finds it peculiar that the first viceroy of the *Estado da India* arrived with orders to foster alliances with kings in India and that the directions specifically mentioned the king of Vijayanagara by name (18). The Narrative mentions the king of Vijayanagar—“Narsindo” (i.e., Narsinga or Narasimha)—by name more than once. In a section of the letter titled “Concerning King Narsindo and a Church of Saint Thomas” (Greenlee 112), Vijayanagar is referred to as “Besenegal [Bisnagar]” (112). Dom Manuel took Joseph’s account of Vijayanagar and this king very seriously:

This king, as Priest Joseph told, he has seen with his own eyes. When he goes with an army against his enemies, he takes with him eight hundred elephants, four thousand horses, and innumerable foot soldiers, and he says that his camp from south to north is thirty miles long, and from west to east, of equal breadth. Consequently, it may be supposed that his kingdom is very extensive, and furthermore, according to what Priest Joseph says, it is three thousand miles around. Its faith is idolatrous. (112–13)

While it is unlikely that the Narrative would be the sole source for the Portuguese to gain an awareness of the kingdoms and its resources in the early 1500s, it would have had a crucial impact on Portuguese and European colonial aspirations.

The conclusion of the Narrative, at the same time, suggests that the aim of the conversations with Joseph—and, therefore, the writer’s purpose—was not to gain information in that commercial direction. The writer’s disclaimer runs:

Many things might be said concerning the spices and the other merchandise pertaining to India and the parts about which we have written

in this our progress, but because they are not pertinent things to the narrative of Priest Joseph but rather an addition, and because we do not wish to proceed further, but to tell the simple truth, we have decided to end the present subject. (Greenlee 113)

This suggests that the purpose of recording the interviews was instead to obtain the big picture, including the faith and lifestyle of the Thomas Christians and Indian society in general. It was never forgotten that Joseph—whose impeccable character co-travellers grew to admire, who displayed for the Signoria of Venice (*Serenissima Signoria*) ancient gold coins that were treasured in his homeland as witness to the robust trade between his community and Venice over the centuries, and whose audiences with the king of Portugal may have influenced early colonial policies—was a Christian claiming apostolic heritage, that is, an Eastern Christian priest. The intention then, *at least as communicated to Joseph*, was not commercial. Trade and commerce were “an addition,” as the writer notes. In this sense, Joseph was not an informer, one who deliberately provided key information for a specific profitarian goal. Joseph was, rather, an accidental informant.

On exposing colonial aspirations

On the other hand, the questions asked of Joseph expose the colonial direction of Europe in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as mainly being that of trade and commerce. The chapter headings of the Narrative are telling: “Cranganore during the Winter, and Their Ships,” “Concerning Their Money, and the Things Which Grow Plentifully There,” “How They Make Wine, Vinegar, Sugar, and Oil from the Palm,” “Concerning Calichut and Its King, with His Usages and Merchandise,” “Concerning the Kingdom of Cambaia, Ormus, and Guzerat,” and “The Site of Cambaia, and Other Places, also of the King, and Its Spices.” The commercial information gathered from Joseph thus covers Ormuz to China and places in between. The *Paesi* mentions that in Calicut “almost all India comes together” and that “countless Moorish merchants” and “those from China” traded there. The Latin source, *Itinerarium Portugallensium*, published in 1508, is more detailed: “I [the scribe] cannot leave out in silence that there are many businessmen there, like Persians, Moors, Hindus, Medos, Assyrians, Syrians, Arabs, Aegyptians and almost from the whole world” (Vallavanthara 197). (The *Itinerarium* is also the source of the Narrative in the *Norvus Orbis Regionum ac Insularum*, of 1532 [Vallavanthara 42].) The listeners then posed him a question: “When we asked priest Joseph about our places mentioned in his place, he said that they do not mention any place except Rome, France and Venice, and that the money of Venice is held in very great esteem among them” (Vallavanthara 202).

Pepper was a major resource of colonial trade. On Cranganore—where Christians were plenty—pepper was available in large quantities, as Greenlee translates:

In that region there grows a very large quantity of pepper, which dries because of the great heat of the sun. And its trees are of mediocre quality. . . . which are bought and marketed by Moors who barter in that region. These carry them to Cairo and to Alexandria and to Damascus and to Persia . . . a greater quantity thereof goes beyond the mountains and to Cataio [China] than comes to our regions . . . (Greenlee 108)

About the Thomas Christians' chief occupation, Mundadan observes that "pepper-growing was almost their sole monopoly" (*History* 155). Malekandathil records that the sale of pepper alone to Portugal was "about 1,04,920 kg" in 1501, and it rose exponentially in the next five years, providing Portugal a profit of around 5,80,200 cruzados ("Dynamic" 161–62). In *Twilight of the Pepper Empire*, A.R. Disney mentions the presence of the Portuguese near Cranganore: "In addition to their establishment at Cochin the Portuguese had maintained a fort at the satellite city of Cranganore (Kodungalloor), close to the border with Calicut, since the first decade of the sixteenth century" (13). He argues though that the chief purpose of that holding was not trade but conversion of the Thomas Christians to Catholicism, which goal—according to him—was achieved by the synod of Diamper. The fact is, however, that after the synod, the Thomas Christians continued their rebellion against the Portuguese ecclesiasts, whereas, as Disney himself acknowledges, citing *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil* (1611), "from 1599 Calicut and the Portuguese were normally at peace" (10). The preceding discussions indicate that pepper, more than religion, determined when and where Portuguese colonizers went and what they did.

Commercial imperialism—the goods loaded and unloaded and affiliated industries (naval expansion and financial services, for instance)—overdetermined the relationship between the Portuguese and the Thomas Christians in a unique way. This becomes apparent early in the Narrative. As a Thomas Christian monk, Joseph was well respected by Europeans on board the ships and on land. However, the spectre of heresy soon enters the scene, when an important question is put to Joseph by Pope Alexander VI:

Our Pontiff Alexander asked Priest Joseph, when he was in Rome and speaking with His Holiness concerning the parts of India, who had given this authority to his Catholocos. And Priest Joseph replied to him that at the time of Simon Magus, Saint Peter was Pontiff in Antiochia, and the Christians in the region of Rome, being molested by the art of this Simon Magus, because there was no one who could oppose him,

sent to supplicate Saint Peter to allow him to be transferred to Rome. Leaving his vicar, he came to Rome. And this vicar is the one who now calls himself Catholicos and he rules in the name of Saint Peter. . . . The authority for this, they say, they have from the Roman Pontiff. (Greenlee 103)

Joseph alludes to the Acts of the Apostles 8:9–24 when he narrates the tradition that St. Peter appointed a “vicar” when he sailed off to Rome to subjugate the heretic, Simon Magus, and that this vicar is the Catholicos who now held authority over the Thomas Christians, among others. In the Narrative, Joseph acknowledges traditional permission of the “the Roman pontiff” for such use of authority in the East. As Mundadan points out, “[T]here was no avowed intention of entering into union with Rome for they [Joseph and his companions] were not aware of any breach of union in the first place” (*History* 504). According to Greenlee, “He [Cabral] was able to learn from them [priests, Mathias and Joseph] the differences between their belief and his own, and also to ascertain that the Syriac Church of Malabar claimed a common origin with that of Rome” (95). The *Paesi* does not carry any response to this apparently audacious claim of Joseph. However, Vallavanthara’s translation in the *Itinerarium* continues,

There is no one who does not know that this is false. For, there is only one spouse of Christ and this is the Roman Church, outside her there is no salvation. All that is said about other Churches is only fiction and is worthy of no faith. I will say this: Let no one think he should withdraw from the rock of Christ. There is one God, there is one faith and one is the Holy Roman Empire. (173)

This is an early reaction by the Latin and Latinized Church to the Thomas Christians. In the *Mirabilia Descripta* (c. 1330), Jordanus Catalani responds with similar irritation towards the Thomas Christians of Quilon for extolling the Apostle Thomas. In both cases, the West is compelled to hear the Indian Christian-who-is-not-a-convert. The response to Joseph in the early sixteenth century, however, becomes part of the civilizing mission—the mission to rid the Thomas Christians of all traces of errors and heresy as a means to prepare the way for colonialism’s commercial goals.

We come across a reference to Joseph outside of the Narrative regarding another aberration practised by the Thomas Christians, likely clerical marriage. Georg Schurhammer reproduces an excerpt from a 1518 letter of Fr. Alvaro Panteado: “As soon as their priest, who came from Portugal, returned [from his pilgrimage to Sao Thome] he was scandalized with me and asked me, what I wanted. I said, they should conform to Rome” (20). Schurhammer asks in a footnote elsewhere about this Thomas Christian priest: “Is he the parish priest of Craganore?” (8) Mundadan seems to think

it is (*History* 293).⁵ The Portuguese mission among the Thomas Christians had its commercial underside. The Narrative proceeds:

They consecrate the Body and the Blood of Our Lord, as we do, with unleaven bread. And he says that since they have no wine, for in those parts grapes do not grow, they take raisins, of which a very large quantity comes from Cataio [China], and they put them in water, and they strain it and obtain a certain juice, and with this they consecrate. (Greenlee 104)

Stephen Neill remarks that the “raisins” part “may well be authentic” (194); he does not identify any inauthentic parts of the Narrative. Gouvea’s *Jornada* testifies that the Thomas Christians were soon compelled to purchase Portuguese wine so that consecration could be done the Latin way (Malekandathil *Jornada* 33; Zacharia 139–40). As the decades passed, it became evident that the Portuguese claim to the civilizing mission, that is, making the Thomas Christians proper Christians, was really a commercial colonial enterprise.

In “Said, Religion, and Secular Criticism,” Viswanathan argues that whereas it would appear that rationalism opposed religion per se, this was a mistaken notion. She suggests that not all religions were equal in the colonial context and, therefore, while some religions were wiped out, others were swallowed by a dominant religion-cum-ethical system such as Christianity. “That Gnostic beliefs were rendered equivalent to Oriental heresies furthered the aims of colonialism in propagating Christianity as the only true authentic religion” (166), she concludes. This is the point where a close reading of Thomas Christian texts and contexts suggests otherwise. The fact is that when Thomas Christians were labelled as heretics and efforts were supposedly made to normalize them, what was propagated was less Christianity and more military and trade programmes. In other words, the blind belief that some scholars show in the discourse of the civilizing mission can sidetrack them into exaggerating the importance of Christianity for colonialism.

“Not my cup of tea”

The moment that Joseph is identified as an Indian is also the moment that will disconcert both Early Modern Studies and Postcolonial Studies as long as these overstate the significance of Christianity for colonialism. Gama’s Christians and the Narrative, even though they provide instances of ways in which “the other” was defined and repurposed for colonialism, fail to catch the attention of modern-day scholars. Global Early Modern Studies has been committed to studying how certain texts contributed to constructing a global south: as Sandra Young puts it, “positioning the unfamiliar and far-off peoples of the ‘torrid zones’ in deprecatory conceptual categories” (5).

The problem, however, is that texts that do not provide the expected level of service in placing in deprecatory terms the far-off peoples tend to be ignored. Gama's Christians fall off the radar unless declared non-Christians. The Narrative is another such text.

The Narrative, however, differs from Gama by providing a pre-auto-da-fé scenario: "They have most excellent doctors and students of letters. They have prophets as we do. . . . there are many books of learned men who have spoken concerning the Bible and the prophets" (Greenlee 104). In a related reference, though to the tradition that the apostle Thomas visited India, Mundadan writes, "In the 16th century the Portuguese came to know that the Christians of St. Thomas had in their possession not only songs but also written records which commemorated the life, work and death etc. of St. Thomas. But most of these records were destroyed after the synod of Diamper [of 1599]" (30). He is here referring to the judgement passed on persons and property as an act of faith, the terrible auto-da-fé, under the Portuguese Inquisition. By the end of the sixteenth century, the over-zealous Archbishop of Goa, Alexis de Menezes, had ordered documents and books of the Thomas Christians burnt on charges of heresy; this, at a time when printing and bookselling boomed in Coimbra and Lisbon (Musser 120). However, scholarship on the late sixteenth century that agrees with Menezes' version of the civilizing mission predominates Western studies on the Thomas Christians.

The Narrative was translated into seven European languages and published in twenty-five different editions very early in its history (Mundadan "Foreword" xvii). In the late twentieth century, Vallavanthara counted a total of seventeen editions as arising from the *Paesi* alone (5) and seven editions originating from the *Itinerarium* (60); Vallavanthara also mentions Peter Vander Aa's "booklet, *Sonderlinge Reysen, van Joseph den geboornen Indiaan*" of 1706, already noted above, which is distinct from both the *Paesi* and the *Itinerarium* (7). Despite such a profusion of translations and editions in the early years, the Narrative has received meagre attention within Renaissance and Early Modern Studies in the twentieth and current centuries. Frykenberg's *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, for instance, ignores this text. Derrett examined the Narrative only for information that could be gleaned on the "pagans," and moreover, as I noted above, suggests that Thomas More's own interest in that source would have been related—this in spite of Joseph's confession that he did not understand "the language [Sanskrit]" and that he "had not had many dealings with Gentiles" (100–01). Similarly, the text and context of Gama's Indian Christians have received either negative attention or none. In other words, mainstream scholarship seems to work best if it ignores or denies the non-European Christian element in the Narrative and Gama's journals.

Needless to say, scholars of Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies also refrain from discussing precolonial Indian Christians. In fact, the very topic of

the Thomas Christians becomes a problem. The Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS) is, as shown on its website, “the first and most established association in Canada devoted to specialized research and creative production in the field of postcolonial studies. . . . [CACLALS] provides members with an international context for studying Canadian, postcolonial and global literatures and cultures within and beyond the framework of the Canadian academy.” However, when I submitted a proposal on a literary text related to the Thomas Christians to CACLALS in 2017, the email response was, “Though all reviewers agree the proposed topic is historically rich, there is concern that CACLALS is not the best venue for it.” One cannot, of course, conclude that a sensitively worded rejection note from one of the associations of the Congress, organized by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada, is bona fide evidence for the general lack of interest in cultures and literatures of precolonial Christian heritage. Nevertheless, the fact is that works such as Frykenberg’s or Ines G. Zupanov’s, or the edition of *Travel Knowledge: European “Discoveries” in the Early Modern Period* by Jyotsna G. Singh and Ivo Kamps, which study the relationship between the colonization of India and the presence of Christians there in general, also tend to disregard the Narrative.

This chapter has thus provided a close reading of excerpts from the travelogues of Vasco da Gama and Pedro Alvares Cabral on the Thomas Christians in the context of Early Modern Studies and its privileging of Western Christianity. In it, I have argued that the attempts of Global Early Modern Studies to shine light on the margins remain problematic as long as the field maintains the “West is Christian/East is not” binary. Furthermore, and importantly, the close readings also point to the perseverance of the colonial mission in the face of the Eastern Christian. This chapter demonstrates how and why the relationship between Western Christians and Eastern Christians deteriorated and what role colonial ambitions played in the process; how recent studies on the Gama–Indian Christian episodes perpetuate colonial paradigms; and why the Narrative can be seen as a proto-national account, particularly as it becomes one of the earliest Indian Christian instances to successfully expose the motives and goals of the so-called civilizing mission. The following chapter, on the travel diary of the Portuguese archbishop, Menezes, explores the dynamics of that relationship in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

Notes

- 1 For an account of the Knanaya community, see Thodathil.
- 2 Ravenstein concludes his comments by adding that it was “significant that the Indian ships carried artillery” (67). The next chapter discusses this in detail, but here I will note that in the sixteenth century, well before colonial rules prevented native populations from possessing or carrying weapons, it was less of an oddity for Indian ships to be carrying Christians *and* artillery.

- 3 Thus a query on the “parentage of the Indian Joseph” (14) in *Notes and Queries*, 3 July 1875, will have to go unanswered (see “Travels of Josephus Indus”).
- 4 In the fifteenth century, the ducat was the preferred currency for international traders, and the value of the ducat was equivalent to 124 Venetian soldi or schillings (Rothbard).
- 5 The irony in the encounter between Joseph and Panteado cannot go unnoticed: Pope Alexander VI, whom Joseph had visited, had children, and they illegally interfered in matters of the papacy (Chedyath 122). In the next chapter, I discuss how clerical celibacy became a sore point in the relationships between the missionaries and the Thomas Christians. Building on the work of Varghese Thekkevallyara, I suggest that there is a link between the colonial insistence on clerical celibacy and the colonial need of the Portuguese to stop perceived Muslim monopoly on trade in Malabar.

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4 The *Jornada*

Why a European travelogue labelled anti-colonial Christians as heretics

Two presumptions influence the study of colonialism and Christianity. The first is that the civilizing mission concerned non-Christians and not Christians. The second is that colonialism's mission was merely corrupted by avarice, but that avarice was not at its core. A close reading of the *Jornada* provides important insights.

When Pramod K. Nayar states in *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* that the civilizing mission began in the late eighteenth century as a colonial project (37), he restates the conclusions of postcolonial theorists who associate the civilizing mission with “the evangelical movement” of the Church of England in the eighteenth century. The evangelical movement had its goal of renewing the spirituality and cleaning up the practices of the elite. As a core writer of this movement, Hannah More reflects, “Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. Their example is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream while the springs are poisoned” (78). In particular, More's energy was directed towards ending slavery in the colonies and improving health and educational services for the poor in her own neighbourhood, but first by influencing rich Christians.

In his introduction to the *Journal of World History's* special issue on the “civilizing mission,” Harry Liebersohn breaks down the term to examine its secular and Christian foci in the nineteenth century (384). According to him, “civilizing missions began in the nineteenth century, and continued until recently in the scholarly literature, as the name for an imposition of an external order or inner principles on colonized peoples” (387). Scholars who consider pre-eighteenth-century assimilationist efforts by the Portuguese or the Spanish emphasize instances of converting the pagans to Christianity as the moment of civilizing. The case of the Thomas Christians under Portuguese colonization in the sixteenth century, however, provides a distinct scenario in that it was a meeting of Christians and yet all of the above-mentioned ingredients of the civilizing mission—its targeting of the elite first, its Christian and secular preoccupation (including the conversion-factor), its imposition of external and internal orders through the Padroado, and so on—were in place even as an anti-colonial struggle ensued.

The second contention noted above regarding avarice concerns the question of whether colonial quarrels were motivated by religious zeal or economic ambitions. Subrahmanyam establishes that it was the Portuguese that claimed the authenticity of the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle in Mylapore and they did so to serve their own mercenary ends. He notes that “the discovery of the legendary tomb of St. Thomas was among the tasks set by the Portuguese monarch D. Manuel to several of the early captains he sent around the Cape route to India” (“Profit” 48). The history he narrates can be culled to support the argument that Portuguese colonial interventions, apparently religious, were basically profit oriented. However, Subrahmanyam underestimates the similar profit motive of the colonized. For instance, he visits the event of the attack on the Portuguese settlement in Mylapore by the de facto ruler of Vijayanagara, Aravidu Ramaraja (Rama Raya [c. 1485–1565]). Subrahmanyam claims that the attack had religious motivations: it was in retaliation for the destruction of temples by the Portuguese. Consequently, the Raya not only demanded 100,000 pagodas (varaha coins) but departed with hostages and also relics of the apostle (“Profit” 201). However, as Thekkedath points out, the Raya almost immediately changed his mind and returned the relics (201). The Raya’s action—the fact that he made some reparation for the invasion of the tomb—suggests two things. First, the tradition of the apostle’s tomb may not have been entirely a Portuguese invention, but rather a site venerated by the native population of all faiths (see Greenlee 49). And second, despite the historical fact of the destruction of temples in numerous places in India during colonial times, the Raya appeared to be pursuing a political and economic rather than a religious battle.

The other Christian

The *Jornada* (of Dom Alexis de Menezes), a Portuguese travelogue published in 1606 in Coimbra, provides one of the best examples of a pre-eighteenth-century attempt at the civilizing mission whose target was the local Christian population. A careful study of this document traces how the Thomas Christian was defined as another kind of Christian, how the colonial ecclesiastical powers sought alliances with pagan rulers to achieve military and economic goals that did not preclude the possibility of subjugating the Thomas Christians, and what it meant to “Christianize” the Indian Christians within the larger scheme of the civilizing mission. Postcolonial Studies tends to favour the post-eighteenth century in its study of the civilizing mission. If we look at material from the previous centuries, however, not only can we revise this start date of the project of the civilizing mission, but we also encounter a wider variety of associated processes and implications that enlighten discussions on colonialism in India in the later centuries and on twenty-first-century nation and nationalism in India.

The *Jornada* is the travel diary of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes. Ethel M. Pope, however, quotes Gouvea noting that the material for the *Jornada*

was “collected by several treatises by persons of authority, who were present at everything” (159). This quotation though also begins with a reference to the original (Portuguese) title *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa, Dom Frey Alexio de Menezes . . .* It is thus the account of Menezes’ travel in what is present-day Kerala, often referred to then as the Serra (*Chera*; roughly, the region west of the Western Ghats) and Malabar. It is divided into three books with a total of fifty chapters, of which all but two are about the Thomas Christians, the last two being on the journey of three missionaries sent by Menezes to the king of Persia, Shah Abbas I. Antonio de Gouvea—friar, ambassador, and one of the three missionaries of Menezes—edited the travelogue. Diogo Gomes Loureiro printed it in Lisbon in 1606 (Pope 159). In 1694, Michael Geddes published the first translation in English and titled it *The History of the Church of Malabar, from the Time of Its Being First Discover’d by the Portuguezes in the Year 1501. Giving an Account of the Persecutions and Violent Methods of the Roman Prelates, to Reduce Them to the Subjection of the Church of Rome. Together with the Synod of Diamper, Celebrated in the Year of Our Lord 1599. With Some Remarks upon the Faith and Doctrine of the Christians of St. Thomas in the Indies, Agreeing with the Church of England, in Opposition to that of Rome. Done out of Portugueze into English*. Geddes excluded material that was for him irrelevant to his purpose of proving that the faith of the Thomas Christians was a version of Protestantism. While I will be consulting this important translation, I will rely fundamentally on the translation edited by Pius Malekandathil and published in 2003 (hereafter cited as *Jornada*). It does not include the decrees of the synod of Diamper and so I will be relying on Geddes and Scaria Zacharia for source material on these. Moreover, the language of Malekandathil’s translation is often awkward, with syntaxes maintaining the length and complexity of the Portuguese original; however, it offers a fuller translation.

The title of Menezes’ book (as it appears in the “Publishers Note” of Malekandathil’s edition) is *The Journey of the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Frei Alexis de Menezes, Primate of East India, of the Order of St. Augustine. When He Went to the Serras (Mountains) of Malabar and to the Places Where Inhabit the Ancient Christians of St. Thomas, He Brought Them Back from Many Errors and Heresies, in Which They Were Found and Reduced Them to Our Holy Catholic Faith and to the Obedience of the Holy Roman Church, from Which They Had Remained Separated for a Thousand Years*. This broadcasts Menezes’ thesis that the Thomas Christians were steeped in “errors and heresies” and that Menezes had “reduced” [reduzido] the community to the Catholic Church. In the early seventeenth century, when the *Jornada* was published, the “reduction” of the Thomas Christians would have signalled not only an ecclesiastical reformation but also an economic and political victory that inadvertently linked itself to the “reductions” or “reducoes” of Latin America. The stated goal of Menezes’ mission—a civilizing mission—was to rid the Thomas Christians of Nestorianism, which he identifies in the

diary as the problem. Nestorianism was the heresy—allegedly introduced by the fifth-century bishop of Constantinople, Nestorius—that Jesus had in him not just two natures, the human and the divine, but two whole persons. Even though at the time the Catholic Church in the main disagreed with Menezes’ verdict and actions, well after the *Jornada* was published, this was one of the few points on which Rome agreed with the Padroado and the Estado da India. The impact of this book has been such that even today the secular press, including *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (“Aleixo”), endorses Menezes’ thesis. Such endorsements easily make way for the persistence of the colonial discourse of the civilizing mission—a persistence that muddies a sense of history especially as it pertains to the anti-colonial struggles of the Thomas Christians, ultimately misrepresenting this community of citizens to the detriment of the nation.

The person of Menezes too will have contributed to the continued impact of the *Jornada*. As an aristocrat, he was to become second in command to the Spanish king of Portugal as the viceroy of Portugal from 1612 to 1615. Prior to that he was governor of Portuguese India from 1607 to 1609. After all, he had become the archbishop of Goa at the young age of 35, in 1595. In the words of Neill, “the new archbishop was a man of considerable personal courage, endowed with charm and diplomatic skills, devout according to the strictest letter of Tridentine orthodoxy, and of an inflexible will” (208). Historians have compared him to none other than the Counter-Reformation and Tridentine figure, St. Borromeo (Alonso 263). If nothing, the positions that Menezes held testify to the extraordinary calibre of this man before whom the Thomas Christian community fled or fought. They also point to the fluid nature of ecclesiastical and civil responsibilities and its unlimited potential within the colonial setting (see Thaliath 17). The *Jornada* sealed the triumph of its author. To make this possible, Menezes delegated the task of editing and publishing it to his most trusted companion and fellow-member of the Augustinian Order—Antonio Gouvea. John Flannery quotes Menezes on why he selected Gouvea to lead the mission to Persia: “[T]here was no one better in any Order as to their maturity in negotiations He was someone that I would have chosen even if he had not been a member of our [Augustinian] Order” (55). Considering that these words come from a dedicated patron of his Order, this testimony to Gouvea’s negotiation skills and Menezes’ preference for him should frame any reading of the *Jornada*.

Thus, in the genre of narratives of the civilizing mission, the *Jornada*’s purported goal is the conversion of the Thomas Christians. Yet, the reader cannot ignore the fact that two other goals of Menezes, although not mentioned in the title, were intricately linked to the declared objective. These were to defeat the trade of the Turks and to extol the bishopric of Goa. The former is well known as the commitment of the Portuguese to wrest trade from the Muslims. The latter, the efforts to increase the size of Archdiocese of Goa—to make it, in fact, the largest in the East—has been discussed by

Neill among others. Yet the relationship between all three goals and the extraordinary importance that the subjugation of the Thomas Christians had in Menezes's mission have not been adequately addressed.

Mar Abraham, the Babylonian prelate of the Thomas Christians, died in 1597. Thekkedath perceives that in a letter that Menezes wrote on 19 December 1597 to Fabio Biondi, titular patriarch of Jerusalem, he had already revealed his plans:

He proposed to visit all the churches of the St. Thomas Christians, purge them of their heresies and errors, teach them the Catholic doctrine, destroy all the heretical books which they possessed, and in the end convoke a synod of all their priests. He would get them to promise obedience to the Church of Rome and to take an oath to receive the prelate whom His Holiness would send them. (66)

A "synod" is an assembly of the clergy and the laity of a division of a particular church convoked by a lawful ecclesiastical authority. The synod of Diamper of 1599 turned out to be Menezes' projected synod.¹ It constituted, besides Menezes, 153 clergy "of which over a hundred had been newly ordained by the Archbishop [Menezes] within the space of four months" (Thaliath 24) and 660 lay members. As Menezes' letter to Fabio Biondi clarifies, the purpose of the synod was to unite the heretical Thomas Christians to the Roman Church. Geddes preserves this narrative with one difference. If for Menezes the synod defined the climax of his strenuous efforts to redeem this Christian community, for Geddes it marked the death knell of the community as it was subjugated by the papacy. As a Scottish clergyman of the Church of England, Geddes saw the synod of Diamper as yet another onslaught of the papacy.

One of these two narratives always defines any discussions on the Thomas Christians: either that Archbishop Menezes redeemed the Thomas Christians from heresy (specifically Nestorianism) or that the alleged heresy of the Thomas Christians was really a version of Protestantism in which the papacy had no business interfering. Both these positions are valid to an extent. Menezes and Gouvea claimed that Menezes single-handedly brought the Thomas Christians to the Roman Church after the latter remained in heresy for more than a millennium. The influence of this text persists. Thus, Charles J. Borges' excerpt, "India," in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism* (2007) reads, "The Thomas Christians were initially willing to accept the primacy of the See of Rome, which they did formally at the Synod of Diamper in 1599" (114). It was also true that the European church, threatened by the Reformation, reacted to every instance of difference even in the colonies in the same way—a way that was later stamped by the Inquisition.

But the Thomas Christians themselves give a different story. They point out that their Eastern patriarch, John Suid Sulaka, was not only in union but also in communion with Rome well before Menezes set foot among

them. They admit that their faith and practices held errors, which they were willing to expunge under the guidance of missionaries—a process that had been ongoing over the centuries, given the Church’s interactions with emissaries from Rome in at least the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, they adamantly objected to the accusations of heresy.

With very few exceptions, historians ignore or downplay the role that colonial ambitions played in the apparently ecclesiastical steps that Menezes took. National and nationalist narratives, as one finds within India Studies, South Asian Studies, World History, Studies in Christianity, and so on, tend to either disregard the experiences of the Thomas Christians or to see Christianity in India as a colonial mission of conversion. In other words, Indian Christians are seen as colonial converts and, by extension, pro-colonialists even in the twenty-first century. Here, we find both pro-nationalist far right groups in India and Western secular scholars agreeing that the aim of colonialism was to Christianize. In this view, the synod of Diamper was a component in the ongoing colonial goal to Christianize the East.

A close reading of the *Jornada*, on the other hand, betrays a number of things: the aspirations of the Padroado as clearly colonial, accusations of heresy on the Thomas Christians as a case of sixteenth-century orientalism, the decrees of the synod as a communication tool of the civilizing mission, and the biographical expressions of the Portuguese prelate and other Portuguese as instances of manufacturing the colonial “other.” In the face of Portuguese orientalism, the experience and history of the Thomas Christians were not an experience and history of Christianizing, but of otherizing. After all, they were already Christians. But they were now the other Christians.

The “other Christian” of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonial imagination was a figure that was neither Hindu nor Muslim. These two colonial concepts have sealed the identities of those who live in the Indian subcontinent, dividing the land ideologically for over six centuries and, importantly for this project, erasing the details of peoples who claimed other identities and made other commitments. This figure is in some ways like the Animist Tribals, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Jews, the Zoroastrians—in short, the other. The other Christian shared a heritage, even a lineage sometimes, with the Jews, as with certain castes of Hindus, and carried on fraternal trade with Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians of the Levant. This figure stood starkly at odds with its European counterpart, whose self and communal definition was considerably determined by the crusades, by ongoing trade rivalry with Muslims, and by increasing anti-Semitism. Their otherness had to be tackled.

Nestorianizing the Thomas Christians

Church historians decipher Menezes’ arrival in the regions of the Thomas Christians, his conduct of a historic meeting in Udayamperoor (called Diamper by the Portuguese), and the resulting policies (“decrees”) as well as

the production of the *Jornada* as either processes of Romanizing or Latinizing/Lusitanizing. They tend to ignore or downplay the role of colonialism. About the arrival of Menezes in India as the archbishop of Goa, Samuel Hugh Moffett writes, “A young new archbishop, Alexis de Menezes, had arrived in Goa in 1595, determined to settle once and for all who ruled the Indian church: not the Syrian Nestorians of either stripe, not Indians, but Rome” (13–14). Moffett reflects the view shared by Geddes, Neill, Frykenberg, and others of a non-Catholic persuasion, as well as by some European and Indian Latin rite (Catholic) scholars, notably Gregorio Magno Antao. According to these scholars, Menezes’ moves amounted to a change of denomination for the Thomas Christians. For others, the goal was cultural. They point out that the Thomas Christians were confirmed in the Catholic faith at least since the time when their patriarch Sulaka committed to the pope in the middle of the sixteenth century. According to “The Narratives of Joseph the Indian,” though, the Thomas Christians acknowledged the supremacy of the pope well before Sulaka formally subjected himself and his flock to him, a fact confirmed by Mar Jacob’s interactions with the Portuguese at the turn of the century (see Schurhammer). Therefore, a “conversion” to the Catholic faith made no sense. Menezes’ attempts to bring about changes could then be interpreted chiefly as attempts to impose a Latin rite on the Syrian rite congregation and as a means to redefine the Indian community by Lusitanian (i.e., Portuguese) characteristics rather than the mores of any other European (read missionary) tradition. The following considers how the *Jornada* provides evidence for these various, even if contradictory, interpretations and how the case for heresy grew as a result.

The two-part title communicates to its readers the gist of the book and the intention of its author and editor. The first part of the *Jornada*’s original title—*The Journey of the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Frei Alexis de Menezes, Primate of East India, of the Order of St. Augustine*—announces the real author and protagonist as an Augustinian and a top-level Catholic who possessed ecclesiastical administrative powers over the See of Goa as well as over India, Pope Gregory XIII having granted the archbishop of Goa the title of “Primate of the East.” Again, the journey of Menezes was the mission of his Order, as against the missions of other Orders—the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Jesuits—in the same region. The second part of the title, an entire sentence, summarizes the itinerary in Malabar, specifically those parts of the country where the Thomas Christians resided, and presents the goal of the journey, the *Jornada*, as having been attained: Menezes, by the end of the journey, had single-handedly brought the heretical Thomas Christians to the truth faith and to obedience to the Roman Church. This millennial event was an extraordinary achievement: for a thousand years, according to this narrative, the Thomas Christians had been separated in their faith and in their allegiance to the Roman Church.

Menezes unravels the history behind this state of affairs in the first three, short, chapters. He begins by acknowledging the tradition of the Thomas

Christians: that the apostle Thomas baptized their ancestors in the first century. He traces the migration of some Thomas Christians from Mylapore (the same location where St. Thomas is believed to have been martyred) to Malabar and attributes the arrival of “the perverse heresy of Nestor” among them with the advent of prelates from “Babylonia” (*Jornada* 26).² Malekandathil observes at this point, however, reckless issues of chronology, where early sixteenth-century Chaldean bishops are recorded as having arrived in the period contemporaneous with the fifth-century Nestor: “What he tries to do here is perhaps to put things in a thematic frame and say that Nestorianism reached Malabar through the ecclesiastical intermediaries, who used to visit its churches from West Asia” (*Jornada* 26). In fact, this thematic frame also facilitates a rhetorical transition from the fifth-century heresy to the fifteenth-century advent of the Portuguese and, more importantly, to the now timely arrival of Menezes in the thick of things. Therefore, the fourth chapter is convincingly titled, “Of the Death of the Last Nestorian Archbishop, and of How the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Frei Alexis de Menezes Started to Try to Bring the Christians of St. Thomas to the Obedience of the Holy Roman Church.”

The process by which Menezes identifies the Thomas Christians as Nestorians is interesting, even if aggressive. For example, on a visit to the church of Vaipicota attended by the inmates of the Jesuit seminary there, Menezes learned that the Thomas Christians among them were praying for their patriarch of Babylon “with the title of universal pastor of the Catholic Church” (*Jornada* 122–23). Menezes could not tolerate this. The missionaries to whom he confided his concerns advised against meddling in the customs of the Thomas Christians for, they suggested, “the Christians would be scandalized and would not accept him [Menezes] in the churches so that in future he would not be able to do what he desired” (*Jornada* 123). Regarding this, Thaliath writes that the very fact that the name of the patriarch was uttered during prayers of the Jesuit seminary in Vaipicota proves that the Jesuits were indeed well informed of the patriarch’s communion with the pope and, hence, with his orthodoxy of faith (94). Joseph Panjikaran lists the several East Syrian patriarchs from about 1550 to the period of the synod of Diamper to show that, beginning with Simon Mama who preceded Sulaka, the patriarchs were Catholic (51–53).

Initially, Menezes took the path of least offence: he decided not to attend such prayer services. But then, without any warning or further consultations, he changed his mind and took a drastic step. He assembled all the priests—both Jesuits and the Thomas Christians—Archdeacon George of the Cross, and the Portuguese who were accompanying him. He then had an interpreter translate into Malayalam the excommunication, *latae sententiae*, that he had issued. The statement was as follows:

By this order he ordered that no person, secular or Ecclesiastic, thence forwards would dare in the Bishopric of *Serra* to mention the Patriarch of Babylonia as the universal pastor of the Roman Church, as it was

a title that belonged only to the Roman Pontiff successor of St. Peter Vicar of Christ on the earth, nor to make any prayer in the Mass or divine rituals for the Patriarch of Babylonia, nor should they mention him in them, as he was a Nestorian heretic, schismatic, outside the obedience of the Roman Church. (*Jornada* 123–24)

By naming the patriarch in the letter of excommunication, Menezes confirms him as “a Nestorian heretic, schismatic, outside the obedience of the Roman Church” even when this was far from the historical truth. The Chaldean [“Babylonia”] patriarchate had two lines of succession: one was orthodox, while the other was schismatic. The patriarch that Menezes names in his excommunication letter was Simon Denha (Simon IX), “successor of Yab Allah pertaining to the Catholic line of succession in the Chaldean Patriarchate, beginning with Simon Sulaka” (Thaliath 95). He was orthodox. Furthermore, on account of his allegiance to Rome, he often faced the opposition of Nestorians (Tisserant 34). Papal Nuncio Leonard Abel had in a report praised the Chaldean Church’s allegiance to Rome in the face of severe persecutions during the tenure of Simon Denha (Thaliath 95). It is neither surprising nor scandalous then that the patriarch’s name was allowed to be mentioned in prayer and at mass at the Jesuit seminary. So, according to Thaliath, “to proscribe, under pain of excommunication, the custom of naming in the Holy Mass the Chaldean Patriarch, who was the legitimate head of the Church and in perfect union with Rome, was, to say the least unpardonable ignorance on the part of Menezes” (95). Thaliath also remarks that Patriarch Mar Simon “legitimately exercised authority in Malabar” (20). From the perspective of Menezes, however, “the Patriarch of Babylonia” had to be exposed as a Nestorian to justify the necessity of intervening with the express purpose of submitting the Thomas Christians to the Roman Church. In other words, it was important for Menezes to charge the Thomas Christians of heresy.

The Greek etymology of the word “heresy” suggests choosing, a questionable human activity in the marginalized community or person. In Europe, which had witnessed large-scale opposition to the Catholic Church in the form of the Reformation, any ritual or belief smacking of difference from the Latin Church was often considered heretical by default and, therefore, demanded immediate correction. In the colonial territories, it demanded assimilation. The means of correction varied. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, for instance, recommended correction through the use of the Old Testament, New Testament, or sheer reason, depending on whether the subject was Jewish, Christian, or Muslim/pagan, respectively. Of course, the counter-Reformation and early colonial responses went much further, even to the extent of the Inquisition. Aquinas’ definition of heresy is “a species of infidelity in men who, having professed the faith of Christ, corrupt its dogmas” (*Summa Theologica* II, II:11:1).

In his chapter on “The Beliefs and Rituals of the St. Thomas Christians,” and especially in the section titled “St. Thomas Christians and Nestorianism” [my translation], Koodapuzha, however, is at pains to distinguish the terms ignorance, error, and heresy. Someone who is ignorant of or has misunderstood a doctrine, and is not stubbornly persistent in it, is not a heretic. He cites St. Augustin in support: “*Errare potero, haereticus non ero, defectu scilicet pertinaciae*”³ (qtd. in Koodapuzha, *Bharatha* 267). It is only when one deliberately rejects faith doctrines that one is culpable of heresy. Moreover, Koodapuzha points out, a philosophical and theological scrutiny of just about anyone’s words, statements, and books can indeed identify at least a few errors. He reminds the reader that after all even a pope—Pope Honorius, who had supported monothelitism, the view that Jesus had only one will rather than a separate human and divine will—was anathematized in the sixth session of the Second Council of Nicaea (*Bharatha* 263). He further observes that if there was heretical material in any of the prayers and books of the Thomas Christians (such as that Western missionaries identified in the colonial times), those were likely imperceptible to them considering that they were outside the Roman regions, which alone were rife with theological debates around Nestorianism. He goes on to mention several ancient prayers of the Thomas Christians that recognized that God’s Son and Mary’s Son are one and the same. This was certainly not the Nestorian stance (*Bharatha* 267–70; also see Malancharuvil 11–12). Koodapuzha additionally cites from seventh-century patriarchs who declared allegiance to the Bishop of Rome as successor of St. Peter as proof that the Persian Church was in communion, even when not in communication, with the pope (*Bharatha* 263–66). Regarding communication: until the so-called golden age of Canon Law, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, even the Western churches were relatively more autonomous than centralized under Rome (277). Note that Russia, which had Byzantine “Orthodox” ecclesiastical authorities between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries (i.e., the period following the Great Schism), was never considered by Rome to have been schismatic (279). Yet, prelates of the Thomas Christians were repeatedly accused of heresy chiefly by the Padroado. Whereas it was likely that there were errors in the doctrines and practices of the Thomas Christians, they did not willingly commit the sin of heresy. Notably, the provincial synod of Angamaly of 1583 sought to correct only “errors and customs” of the Thomas Christians (see Ferroli 170).

While this project in the main lies outside the theological debates, it is concerned with how colonial figures utilized the disputes to further their own ends. In the context of the history of the Chaldean Church and its reach in India during the sixteenth century, what Menezes’ charges of heresy amounted to was othering, the process by which colonial discourse as the location of power creates its subject: the other. Such creation of the other dialectically produces the colonizing other as well, for instance, the self—the hero of the *Jornada*, Menezes himself, who purportedly “reduced” the Thomas Christians to the Church of Rome. The reduction of the

“Nestorian” Thomas Christians crowned Menezes’ report of even 12 November 1611 to the pope (Alonso 329). Considering that Menezes became the viceroy of Portugal the following year, the report functioned as an expanded and embellished resume. The colonial and postcolonial label of “Nestorian” affixed to the Thomas Christians of India is thus part of the process of this othering and imperial self-defining.

De-Nestorianizing

Mar Joseph, who arrived among the Thomas Christians in 1557, figures in Book One of the *Jornada*, where he is presented paradoxically as at once Catholic and pro-Portuguese *and* Nestorian and anti-Portuguese. The *Jornada* testifies that Mar Joseph was sent by “Mar *Audixo* (Abdiso) Patriarch of Babylonia, and it was he who put all the things in order more than the others, because before him there was no order at all, neither in the customs nor in the celebration of the Mass and other rituals” (32). Mar Abdiso (Ebdjesus), the aforementioned representative of India at the Council of Trent, was the successor of the Sulaka who was confirmed as patriarch by Pope Julius III, marking the union of a section of the Chaldean Church with the Catholic Church. Mar Abdiso was, therefore, a Catholic Chaldean patriarch. Mar Joseph replaced the “bed sheet” with liturgical vestments, and “some cakes kneaded with oil and salt” and “soaked dry grapes” (*Jornada* 33) with hosts and imported Portuguese wine of the Latin rite.

However, even as Mar Joseph is introduced as a Catholic Chaldean, the *Jornada* provides another background for him: “he was a professed Nestorian, he was also imparting the errors of Nestor like his predecessors [with reference to Our Lady]” (*Jornada* 33). The (Latin) Bishop of Cochin, the Archbishop of Goa, and the Portuguese Viceroy himself were involved in removing Mar Joseph from the Thomas Christians and sending him off to Portugal en route to Rome to be disciplined. Mar Joseph, however, convinced Portuguese royalty as well as the Inquisitor General of his orthodoxy, so that the queen “ordered that he should be allowed to carry on with his Bishopric peacefully” (*Jornada* 34). The *Jornada* continues, “Mar Joseph arrived from Portugal, and, showing his letters, was sent freely to his Bishopric” (34).

This was in sharp contrast to how the Portuguese authorities, both civic and ecclesiastical, evaluated papal documents and the support of two Maltese Dominicans, Bishop Ambrose Buttigieg and Fr. Antoninus Zahra,⁴ lent by the pope to Mar Joseph. According to these documents and the testimony of the Dominicans, Mar Joseph was to function as the metropolitan of the Thomas Christians. But the Padroado in India restricted the Dominicans to a monastery in the present state of Maharashtra and sent the Chaldean Catholic bishops, Mar Joseph, and Mar Elias (a companion) to Africa first before returning them to the monastery, practically incarcerating them for over a year (Thekkedath 42). All four were allowed to proceed

to the region of the Thomas Christians only when it was seen as an effective means to curb a worse troublemaker, Mar Abraham (Thekkedath 41). The subsequent game of Mar Joseph accommodating the Portuguese and the latter the former was in some ways the direct result of this threatening figure. Once Mar Abraham was accused of Nestorianism and sent back to Rome, the attention once again turned to Mar Joseph. According to the *Jornada*, Mar Joseph “did not stop continuing with his errors” (37). Thus, the *Jornada* reflects the perspective of the Padroado even before the arrival of Menezes.

Thaliath writes that “the charge of heresy against Mar Joseph seems to have been only a very handy means of getting rid of someone who gave embarrassment to the Portuguese authorities” (8). Mar Joseph was hunted from place to place by a self-declared Inquisition-like figure, Fr. Carneyro, who kept challenging him to a public debate supposedly on heretical topics. The following is one narrative of this colonial chase:

But the cunning wolf sought only to avoid him, flying hither and thither from wherever the Father pursued him, and finally seeking refuge with a pagan Rajah. There too, the Father followed him and persuaded the Rajah to arrest him as a disseminator of errors and a disturber of the public peace. But this was not easy, for the Chaldæan party had gathered some 2,000 desperadoes, who had sworn to protect the life of Mar Joseph at the risk of their own. Yet it was felt to be somewhat undignified on the part of Mar Joseph to be always dodging Fr. Carneyro and refusing to have a public disputation with him. One was arranged at Angamale; but when all was ready, Joseph was not to be found. (Ferrolí 154–55)

Colonial discourse transforms Mar Joseph as bishop of the Thomas Christians from a man of prayer to “the cunning wolf” and construes his attempts at escape from the already familiar and violent processes of colonial inquisition as unreasonable, as the deceitful instincts of a wild animal. In turn, “the charming and affectionate manners” of Fr. Carneyro, which won him the confidence of Christians in remote areas, change somewhat, as he becomes the rightful hunter. By dismissing age-old conventions of royal protection of the Thomas Christians and their prelate, he persuaded the Rajah to arrest the bishop on the ecclesiastical and political grounds of “errors” and as “a disturber of the public peace.”

In fact, ecclesiastical and political charges merge in such persuasion: it is suggested that the heretical teachings of the bishop disrupt political control. Since the Rajah had no reason to believe that his own authority over the Thomas Christians was jeopardized in any way (the bishop was after all seeking refuge, believing in and confirming the effective authority of the Rajah) and since he had to be persuaded, it was certainly colonial control that was in doubt. However, the moment colonial and native powers joined

against these Christians, the latter summoned their own political and military might by enlisting “desperadoes,” the *chaverpada* (more about them later), to protect their prelate. This in effect forestalled any alliance between the Portuguese and the Hindu king that would have been to the detriment of the Thomas Christians. Viewed thus, the heretical strain in the Thomas Christians challenged colonial power. Mar Joseph was eventually sent to Lisbon, where he was acquitted; furthermore, he received an apostolic brief authorizing him to serve the Thomas Christians (Thaliath 9). Mar Joseph finally returned to the Thomas Christians but remained only until the Archbishop of Goa again complained to Rome of his heresy. The bishop had to once again face charges, this time before the Inquisition in Goa and Lisbon (see Tisserant 39), before he was sent to Rome, where he was once again acquitted. But he died soon after in Rome.

The *Jornada* goes further than simply endorsing the perspective of the Padroado. The narrative also accommodates that viewpoint. We see this clearly, for example, in the book’s omission of some of the core reforms (beyond changing “bed sheets”) that Mar Joseph along with his Dominican helpers enforced in the Thomas Christian community. Thekkedath lists the reforms as reported by Fr. Zahra: “[T]he people were purged of their Nestorian ideas and taught the existence of purgatory, to receive the sacraments of penance, confirmation and the anointing of the sick” (43). As we shall see later, Menezes’ singular reforms were in general a repeat of this list. Since these reforms sit at the heart of the claim that Menezes brought the Thomas Christians to the Holy Roman Church, we can safely conclude that it was highly strategic to indiscriminately label prelates of the Thomas Christians as Nestorians and heretics.

The *Jornada* announces the last Nestorian—that is, the successor of Mar Joseph, Mar Abraham—in this vein. Mar Abraham came from the Nestorian line. However, according to the report of Fr. Zahra, Mar Joseph and his missionary supporters had as early as 1558 convinced him to become a Catholic (Thekkedath 42). Furthermore, that same year and in a public ceremony, Mar Abraham once again announced his renunciation of Nestorianism. In spite of all of this, he was held in a monastery in Goa for two years and returned to his homeland. Fr. Zahra reports that Mar Abraham submitted to the Catholic Chaldean Patriarch Abdiso upon his return (Thekkedath 43; 45). Moreover, he acquired letters of recommendation from Pope Pius IV. In his letter to the bishop of Cochin, “given in Rome at St. Peter’s, on the last day of February 1565,” the pope spoke plainly:

He [Mar Joseph] must be defended from all harm, that, protected by your patronage [the Padroado!], as he hopes, he may reside, without any molestation and impediment, where his Patriarch [Abdisho] has placed him and exercise the office assigned to him, so that he may bring as many souls as possible to Christ. Therefore, you [must] protect him from all harm in such a way and so diligently that from your conduct it

may be perceived how much you continue to revere us and the Holy See and how greatly you respect the good name, the equity and the justice of the same See. For we wish and desire that he obtains the diocese, which his Patriarch has assigned to him, without any impediment whatsoever. (Pallath *Provincial* 169)

Pope Pius IV, thus, was aware of the injustice to which Eastern prelates and their flocks were often subjected, and this undoubtedly dictated the severe tone of his letter to a member of the Padroado. Later, Pope Gregory XIII, successor to Pius IV, wrote to the archbishop of Goa on 20 November 1578 requesting him to show Christian “charity and humanity” as “behoes a brother.” The pope made this request based on “the equity of the thing itself” and obedience to the papacy (Pallath *Provincial* 181). Papal letters (dated 23 February 1565) in support of Mar Abraham went also to the king of Portugal and to the king of Cochin (Koodapuzha, *Bharatha* 184). Mar Abraham had letters of recommendation from even the superiors-general of the major missionary orders in India.

But, as in the case of Mar Joseph, Portuguese authorities prevented Mar Abraham from entering the regions of the Thomas Christians. Eugene Tisserant records that “the Archbishop of Goa, George Temundo O.P., *cum sapientissimis viris*, examined them [the letters] and declared them to be either false or obtained by subterfuge” (42). If this might indicate a slight conflict of interest: the same archbishop was the first bishop of Cochin (Ferrol 149) and, as history proved, a direct contender for control over the Thomas Christians. For instance, a letter of Fr. Francis Lopes S.J., of 6 January 1565 and written from Cochin, records what Thekkedath calls “a bold attempt to bring the St. Thomas Christians under his jurisdiction” (45). According to Thekkedath, it was then Viceroy Dom Louis de Ataie *and* the archbishop of Goa who detained Mar Abraham at a Dominican monastery (49). A letter of Fr. Dionysio S.J. in 1578 asserts that their reason for detaining the prelate was that the king of Portugal did not authorize his entry to India (Thekkedath 49). After all, Mar Abraham had evaded the Padroado by coming through Ormuz. The *Jornada*, however, justifies every historical move of the Padroado on the grounds that Mar Abraham was a heretic.

This is how the *Jornada* presents what happened after the arrival of Mar Abraham with the letters of recommendation:

After seeing the form of the briefs and its reports, it was found that the said Mar Abraham had misinformed and cheated His Holiness in all that was proposed to him: because of which, fearing that he may return to his old errors, as was done by Mar Joseph, it was agreed that he should be retired to a monastery till His Holiness was told the truth and his reply came. And thus he was lodged in the monastery of S. Domingos (Dominican monastery) of Goa, but he had such a tantrum that on a Holy Thursday at night he ran away from the monastery and passed

on to the mainland, and thence he went by land to Malabar, where, on arriving at the churches of his Bishopric, he was received by all the people with great applause and feasting having gone almost desperate of seeing Bishops of Babylonia, as they had always had, except the two whom the Portuguese had arrested. (38)

The *Jornada* does not identify the persons who judged the letters of recommendation. But, as stated earlier, both Tisserant and Thekkedath clarify that they were the then archbishop of Goa and the viceroy. The *Jornada* also reveals that following the fugitive Mar Abraham's welcome by the Thomas Christians, the archbishop of Goa and the bishop of Cochin made many attempts to capture him, but that Mar Abraham "went right inside the land and never came close to churches close to Cochin or to the places where he could be arrested by the Portuguese" (39). The hinterland, including the regions where pepper grew and the Thomas Christian communities dwelt, was not impenetrable; but it was, according to the *Jornada*, "not known much to the Portuguese" (39).⁵

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese Church in India, attempting to draw Mar Abraham into more accessible regions, went against the notion of universal justice and against the papacy by using the Provincial Councils to bring Mar Abraham to Goa. Of the six Provincial Councils of Goa held between 1558 and 1950, the focus of the second and the third was Mar Abraham (Cottineau De Kloguen 63–67; also see Pallath *Provincial* 154–91). As Tisserant recounts, "Being unable to use compulsion to catch the elusive Chaldean, the Archbishop of Goa tried to make him leave his refuge with an invitation to the second Synod [Council] of Goa, but Mar Abraham discovered the trick and did not appear" (Tisserant 42). In a letter to Pope Gregory XIII (dated 3 January 1578), Mar Abraham wrote,

For in truth the reason was that I did not trust them, though they were Catholics, because, after they had promised under oath (that which according to the ancients there is no tighter bond constraining one to keep one's word) that I would be safe, they set me in bonds. Again, when I presented the pontifical letters of your predecessor, the most Holy Father Pius IV of happy memory, I was so received by some, those were endowed with the supreme power, that I thought it best to flee. This is disgraceful and shameful for an honest man, let alone for a Bishop and a Catholic one. As to with what intention and mind they acted, Christ the vindicator of all will judge. (Pallath *Provincial* 177)

Mar Abraham's letter was sent from the College of the Society of Jesus in Cochin, where he had gained the confidence of the Jesuits for the time being. Pope Gregory XIII responded to Mar Abraham in 29 November 1578 in a letter that (like the one addressed to the bishop of Cochin and the archbishop of Goa) highlights the reasonable nature of the promise of safe

passage: “prompted by the equity of the thing itself and also by their [the Latin Church’s] zeal for gratifying and obeying us” (Pallath 183). Mar Abraham, at the age of 77, went to the Third Council of Goa, putting his trust in the pope. The *Jornada*, however, reveals the purpose and process of the Padroado in convoking the Third Council:

Thus, wishing to hold the Third Council, the Archbishop Frei Vincente da Fonseca, ordered to inform him about the brief and called him with another sworn safe passage, his own and of the Viceroy, so that he could not have excuse not to go. On showing the brief and on seeing the safe passage, Archbishop Mar Abraham realized that if he did not go he would be taken to be schismatic and disobedient to the Roman Church, and would no longer have peace with the Portuguese who by all means and through their friendship with the native kings would try to arrest him, he came to Goa and attended the said Council. (40)

Earlier, the *Jornada* reports, “the Viceroy and the Archbishop of Goa and the Bishop of Cochin tried a lot to lay hands again on him.” (39). Thus, calling Mar Abraham to attend the Third Provincial Council of Goa appears to be a continuation of these attempts.

The letter of Alexander Valignano S.J., the Provincial of India, to the Jesuit General Cludio Acquaviva concerning the participation of Mar Abraham in the Third Provincial Council of Goa (Pallath 185–91), sent from Goa and dated 15 December 1585, tells us that Mar Abraham had to reside in the religious house of the Jesuits in Goa for “almost an entire year” (185), that he and the Thomas Christians were full of “ignorance,” and that they were “lost and corrupted.” Roz, who later became apostolic vicar and governor of the Thomas Christians, had been given the task of purging and burning their Syriac books. The letter of Valignano records that Mar Abraham tried to prevent Roz’s attempts to learn the Chaldean language and that he “tried to hide his books” (185). Moreover, Mar Abraham “could not even bear the talk about teaching” Latin to the Thomas Christians. Valignano continues, “For this and for many other things, which were found against him, they considered him as very suspicious in the faith, and regarded him as a heretic and schismatic, although in words he said that he was Catholic” (189). Matters proceeded as follows:

It seemed that in the same Council he should be gravely reprimanded by the Archbishop of Goa, the metropolitan and the primate of India, placing before him all his faults and admonishing him to mend his ways and to perfectly keep what the Council ordered, threatening him that if he did not do so when he would return to his land, he would be tried in the Holy Office (of Inquisition) as against a heretic and schismatic. With this rebuke, being gravely terrified, he promised great things and made a public abjuration in the Council and a solemn promise with an oath to

observe all what the Council ordered, when he would return to his land. He also said that he would take with him the fathers, but it did not seem that they should be given then, but that he should return to his diocese and after handling with the Archdeacon, the clergy and the principal Christians of Malabar, he should send them to petition for the fathers from there, so that they would be immediately sent. (190–91)

The quotations from the letters give a sense of the extreme pressure placed on the archbishop of the Thomas Christians in his old age and against the directions of the pope in order for the Padroado to impose their rule over the Thomas Christian community. The Fourth Council was also convoked to deal with Mar Abraham, but he refused to go, citing old age and poor health (Thaliath 80). Cyriac Thevarmannil intimates that Mar Abraham responded thus because his relationship with the Jesuits was “strained” (148). Shown in this light, the Provincial Councils of Goa illustrate the conflict between the papacy and colonial authorities.

This struggle between the Indian Christian community and the colonial Christian administration is rarely acknowledged in discussions on World Christianity or the East. The Provincial Councils of Goa, as far as the Thomas Christians and their archbishop were concerned, were colonial instruments of invasion and assimilation. The See of Goa was known to support other missions at home and abroad. According to Valignano, a Jesuit, the Society (*Societas Iesu*) sent “60,000 taels from India to Japan” (Moran 117). Although the then visitor refuted Valignano’s accusations, the efforts to subjugate the Thomas Christians and to make their See a suffragan of Goa were perceived by the targets as attempts to secure their significant wealth. (Goa had been raised to a metropolitan archdiocese in 1557.) They sought to resist it with all their might. It is no wonder then that Mar Abraham, even after being threatened with the Inquisition, successfully negotiated the delay of “assistance” by Latin fathers pending his consultations with the archdeacon and chief members of the Thomas Christian community.

Furthermore, it was not just their archbishop who came under suspicion.⁶ Images and other symbolic representations that did not accord with Latin conventions were held equally suspect. In his introduction to the second edition of F.A. D’Cruz’s *St. Thomas the Apostle in India* (1929), A.M. Teixeira writes, “A stone bearing a crude inscription in Portuguese dated 1596 was found a few months ago at St. Thomas’ Mount. It commemorates the finding of a Cross there. The event was considered of sufficient importance to deserve an inscription” (qtd. in Menachery 336). In the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese led an excavation in Mylapore, the site of pilgrimage, where St. Thomas is believed to have been martyred and buried. Menezes records in his diary the excavation of a cross with a bird on the top of it. An observation of the features of the bird suggests, according to some, that it is a peacock, a plausible finding since “Mylapore” means city of the peacock. But Menezes disagrees, for “it was more proper for the sacred Apostle to

have carved a female dove on the Cross, figure of the Holy Spirit” (*Jornada* 311). Menezes reads the cross with the bird as the descent of the Holy Spirit, therefore, a dove—alluding perhaps to gospel reports of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the shape of a dove (Matthew 3:16 or John 1:32), Menezes extends the imagery to the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, although none of the gospels suggests this. For Menezes, religious and spiritual signifiers make sense only when these fit his own—that is, Latin—tradition. Frustrating propriety, however, some ancient stone crosses in Kerala reveal the image of peahens and peacocks, for example, on the base of the open-air cross in Changanacherry (Menachery 361). Menezes’ insistence that the proper and apostolic way is non-Indian and Latin points to a humanism of the self against the other, and it also punctuates the lethal desire to see the end of the Syriac bishops of the Thomas Christians.

A number of other Thomas traditions were removed as heresy. The *parismao*, baptism, and bigamy were some of these. If the Thomas Christians’ bishop was not caught red-handed participating in these, then his crime was allowing them in his domain. The *parismao*, literally the “small Persian Table,” was the Persian book of magic, used by some Thomas Christian priests for rituals such as exorcisms. Bishop Franciscus Ros’s thesis on the Nestorianism of the Thomas Christians, *De Erroribus Nestorianorum*, denounces this book as “full of trifles, fables and lies, which they use for driving out whatever kind of evil, not without great superstition” (161). Two Thomas Christian *Cassanars* were said to have studied in Persia in ancient times, a visit that turned them into “Necromancers and Magicians” (*Jornada* 297). The *Jornada* mentions at least one Thomas Christian priest using the *Parismao* for exorcism (*Jornada* 292). The Thomas Christians’ form of baptism was also seen as corrupt, failing to align with the Latin style, mainly because it used the oil either of coconut or sesame (*gingili*) and not olive (*Jornada* 161–61). It mattered little that the olive was not produced in India or that the use of coconut or sesame oil was part of religious tradition—as the *Jornada* cites an elderly priest who testified that “for fifty years he was baptizing that way” (302). Finally, the heresy of bigamy (Zacharia 165) was seen to shame all Christians: Thomas Christian priests who were widowers married again and some even married widows. The synod of Diamper, its discourse permeated with Enlightenment reasoning and the ideology of modernity, proposed removing these heresies—thus targeting Thomas Christians and their lifestyle.

The cultural cleansing extended into the ecclesiastical sphere. As Thekkedath explains,

The Jesuits were convinced that the hierarchical and liturgical dependence of the St. Thomas Christians on the Chaldean Church was the source of most of the errors found among them. . . . To many of these missionaries, anything that did not accord with the usages of the Roman (Latin) church was corruption and abuse and heresy. Hence they

sought to get such things changed. Some of the Jesuits wanted to change things immediately, others wanted to do it more gradually. This trend culminated in the synod of Diamper, where under the pressure of contemporary thought and the demands of the Council of Trent, almost complete latinization of the church of the St. Thomas Christians was effected (sic). (59)

Briefly, the Thomas Christian liturgical rite and Church customs—born in the political, social, and cultural milieu of the Indian subcontinent and shaped and developed by the Chaldean Church—were treated as Protestant variations. C.R. Boxer considers this attitude of the Portuguese as an essential part of “The Age of Latin Arrogance,” during which the attitude of the Portuguese changed from respect to distaste towards any church in the colonies that did not appear Latin or Latinized. This distaste arose from the experience of the Reformation and reactions to Protestant heresies (73). Menezes famously used the “*Professio fidei Tridentina*” or the “*Creed of Pope Pius IV*” to accuse and reconcile the Thomas Christians. This creed issued in 1565 at the time of the proceedings of the Council of Trent and intended to clarify the Catholic faith against that of the Reformation. Naming the Thomas Christians heretics was a response to a certain return of the repressed. For Menezes, the nightmarish visions of Protestantism returned in the otherness of Indian Christianity, so that to all appearances the aim of the journey was indeed to bring the Thomas Christians under the Roman Church. The question was whether the changes should be made over time or immediately. Menezes’ policies of screening the borders, cornering the archbishop of the Thomas Christians, and imposing decrees of the synod of Diamper served to bring about drastic changes at once.

The *Jornada*’s announcement of the “last Nestorian Archbishop” is nothing less than the anticipation of the literal and cultural death of the other. Even before Menezes arrived in Malabar, he had ensured that there would be no further appointments of similar archbishops in India. The colonial structure ensured this in India and in Ormuz. After all, the Portuguese had captured Ormuz, a strategic location, in 1515 (Prakash 45). Ghoncheh Tazmini argues that Portuguese claims in Ormuz were not much more than “tribute taking” (271). As far as the Thomas Christians were concerned, Portuguese presence in Ormuz translated into more than “religious rhetoric.” The Portuguese hold on Ormuz in time choked off the arrival of bishops from the Levant and made way for European bishops to take over ecclesiastical control of the Thomas Christian community in India. In other words, the victory over Ormuz, however short-lived, was a strategic gain for the Portuguese in their attempts to become a world power. Ships from the Levant—where the bishops of the Thomas Christians traditionally arrived—would go through a customs’ check at which point “Nestorian clergy” would be declared illegal and denied continuation of journey to India. To quote Gouvea, when it became known that

Mar Abraham and the Thomas Christians were attempting to bring a successor from Babylon, “Dom Frei Alexis sent orders with serious censures to Ormuz, which is the place through which all these people pass on their way to India, that they should not allow to pass any Chaldean, Persian or Armenian Ecclesiastic to India without his special permission” (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 49). Gouvea can be trusted on this point, as he later became an ambassador to Shiraz and Ormuz and successfully negotiated peace deals favouring the passage of merchants through Ormuz (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 582–83). He reports that Menezes forced at least one such bishop who clearly held the title “Archbishop of Serra” to return from Ormuz. According to Placid Podipara, as well, Menezes learned that the archdeacon and his people were expecting a Seleucian (Iraqi) bishop and, therefore, alerted guards in the ports to prevent the entry of any such bishop. Podipara continues, “it is said that a bishop who was on his way to Malabar was sent back” (136). Indeed, anyone who raised suspicion was returned from any port in India as it became evident that clergy were arriving dressed as sailors and merchants, these typically (and tellingly) being colonially acceptable figures.

Three successive popes—Julius III, Pius IV, and Gregory XIII—had intervened on behalf of the so-called Nestorian bishops, but this had no impact on the Portuguese colonial, including ecclesiastical, authorities in India. Menezes can claim responsibility for defining port-of-entry policies that, at a crucial period in the history of the Thomas Christians, cut the supply of prelates from the Middle East and sowed the seeds for a permanent schism in their Church within a few decades.

“Let them dress Portuguese”

Whereas the *Jornada* is anxious to establish that the Thomas Christians were heretics until Menezes intervened, some scholars (viz. Mundadan, Thekkedath, Thaliath, and Koodapuzha) understand the efforts of the Padroado in the sixteenth century as a combination of Latinization and Lusitanization. Malekandathil writes, “In the process of change introduced among the St. Thomas Christians what was grafted here was not the apparatuses of the pure Latin Church administration, but the Lusitanized version of them which were very much coloured by the ambitions of the Portuguese crown” (*Jornada* lvii). This partly explains the several instances of disagreement between Rome and Portugal on decisions bearing on the Thomas Christians. Thekkedath revisits numerous sixteenth-century sources that testify that the Thomas Christians held the Catholic faith prior to the arrival of Menezes but that there were certain errors and irregularities in their practices. For instance, Fr. Fernando da Paz, the rector of the Franciscan College of Cranganore, wrote to the king of Portugal in 1557 that he never came across heretics among the Thomas Christians and that the Thomas Christians were “slowly discarding” “errors,” “such as married clergy, the permission

of usury, the non-practice of auricular confession, and the non-observance of the commandments of the Church.” Fr. da Paz goes on to complain, nevertheless, that Mar Abraham “of the same caste (sect) as Anastor” (Nestor) was a negative influence on these Christians: “all this work has received a setback on account of the arrival of this bishop” (qtd. in Thekkedath, *History* 29).

Fr. da Paz rightly differentiates between heresy and error, labelling only Nestorianism as the former. He does not attribute heresy to the Thomas Christians. The “setback” caused by the arrival of Mar Abraham, thus, refers only to errors. According to Frei Fernando da Soledade’s *Historia Seraphica da Ordem dos Frades Menores de S. Francisco na Província de Portugal* (1705), the Franciscans rectified “the abominable error of consecrating the sacrosanct body and blood of Christ in cakes of rice and wine of the palms” (qtd. in Mundadan *History* 201). According to other sources, the wine was made from dried grapes, with Joseph the Indian claiming that the dried grapes were brought from China and Barbosa that it was from Mecca and Ormuz. The correction of these errors, yet, pertains to an entire lifestyle and includes attempts to—albeit slowly—impose core changes, such as clerical celibacy, that were fundamental practices of the Latin Rite. As narrated by Fr. Melchior Carneiro S.J., one elderly Thomas Christian priest and professor (called a “Cassanar”) responded that as a prerequisite for Thomas Christians to unite with the Portuguese, the Portuguese clergy should be married (Thekkedath 29). As a rare extant instance of a rejoinder from the Thomas Christian side, the Cassanar’s reply reveals that the Thomas Christian hierarchy read the corrections by the Portuguese clergy as “Portuguese” (i.e., Lusitanian) interference rather than any Catholic requirement. Carneiro continues, “Nevertheless, they acknowledge that the Roman church is the principal Church, and some of them say that, if they do not observe completely what the Roman Church commands, it is because previous popes have dispensed them” (qtd. in Thekkedath 29). Undoubtedly, the Thomas Christians were alluding to the instances where popes had, indeed, tolerated the ordination of married men, as in the case of the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch. After all, Sulaka as well as his successor, Abdiso, both consecutive patriarchs of the East Syrian or Chaldean Church, which most scholars consider to be the Mother Church of the Thomas Christians, had made their profession of faith before Pope Julius III and Pius IV, respectively. It was Abdiso who had sent Mar Joseph as bishop to India, and Mar Joseph had continued the practice of ordaining married men in India. Thekkedath opines on the quotation from Carneiro: “It is fairly obvious that the latter remark was made, chiefly in order to please Carneiro, and not out of any real conviction. In fact, the text adds that Carneiro did not take this excuse of theirs seriously” (29). That Thekkedath, like Carneiro about five hundred years before him, should dismiss the suggestion that “previous popes have dispensed them” may point to the force and persistence of Latin ideology on some Eastern Churches. Varghese Thekkevallyara blames colonialism for

the typical inhibition that Thomas Christian priests betray in discussions on the history and the future of celibacy in their Church. The instances demonstrate the role of Latinizing as a civilizing mission in the sixteenth century. They point to spaces not widely covered within postcolonial studies—the personal, familial, and communal spaces of Indian Christians in the beginning phase of the European civilizing mission.

Referring to yet another source, a letter dated 31 December 1561 by the rector of the Jesuit residence at Cochin, Fr. Melchior Nunes Barreto, Thekkedath underscores his point that the Thomas Christians did not err in their faith “regarding the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Eucharist” (30). According to Barreto, the “dangerous errors” of the Thomas Christians still were that “their priests celebrate mass with fermented bread mixed with an oil which they believe to have been consecrated by Our Lord; their priests marry; they consider usury and some ceremonies of theirs to be licit.” Here, however, Thekkedath provides a one-sentence paragraph as a commentary, “Now it is clear that none of these ‘dangerous errors’ pertain to faith!” (30). Thekkedath also cites a letter of Archdeacon George of Christ, who served under Mar Abraham, to support his thesis that in the latter half of the sixteenth century, well before Menezes made his appearance, there was evidence that the Thomas Christians were subordinate to the papacy: “Regarding matters spiritual, as Your Reverence will hear from my archbishop [Mar Abraham] we are all obedient to the Catholic Roman Church and to the Supreme Pontiff, Gregory XIII. In this obedience we wish to live and to die” (qtd. in Thekkedath 31). Menezes’ own actions before the synod meeting that he arranged lends further credence to Thekkedath’s stance that the Thomas Christians were already Catholics in the sixteenth century: on more than one occasion, Menezes threatened the Thomas Christian community with excommunication. In spite of the attestation by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the full title of the *Jornada*, specifically its claim to Menezes having subjugated the Thomas Christians to the Catholic faith, becomes suspect. The title rather signifies how a community of Indian Christians were first othered, as “heretics,” before the Padroado took even further steps to invade their lives, livelihoods, and traditions.

The period of peace that punctuated Mar Abraham’s time in India bore, in fact, the impress of assimilation. The “occasional opposition” remained in spite of repeated affirmations of the orthodoxy of the Thomas Christians. Francis Dionysio, rector of the Jesuit residence at Cochin, wrote in 1578,

These Christians commonly believe in all the articles of the Nicean Creed and the equality of the divine persons and the two natures and one person in Christ. The same is held by the Archbishop and the Archdeacon. They regard the Pope as the Vicar of Christ our Redeemer, on earth, and their Patriarch as subject to the Pope from whom his powers are communicated to him. (Qtd. in Thaliath 13)

But even such pronouncements—we see one a century previous by Pope Eugene IV on the “true Christians” of India (qtd. in Ferroli 67)—were during Portuguese rule often a strategy to assimilate the Thomas Christians when executing reforms of the Council of Trent. If Section 23 of the Council required establishing episcopal seminaries, since prior to that priests received no formal training in the West,⁷ the seminaries that the Jesuits started in India in the late sixteenth century held instruments of assimilation. For example, Latin, instead of complementing Syriac, often replaced it (Thaliath 13–14) in these seminaries, at times producing priests according to the Latin rite and thus securing support for further Latinization and simultaneous colonization for monopoly of pepper trade.

One point of contention was the East Syriac Rite, a core characteristic of the particular church of the Thomas Christians, and its use of the Syriac language in the liturgy and the training of seminarians. When Pius V in 1570 decreed the use of the Roman Missal, he exempted regions where local rites had been in place for at least two hundred years. It is likely that such an exemption was prompted by particular churches, including the Thomas Christians. As Koodapuzha quotes from Samuel Giamil’s *Genuine Relations intersedem Apostolicam et Chaldaeorum*, in 1578, the Thomas Christians reminded Pope Gregory XIII as much (*Christianity* 53). While the Thomas Christians were willing to learn many Latin liturgical customs, they refused, point-blank, to give up the Syriac language. In their turn, the Portuguese saw such favouring of Syriac as evidence of their disloyalty to the Catholic Church. On 9 December 1597, in a letter to the Latin titular patriarch of Jerusalem residing in Rome, Archbishop Menezes wrote,

The priests with many of the people held a meeting and took an oath that in case his holiness appointed a Syrian bishop, they would obey him, but if he sends a Latin bishop, they will consider what course they will adopt. I propose to purify all the Churches from the heresy and errors which they hold, giving them the pure doctrine of the Catholic faith, taking from them all heretical books that they possess . . . I humbly suggest that he (the Latin bishop, preferably a Jesuit) be instructed to extinguish little by little the Syrian language, which is not natural. His priests should learn the Latin language, because the Syriac language is the channel through which all that heresy flows. (Qtd. in King 449–50, ellipses in original)

Earlier, the Jesuit Bishop of Goa, Joao Nunes Barreto, had something similar to say:

As all these people [of Malabar, Socotora and Persia] (sic) have their divine things in the Chaldean language and not in any other, they give almost no credit, nor any devotion nor any authority to all the doctrine given to them except covered in Chaldean. This excessive devotion to

the Chaldean language does great harm to them, for given the fact that they possess some errors very perilous to their salvation we cannot help them out because of the little credit they give to our Latin literature. (Qtd. in Mundadan, *History* 197)

The Syriac language—the Thomas Christians’ mark of tradition and guarantee of the conventional links with the Middle East—was declared “not natural” by Menezes. According to him and Joao Nunes Barreto, it was the certain source of evil. For the latter, it was the cause of “errors” but “very perilous”; for Menezes, outright “heresy.” For all practical purposes, Menezes was literally at a loss for words when confronted by this language. He knew that the survival of this liturgical language became an alibi for the continued presence of the Chaldean ecclesiastic. He argued against the use of the Syriac language during liturgy on the basis that not all knew what was going on, despite the fact that most of the congregation at a Latin Mass were in a similar predicament.

However, when he failed to receive papal support on this matter—the pope even going so far as to stipulate that only someone who was versatile in Chaldean and Syriac should become the Thomas Christians’ apostolic vicar (see Thaliath 68 and 75 for the original papal briefs)—Menezes instead asked the pope to send breviaries and missals in Syriac. The plan was to teach the doctrine in “the Malabari language” (*Jornada* 281–82). Menezes writes in his diary, “His Holiness sent [a] printing press of Chaldean characters with which to print all the things which were important to this Church” (*Jornada* 516). In this instance, Latin teachings and customs were imparted in Syriac. Francis Bacon in *Novum Organum*, writes,

Again, we should notice the force, effect, and consequences of inventions, which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were unknown to the ancients; namely, printing, gunpowder, and the compass. For these three have changed the appearance and state of the whole world: first in literature, then in warfare, and lastly in navigation; and innumerable changes have been thence derived, so that no empire, sect, or star, appears to have exercised a greater power and influence on human affairs than these mechanical discoveries. (105)

As far as the Thomas Christians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—the period of Bacon—were concerned, the printing press, gunpowder, and the compass used on them simultaneously by the Portuguese jolted them out of their past and their social and religious traditions when these were used to rate their legitimate religious past as heretical. It indeed changed the whole face and state of things.

In the context of the Inquisition, the crime of the Thomas Christians was stepped up from error to heresy and, therefore, subjected to graver consequences. The culprit was the language, a language to which the Thomas

Christians were wedded. Any attempt at purification by the Portuguese inevitably targeted the Syriac language, triggering massive resistance from the Thomas Christians. The language was closely tied to the literature and culture. For Barreto, the Syriac language discredited “Latin literature”; he suggests the reverse: The Latin tongue imparted Latin culture by way of its literature. Ultimately, charges of heresy and the method of Latinization and Lusitanization, in turn, impinged on the literature and culture of the Thomas Christians.

The next category targeted for assimilation was the customs of the Thomas Christian community, including what people wore and ate. The *Jornada* remarks that the people dressed like caste Nairs (282):

Everywhere, even when they go out, they wear long hair like the people of Malabar, bound at the top of the head either to flank with a coloured silk ribbon, to which the majority of Christians add some praying beads, or to a Cross of gold or of silver, and thus although in their dress they are not different from the Nairs, when they move among the same, yet among many thousands of Nairs one can distinguish a Christian. Some old men, and widowers, who do not wish to get married any more, and those who have gone on a pilgrimage to S. Thome [Mylapore] and who consider themselves to be more religious cut their hair and have them shaved like us.

They had their ears pierced and over-hanging like the Malabaris, and in them many ear-rings, golden jewellery and stones and many rings of gold joined together, which make their ears grow further which they had as great authority. And from their dress only this was removed by the Archbishop, at the Synod, that they may look different in some thing (sic) from the gentiles. (*Jornada* 251)

In a footnote, Malekandathil observes that the reforms made among the Thomas Christians concerning dress and diet were minimal compared to the sweeping changes imposed on the Christians of Goa. The process, he says, was not Catholicization but “Lusitanization” (*Jornada* 251), and it resulted in Goan Catholics looking more like the Portuguese in their dress, diet, and culture. The same extent of Lusitanization was not possible among the Thomas Christians. In fact, the Thomas Christian priests dressed like laity (242), and even more scandalous for the Portuguese was that they offered Mass in such “everyday dress” (291). Decree XVII of Session IX of the synod of Diamper, enforcing “distinction of the faithful from unbelievers,” aimed to influence “outward signs and habits”—that is, customs pertaining to dress and ornaments. It ordered that

henceforward no Christian do presume to bore their ears, or to do anything to make them large, except women, among whom it is a universal ornament; and whosoever shall transgress therein, shall be punished

at the pleasure of the prelate, who shall not suffer them to wear an ornament of gold or of anything else in their ears; and whosoever shall presume to wear any such ornament, shall be thrown out of the church, neither shall the casture [?] be given them until such time as they are brought to yield effectual obedience, and to leave off all such ornaments; but as for those whose ears are bored already, if they are not children, they may wear what they please, or what they have accustomed themselves to. (Zacharia 210)

The last line, that those adults whose ears were pierced could continue in their style and habit, was likely intended to prevent any immediate reaction and disruption to the proceedings of the synod. Practically, this matter was to be dealt with in the future, through habituating male children to new styles of unbored ears. If large ears, created by extending earlobes with heavy ornaments, were considered a sign of beauty in women and power (“authority”) in men, then that very perception would change almost immediately on account of the decree. The decrees’ purpose was plain and straightforward: “so the one may be known and divided from the other,” that is, so that the Christian may be distinguished from the pagan in appearance.

Hence, there was to be a distinction between native Christians and the rest of the natives that had to be apparent and match the colonial paradigm. According to the *Jornada*,

[I]t was laid down that no Christian should pierce his ears, nor should wear in them jewellery, so that there would be some distinction between the Nairs and the Christians, who in every other thing of the dress were one, and they did away with many other customs which were barbarous, harmful, and impertinent. (282)

One senses a proto-Macaulayan despair in this statement: the colonial ecclesiastic is resigned to the fact that some similarity would inevitably continue among natives (Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Indian in blood and colour” [“Minute” 116]), but as far as is possible the culture of the native Christians had to change. These customs are the logical target of the colonial mission, for they are “barbarous, harmful, and impertinent.” A genuinely barbarous custom that was discussed outside the synod but not brought to it was casteism, specifically, untouchability or the practice of considering the touch or proximity of members of certain communities as polluting and requiring penalizing or absolution. Menezes was unable to remove this malice from the Thomas Christians because they traditionally practised it against the so-called lower castes. In fact, he alleged that it was his moves against casteism that estranged the Thomas Christians from him (259). However, the political risks of losing the community weighed too heavily for Menezes to proceed with any reform linked to untouchability. This pagan-like

difference thus was tolerated for expediency sake. Apart from this, the signs and symbols that made up customs were shuffled, transformed, or even removed, as demanded by the civilizing mission.

The implications and consequences of such forced differentiating in a community that, as a minority, had for over a millennium cooperated with and survived amidst non-Christians were extreme. Similarity in attire and ornamentation were manifestations of a shared sociocultural tradition and context that was conducive for its political and economic exchange system. Forcing the Thomas Christians to reject the sociocultural tradition through restrictions placed on style also forced them out of their erstwhile political and economic relationships. By the same token, it also forced them to adopt Lusitanized ways, thereby coaxing their entry into Portuguese politics and economics. In the colonial context, then, at centre was the colonial self, whose ontological humanity demanded Thomas Christians' assimilation and subordination not as co-humans but as the marginal—the other.

As far as the Padroado was concerned, the customs of the Thomas Christians could not be ignored. During the late sixteenth century in medieval Portugal, a gathering of the estates of the kingdom, the Cortes, dictated even for Don Sebastian, the heir to the Portuguese throne and later king of Portugal and the Algarves from 1557 to 1578, “Let him dress Portuguese . . . , eat Portuguese, ride Portuguese, speak Portuguese, all his acts be Portuguese” (qtd. in Livermore 152). The alternative to eating and dressing like the Portuguese would be to eat and dress like the Spanish, who challenged the autonomy of Portugal. Extended to the Estado da India, this dictum—to eat and dress Portuguese—was comprehensible: it was important for the very continuation of Portuguese rule in India. To do otherwise was a crime against the Empire. To use current terminology, ethnocide was essential to both the Padroado and the Estado da India. Thus, according to colonial reading, the attire and lifestyle of the Thomas Christians and their bishops reflected the extent of their subordination to the Portuguese rulers, whether civic or ecclesiastical.

Menezes hence saw a link between ridding the Thomas Christians of heresy and assimilating them culturally. This link was derived from the prevailing unity of church and state. However, Menezes went to great extents to establish that the goal and means of his mission was the spiritual—and certainly not colonial—redemption of the Thomas Christians.

Interpreting the sacrament of confirmation as colonial capitulation

One way of *de-Nestorianizing* the Thomas Christians was, according to Menezes, the reformation and imposition of sacraments. Mandatory clerical celibacy and, to quote from the Profession of Faith (the Tridentine Creed) of Pius IV, issued on 13 November 1565 in the Bull *Injunctum Nobis*, the

“assertion of belief in the seven sacraments with their proper efficacy as taught by the Catholic Church” were some examples of the reforms Menezes himself initiated among the Thomas Christians under the rubric of the Council of Trent. The main goal of the Creed was to clarify the Catholic faith in the context of Protestantism. Menezes, like others, used it as an oath of subordination to the Catholic Church to bring back heretics. He focused on the sacraments: their number and the manner in which they were ministered. Confirmation, that is, the second sacrament of Christian initiation and the conferral of the Holy Spirit on the baptized, took prominence for Menezes.

This episcopal rite was typified by the bishop anointing the forehead of the candidate with the chrism or consecrated oil and ministering a gentle slap on the cheek to make the candidate a spiritual soldier. The universal practice in the early Church was to combine baptism and confirmation, and this was continued by the Eastern Church. In this tradition, the anointing of confirmation was done using the holy oil (“Myron”) blessed by a bishop and, therefore, did not require the actual presence of the bishop at the time of confirmation. The development of a greater hierarchal role of the bishop in the Western Church accounted for the separation of confirmation from baptism. Traditionally, in the West, there was no definite age assigned for confirmation. The Council of Trent, however, moved the sacrament of confirmation to between the ages of seven and twelve, twelve as the ideal age, thereby linking it to confession and the Eucharist rather than to baptism. It became the sacrament of the mature, not the infant: the sacrament of discretion, requiring the candidate to publicly profess their faith and commitment to the Church.

Since the sacrament was administered by the bishop, it became a strategic weapon for Menezes. Menezes likely saw this priority of the bishop in the sacrament of confirmation in the Latin Church as the appropriate and ecclesiastical means to make himself indispensable among the Thomas Christians, who at that time did not have their own bishop—Mar Abraham having died in 1597. The imposition of the sacrament, however, was promptly taken as colonization. The *Pax tecum* touch on the cheek, making the candidate into a soldier of God and defender of the faith, was understood by the Thomas Christians as a “slap” and consequent capitulation to the colonizer. The Council of Trent, unbeknown to itself, hence facilitated Menezes’ ecclesiastical practices within a specific colonial setting. It is also notable that Patriarch Abdiso’s letter presented at the Council of Trent stating that several regions, including Goa and parts of Southern India, were in his jurisdiction, met much protest from the Portuguese representative (Thaliath 9). But the Council of Trent chose not to resolve the issue, leaving that decision in practice to the dictates of colonial power. The link between the Council and colonial policies and practices was thus not entirely arbitrary.

Not surprisingly, *Jornada*’s chapter on “How the Archbishop Started to Visit the Churches of Serra” presents Menezes as very determined to

minister the sacrament of confirmation to the Thomas Christians. The build-up to the invocation to a new sacrament was strategic, and it was skillfully executed by Menezes. He paved the way for direct involvement through several strategies, including impressive appearance, claims to authority, denunciation of opponents, and drama. At Vaipicota, Menezes preached to the people dressed in Pontificals, and his preaching, based on the Gospel of John, was a tirade against Nestorianism—he alone was presented as the good shepherd:

For he had been sent by the Highest Roman Pontiff to deal with their salvation, and . . . the Bishops who had been so until then had not been pastors but thieves of their souls, for they stole them from Christ to whom they belonged and from the Catholic Church to whom they pertained, and with their false doctrines they handed them over to satan and took them away from the womb of the Holy Mother the Church and were sending them to hell. (*Jornada* 121–22)

The aforementioned Patriarch of Babylon (who was in full communion with the pope) and the bishops sent by him to the Thomas Christians were accordingly stamped as intruders and thieves. If scripture (chapter 10 of the Gospel of John) and papal authority, as Menezes himself claimed, were not sufficient, Menezes accompanied the sermon with “many tears and devotion” that touched the audience, “both natives and the Portuguese,” who also joined the archbishop and “shed them in great abundance.” And, as culmination, “after the sermon was over he ordered all of them to come on the following day to the church for the Confirmation” (*Jornada* 122).

Menezes’ strategy precluded dialogue or reasoning and consisted of exhibitions of power, whether ecclesiastical, colonial, or personal—or all of these combined. In the face of the reality of the patriarch of Babylon’s communion with the pope, power politics alone could function to establish the contrary. Ultimately, it was a colonial context that allowed the labelling of the pastors of the Thomas Christians as “thieves,” just as native traders who failed to obtain Portuguese passports were automatically labelled “pirates.” The unexpressed shock and anger of the congregation was deftly countered, to an extent transformed, by the timely show of tears. Even the pontifical vestments were used to good effect. The *Jornada* does not lack scenes of Menezes putting on the mitre and the vestments for spectacle, to “have more authority” (*Jornada* 286) as at the synod, or to impress the locals of Kadam-banad: “the Archbishop was performing all the offices with the Pontifical and with the best adornments, which with this intention he had brought, and all with great solemnity” (406). He also hoped to impress the curious crowds of non-Christians. Such manifestations of power were necessary to not simply convert but also bring the Thomas Christians under his strict and lasting control. Menezes sought for himself the devotion and obedience that he knew the people had for their own bishop. Confirmation was to function

among laity the way ordination worked among their clergy: the ministering bishop was always obeyed by the ordained. The sacrament of confirmation, which Menezes had the most direct role in ministering, was thus the most appropriate means to elicit the subordination of the Thomas Christian laity.

At Parur (129), Menezes placed the archdeacon under intense pressure to bring to him people to be confirmed. As a result, the latter fetched “some eight or ten boys” for confirmation (*Jornada* 133). This token gesture was a severe disappointment for Menezes, who likely visualized hundreds of people lining up in an entire community’s subjugation, as at Vaipicota. But he proceeded with the confirmation nonetheless, as, albeit limited in numbers, it would signal to the community the hold that the *paranki* (the Malayalam misnomer for foreigner, specifically Portuguese) archbishop had on them. The temporary return of the confirmed boys to their families and the community would have disturbed traditions and allegiances. The namesake cooperation of the Thomas Christians was not just acquiescence to a stubborn colonial ecclesiastical leader of an alien archdiocese (Goa), signalling an invasion into what was distinctly theirs. A much earlier instance of a similar struggle against confirming had resulted in a “faction” in 1530 among the Thomas Christians (Mundadan 308). The person at the centre of that disturbance was the earlier mentioned Fr. Panteado. For Menezes, however, the paucity of candidates for confirmation ensured that all was not lost even in Parur; it guaranteed at least a small victory over the archdeacon and his supporters. It added credence to the independent decisions he made to hasten the “conversion” of the Thomas Christians, a decision opposed by some lay Portuguese officers and by the Jesuits who were already in communication with the Thomas Christians (*Jornada* 139–40).

It is astounding that Menezes chose to proceed with the formalities of confirmation in Parur given the candidates’ lack of preparation; the only rationale for such a defective procedure would be his decision to utilize confirmation as a means of political control. The political situation and anticipation of resistance thus compelled Menezes to confirm the boys without fully preparing them (*Jornada* 133). In hastening the procedure and compromising preparation he removed the opportunity for dialogue—those several moments for the candidate to learn, think, question, clarify, be convinced or not. We see such strategic and political use of religion as well when, for example, upon learning that the Thomas Christians of a certain church (in Quilon) were not fully committed to the archdeacon and that the archdeacon paid few visits there, Menezes decided to visit these Christians “to see if he could subjugate” them (*Jornada* 146). Yet another example of his use of confirmation for political ends was the secret baptism and confirmation of the Hindu king’s, the Zamorin’s, nephew, who leaked state secrets to the Portuguese (*Jornada* 478) and whose life, along with that of others like him, may have been jeopardized by the publication of the *Jornada* only a few years later. In these cases, confirmation was more of a political and colonial tool or sign than a sacrament.

Strategizing at the feet of the other

In another related incident, this time in “Carturte” (Kadathuruthy), Menezes strategically achieved religious effect through the formalities of the washing of the feet linked to Maundy Thursday celebrations. While this ritual was not part of the liturgy in the late sixteenth century, following Trent, the Roman Missal included text to accompany the washing of the feet outside of the Mass. Menezes, characteristically, used related histrionics to maximum effect. He ordered that the Latin Mass should precede the Chaldean Mass in the schedule of events. He himself made it a point to attend all the ceremonies “showing that he was the Prelate of both” (*Jornada* 180). The Latin ceremonies were planned to have Menezes wash the feet of the attending priests—“all the Cassanars” (181). Malekandathil reports that Menezes washed the feet of only twelve priests and that such an act was a novelty for those in Kadathuruthy (*Jornada* lxvi). Regardless, the picture of this archbishop, in Pontifical, bending low at the feet of the Thomas Christian priests, the *Cassanars*, was one of personal humility and must have served to impress.

Historically, this ritual was practised in the Eastern Churches, and the rite in some of the Churches includes the kissing of the feet after the washing. While the *Jornada* does not mention this practice among the Thomas Christians, it reports that Menezes cleaned and kissed the feet of the Cassanars with great humility and with expressions of devotion and tears. The fact that this detail comes from Menezes’ own diary and that Gouvea was never present is all the more reason to believe that the actions of Menezes were carefully choreographed for maximum impact. To note, this is not to deny Menezes’ contribution to the spiritual and religious well-being of the Thomas Christians. Gouvea writes,

[W]hen they saw the person of the Archbishop which they felt to be very big, with Mitre on the head and on his knees washing the feet of the Cassanars, there were so many tears in the same Cassanars and in all the people which was well exceeding the greatest devotion of the churches of Europe, and they thought that it was a new reformation of his, of which they were already being aware that their Bishops did not deal with anything. (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 181)

Whether the Thomas Christians themselves saw the washing of feet as a “reformation” is another question; they were, after all, familiar with the etiquette of washing or offering water to wash the feet of guests, as well as that of *charana-sparsha*, that is, the touching of the feet of an honoured guest or elder in salutation and to receive a blessing. But the *Jornada* deduces the effect as a “reformation,” and in the context of the Reformation, possibly as a Catholic counter-reformation.

The scheduling of the service, with Latin first and Chaldean to follow; the decision to wash the feet of *all* the Cassanars, making it difficult for them to

disobey Menezes; the public display and Menezes' awareness of its impact on the congregation—all of these were directed at replacing the tradition of the Thomas Christians with its Latin counterpart. The ultimate goal was that the Latinized congregation would engage with the Latins and not with the Babylonians, who were “vassals of the Turks,” to borrow a phrase from *Jornada*—a phrase that either Menezes or Gouvea put in the mouth of the archdeacon in a reported speech (*Jornada* 210). Menezes also revived the use of holy oils among the Thomas Christians, the practice not being prevalent although their books mentioned it. Here too, as in other things, his aim was to effect Latinization as soon as the “conversion” occurred. He was anticipating it, preparing them towards that end. On the impact of the Latin paraphernalia, Gouvea asserts, “they [the Thomas Christians] felt so edified on seeing such holy things in their church, which they had never seen, that they were getting affectionate to the archbishop.” In fact, according to Gouvea, the Thomas Christians even said that “the rituals of the Roman Church were better than theirs” (*Jornada* 181). Accordingly, in their openness to Latin ways, “Carturte” showed every indication of conversion.

However, such openness went beyond matters of religion. That is why when Menezes wrote to the king of Cochin requesting the presence of his chief official, the *Regedor Mor*, at Mulanthuruthy, a town near Kadathuruthy, the king became anxious that he might lose in these Christians “fifty thousand gun-men” (*Jornada* 200). The king, according to Menezes' own narrative, recognized the allegiance of the Thomas Christians to their prelate as fundamentally *political*. The king of Cochin had greater faith in the bishops of Babylonia, as they were obedient to him. The Portuguese, on the other hand, challenged the feudal authority of the king in the regions they invaded. All of this also suggested that the relationships sought by both the colonizer and the colonized were often oriented towards political and/or economic gain.

A slap in the face

The confirmation ritual in Parur mentioned above met with a reaction—a political reaction, it must be added—that calls for scrutiny. When Menezes arrived in Parur, he was met by Christian men in arms. Not a single woman or child was present. These men had heard of Menezes' “success” in performing the sacrament of confirmation in another church, in Vaipicota. Whereas the Thomas Christians custom was to bear arms but to leave them in the armoury or *ayudhapura* (the house for weapons) normally attached to or located near the church, the men of Parur uncharacteristically entered the church fully armed. Gouvea writes that only Menezes suspected the ill intentions of the armed Christians; those who accompanied him imagined this to be a custom among the Thomas Christians. Menezes, with experience of the Thomas Christians both inside and outside churches, likely knew that his retinue would be no match for the mass of armed Thomas Christians.

Any attack on either side would compel him to summon his (the Portuguese) army, thereby exposing his ultimate goal of bringing the Thomas Christians under Goa.

To reduce the risk, he permitted only a few assisting priests to remain with him in the church. Menezes then put on the Pontifical, gave “a solemn blessing” (*Jornada* 130), and then preached “very slowly” (130) to the congregation with the help of a translator, likely Roz. The people listened “quietly”: as he reasoned on there being only one law (that of Christ—and not the two laws of St. Peter and St. Thomas), as he spoke about the need to obey the Roman Church, as he declaimed “the falsehood of the errors of Nestor,” and as he expounded on “the greatness of the Sacraments of the Church” (130). His sermon was an hour and a half long, and the people attended in silence. But when he concluded with the doctrine of the sacrament of confirmation and asked the congregation receive it, the reaction was sharp and violent:

Until then the people had heard him quietly, but on this point they all got up with the arms in hand, saying in a loud voice with great impetus that they would not allow the Confirmation, because their Bishops never did so to the Christians, nor was that Sacrament instituted by Christ, but his invention, with which he wanted to make them captives, and vassals of the Portuguese by putting the seal of Portuguese in their forehead, which word they used for the sign of the Cross which with the holy oil he was making on their foreheads, and soon as a sign of captivity was giving them a slap, and that if the cowards and the *paruos* of Vaipicota allowed themselves to be made captive and to be slapped, they would not tolerate it, nor would he lay his hands on their beards, nor on the faces of their women and of their daughters, that he should go to the Portuguese and leave the Christians of Saint Thomas, and that otherwise it would cost him a lot, for they were in their lands, where nobody could do any harm to them. (*Jornada* 130–31)

The above passage captures the spirit and substance of the Thomas Christians’ resistance to Menezes’ attempts to minister confirmation. Clearly, the Thomas Christians must have felt desperate to use such a tone (“with great impetus” in a display of power) and such words towards a prelate, even if not one their own. They possibly also saw Menezes as a political, not religious, head. The sacrament of confirmation and Menezes’ introduction and ministering of it were alien to them. The equivalent in ritual in the Eastern Church accompanied baptism, in which their priests used coconut or sesame (*gingili*) oil as chrism, invoking the Holy Spirit. The immediate problem above, however, was not the foreignness of the ritual but the strong suspicion that it was being used as a colonial instrument of subjugation.

The *Jornada* does not reveal the length or content of Menezes’ “conclusion” beyond noting that its subject was “Confirmation” and that Menezes

invited members of the congregation to receive the sacrament. However, there can be no doubt that Menezes referred to the key points as presented at the Council of Trent. These documents list topics on the subject of confirmation, a number of which would have enflamed the Thomas Christians (*Catechism* 199–212). For example, the statement that confirmation is distinct from baptism challenged the age-old tradition practised by the Thomas Christians. They also likely objected to the Council's insistence that (olive) oil and balsam alone compose the chrism, since coconut or gingili oil had always served their purposes well. Furthermore, the Thomas Christians would have viewed the item stating that the minister of confirmation must be the bishop as purely political, since it was two years since their own bishop was buried and it was well known that Menezes was doing everything possible to prevent the arrival of another bishop from Babylon or Mosul. The statement of the "Proper age for Confirmation"—which placed it at the minimum age of seven—would have likewise sparked a problem for the Thomas Christians: in a society where child marriage prevailed, young girls were not to be touched by a strange man, even their bishop.

However, the elements of the council documents that would have caused especial concern were the statement on making the confirmed into "soldiers" of Christ and the ceremonial actions of anointing the forehead, the sign of the cross, and the slap on the cheek. The Tridentine explication of the "Anointing of the Forehead" is as follows:

The forehead, then, of the persons to be confirmed is anointed with sacred chrism; for by this Sacrament the Holy Spirit infuses Himself into the souls of the faithful, and increases in them strength and fortitude to enable them, in the spiritual contest, to fight manfully and to resist their most wicked foes. Wherefore it is indicated that they are to be deterred by no fear or shame, the signs of which appear chiefly on the forehead, from the open confession of the name of Christ. (*Catechism* 211)

The anointing, thus, in the first instance makes one a soldier against "wicked foes." In the colonial context, however, "the wicked foes" signified not the devil but the colonized other, whose relationship with the colonizer—specifically, the Portuguese bishop who was offering to anoint them himself—determined the extent of their wickedness or their being foes. Subjugation to the Portuguese bishop through the anointing of confirmation could then make the "unconfirmed" natives, and even the native kings, those very enemies. The reference to soldiering continues in the explication for "The Sign of the Cross": "Besides, that mark by which the Christian is distinguished from all others, as the soldier is by certain badges, should be impressed on the more conspicuous part of the body" (*Catechism* 211). The repeated word, soldier, whether as a motif or real or both, would have been immediate cause for concern among the Thomas Christians, whose very survival as a minority among non-Christians hinged on allegiance to the

native kings. The king was their lord in the prevalent feudal system, and they held land on conditions of allegiance to him, including paying taxes and enlisting in military service.

The confirmation message of Menezes thus amounted to treason. The vassal status of the Thomas Christian was clear and arises on a number of occasions in the *Jornada*. Menezes, when accusing the king of Cochin of not supporting him against the archdeacon, referred to him as vassal: “Your highness wishes to favour rather the Archdeacon your vassal than me and the entire State of Portuguese” (*Jornada* 221). And later, he defended himself to the king of Cochin: “Your Highness thinks that I want to remove from you as vassals the Christians of your Kingdom” (221). The king of Cochin indeed felt threatened with the potential change of vassalage and consequent loss of 50,000 soldiers. In this context, the anointing of the forehead with the chrism (imported olive oil), even when the sign was clearly of the cross, was interpreted unequivocally as “the seal of Portuguese.” In fact, as Maturin Veysiére La Croze recollects in the eighteenth century in discussing events of the synod of Diamper, the chrism that Menezes placed on the candidates was interpreted by the king of Cochin as “la marque des Portugais” (194), that is, the seal of the Portuguese, not of Christianity. The charge is not that it was the insignia or tradition of the Roman Church: the Thomas Christians simply refused to acknowledge the religious character of the sign and ritual. Indeed, they fundamentally denied its religious significance and instead saw the ritual entirely as a colonial imposition.

Finally, the slap on the cheek would have been viewed by the Thomas Christians with deep suspicion. As the order goes: “The person when anointed and confirmed next receives a gentle slap on the cheek from the hand of the Bishop to make him recollect that, as a valiant combatant, he should be prepared to endure with unconquered spirit all adversities for the name of Christ” (*Catechism* 211–12). As a sign calling the confirmed to a life of faith even in the face of death, the slap was never “gentle.” Furthermore, Thomas Christians saw the intimate touch on the face as untoward touching, which was unacceptable even among the men. Any touch of their beard in the process of the “confirmation slap” and anointing was construed as an insult. The insult then was double: personal and political. If to be touched and slapped was demeaning to the person, it was even more so considering the particular reading that Menezes gave the process in the colonial context. As a minority community, the Thomas Christians protected themselves from attacks from other communities and at the same time served their king and nation. The fortified walls of their churches and the armoury attached to their churches, the *ayudhapura*, were symbols of this complex situation. The slap as a signifier in such a circumstance was superfluous. It was destined to be misinterpreted.

The Thomas Christians could thus recognize Menezes himself only as a colonial agent: this ritual was “his invention,” for it held no religious or

spiritual meaning to them. Its entire purpose was to remove the Thomas Christians from obedience to their king and to make them “vassals of the Portuguese.”

Sacrament or strategy

The rigmarole of strategies, with its combinations of the harsh and the soft approaches and the spectacular and the subtle, had a specific function at the intersection of Church and State in the sixteenth-century colonial context in India. It emphasized the space of that intersection, which, however, was nothing new: civic society experienced its sociality simultaneously in religious and economic and political terms. The novelty, on the other hand, was in the religio-political presence and power of the alien. In Menezes, both the State and the Christian religion held a foreignness that needed to be simultaneously imposed and overcome. The threatening foil to Menezes was the archdeacon, who was the ecclesiastical and civic administrator of the Thomas Christians and who routinely negotiated with both king and bishop on their behalf. The local king rested assured of the subordination and support of the archdeacon and his people and their numbers filling the army, and the Christianity they practised was mostly in harmony with other religions. As a result, when certain Nairs attacked the Thomas Christians in response to Menezes’ disparaging words against their gods, other Nair soldiers called them “brothers” and stopped the attack (*Jornada* 408).

Menezes was sensitive to most of these complexities and responded with strategies marked by histrionics aimed at communicating fear and gaining indulgence, if not understanding. The colonial implications of the canons of Trent are serious indeed. The decrees on confirmation of the seventh session of the Council of Trent declared “anathema” on those who challenged aspects of this sacrament. But Menezes moved effortlessly from threatening hell-fire on heretics and Nestorians to expressing piety and weeping. At the end of it, the congregation was not necessarily enlightened but were sufficiently confused to at once pacify and alert Menezes to the probability of resistance. The colonial strategy of political tact in the religious realm reaped what it sowed: an all-round atmosphere of distrust. Yet, it is this distrust that ultimately sustained both colonial power and resistance to it.

Later, when Menezes broke the agreement he had with the archdeacon and proceeded with ordinations among the Thomas Christians, the archdeacon was left with no option but to excommunicate the archbishop in the hopes of preventing further confirmations—despite the fact that earlier attempts by the archdeacon to stop confirmations had been futile (*Jornada* 144). The excommunication was written up on palm leaf—the *padiola* (the palm leaf on which agreements were written) or *Ola* (*Jornada* 161). It contained five orders to the priests and the people of Diamper: (1) do not allow the Portuguese archbishop to hold ordinations in the church of Diamper, (2) do not allow him to perform any rituals, (3) do not attend his Mass, (4) do not listen

to his sermons, and (5) do not allow him or his people into the church. By the time the *Ola* arrived, Menezes had already confirmed a large portion of the people in Diamper: “But when the *Ola* arrived the entire earth turned, and no more person was given Confirmation” (*Jornada* 161). The eldest priest of Diamper requested Menezes to leave, arguing that Christ did not institute the sacrament of confirmation and that the sign on the forehead with the oil was already applied in baptism. Menezes, however, persevered with the confirmations (*Jornada* 162). As for the *Ola*, it entered colonial discourse as a thing of anthropological curiosity, such that Menezes when discussing the point of excommunication in his diary, writes that

it is known as *Ola* for being written on palm leaves made ready for this purpose, which is the paper on which they write, and they are two palms in length and two fingers in breadth, and have the sculpted letters cut with an iron pen like a graver, which they do with such an agility and speed that very few of our clerks could be faster in writing, and they are so accurate in this that very often with their eyes somewhere else and whilst talking to others they go on writing with the maximum speed. (161)

Within the colonial context, it is as if the *Ola* of excommunication had simply never been written.

On their part, the Thomas Christians could not but see the moves of the Portuguese archbishop as anything but invasions. The *Regedor* of the king of Cochin advised Menezes that he “should not look after the Christians who were vassals of their king” (*Jornada* 162). The Nair militia, who also had the task of freeing their kings from Portuguese vassalage, later arrived “to kill the Archbishop and to free the Christians of the forces which he was putting on them” (*Jornada* 168). And, as mentioned earlier, Menezes’ own complaint was that the prelates of the Thomas Christians were “vassals of the Turks.” It appears then that the Thomas Christians followed the underlying equation: if their prelate was considered a vassal of the Turks, then replacing such a one by Menezes or another Portuguese bishop was to replace a vassal of the Turks with a vassal of the Portuguese. The difference between the Babylonian bishops and the Portuguese bishops would be that, unlike the former, the latter would never accept the Christians’ vassalage to a native king. Hence, under a Portuguese bishop, the Thomas Christians themselves would cease to be vassals of native kings.

On the other hand, the response of the Thomas Christians of Parur reflects elitist and casteist biases; these people declared that they would not become like the confirmed Christians of Vaipicota: cowards and pariahs. They declare that there is nothing for them to fear because the territory in which Menezes stood was theirs, by tradition and right. The most they could do was to recognize Menezes as a visiting bishop, a guest. According to Malekandathil, “The central point of the struggle between the archdeacon and the Archbishop of Goa revolved round the question whether

the Archbishop of Goa had jurisdiction to interfere in the affairs of the St. Thomas Christians or whether he was only a guest” (*Jornada* 144). In reality, it went further. In their recognition and defiance of the colonial character of the Portuguese ecclesiastical head, the Thomas Christians as colonized and Christian other challenged even the theoretical possibility of the Pax that was extended in confirmation. Such peace was to them *Pax Lusitania*—colonial, therefore, impossible. The receiver of such peace would be promptly dehumanized.

The violent colonial setting was least congenial to the normal spread of any religion, chiefly because it was a context of unfair competition between the colonizer and the colonized. This was especially the case when the representative of a religion was affiliated with and even represented the State. We must not forget Menezes’ profile on the world stage as both ecclesiastical and political head. Menezes’ visit to regions of the Thomas Christians entailed other political and diplomatic duties as well. For example, Menezes as a Portuguese official was charged with the responsibility to negotiate political and trade interests with the queen of Quilon (*Jornada* 146), a kingdom that had trade with Portugal from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Portuguese trade with this region began “in 1502 when some members of the St. Thomas Christian community of Quilon as official envoy of the Queen invited Vasco da Gama to this city for trade” (*Jornada* 180). The following year Afonso Albuquerque established a factory there. As Malekandathil comments,

By the end of the sixteenth century the emerging power of Travancore also started building a fortress in Quilon near the Lusitanian fortress, as a result of which mutual distrust and suspicion appeared between them. Being suspicious of the motives of the king of Travancore, D. Alexis Menezes made his visit to Quilon chiefly as a journey for political intriguing and manipulations for the sake of protecting the political and commercial interests of the Portuguese in that area. (*Jornada* 146)

This clearly shows that Menezes was both an ecclesiastical and civic official on his visits to the Thomas Christians. Whereas the Thomas Christians had no doubt about his political authority—that he was authorized as a political representative—they doubted his ecclesiastical right to do the many things he did among them.

Because dialogue was near impossible in the colonial situation, religious conversion, at least in the initial stage, was both superficial and formal. It was only over the course of time, and especially for those who could distance themselves from the artifice of power, that the new religion could be experienced as their own. In this way, from initial proselytizing to concluding conversion, strategy dominated the process. Not only was the choice of confirmation strategic, but Menezes had to strategize its conferring in terms

of the persons chosen and the manner. Such strategizing was driven by the limitations and freedoms engendered by a colonial encounter, and central to such strategy was the primacy of the colonial self.

Brother-in-arms: expediency versus Christianity

Ultimately, the heretical strain in the Thomas Christians, whether real or imagined, was perceived to challenge colonial power. The second Provincial Council of Goa (1575) made the connection between charges of heresy and colonial ambitions evident in the first decree of its third session. Pallath reproduces the decree:

For the good of the Christianity of the Apostle St. Thomas, which is in the land of Malabar, it is convenient that the diocese be governed by a prelate presented by the king of Portugal and not by the Patriarch of Chaldea in order that the said Christianity may be more easily freed from many abuses in which it is involved. (Qtd. in Pallath, *Provincial* 70)

The entire purpose of the Provincial Council of Goa, as it pertained to the Thomas Christians, was twofold: to correct abuses in the faith and practices of the Thomas Christians and to engineer this by submitting that community to the Padroado. Noticeably, the Second Provincial Council of Goa did not ascribe heresy but only errors and abuses to the Thomas Christians and their archbishop. As discussed earlier, the Third Council, however, charged them with heresy. The decree legislated that the king of Portugal and not the Patriarch of Chaldea exercises the right to appoint the prelate of the Thomas Christians. Pallath provides the following explication:

The Portuguese political and religious authorities decided to bring the St Thomas Christians, who had the monopoly of the pepper trade and among whom there were several thousands of excellent soldiers, under the Portuguese patronage for political, commercial, military and colonial interests of the Portuguese Empire. But the reason officially given for granting the King of Portugal the right of nominating bishops in the See of the St Thomas Christians was a religious one, namely to free this Christianity from many abuses in which it was involved. (*Provincial* 72)

This ambition of the Portuguese and the Archdiocese of Goa came to fruition about twenty-five years later, when on 20 December 1599 Pope Clement VIII made the Archdiocese of Angamaly of the Thomas Christians a suffragan See of the Archdiocese of Goa and, on 4 August 1600, the same pope extended the Padroado over the Diocese of Angamaly (Pallath *Important* 64–65). The Thomas Christians resented the loss of status so much that they sent a series of petitions to the pope. The response of their priests to their new Latin prelate, Roz, when first informed of the demotion was, “Oh, we

know very well that is the doing of the Archbishop of Goa, for how can he be Primate, if our Church is more ancient than his?" (Ferroli 294). One cannot at this juncture forget that the Thomas Christians did not take kindly to Father (Alvaro) Panteado, who in 1516 sought to take care of the Christians of Cranganore as its "head and primate" (see Mundadan *History* 291).

On 22 December 1608, Pope Paul V returned Angamaly to its autonomous metropolitan status even as it continued under the Padroado (Pallath, *Important* 65). According to Ferroli, the See of the Thomas Christians was transferred from Angamaly to Cranganore, and this raised many problems. The geographic boundaries of the Archdiocese of Cranganore and Diocese of Cochin were determined only at the end of the following year by a papal brief, which the Primate Menezes took another year to communicate. Even then, Menezes communicated it to the bishop of Cochin: "Don Francis Roz was kept in the dark about it" (*Jornada* 332). Moreover, on 14 February 1619, the bishop of Cochin, Don Sebastiao de San Pedro, wrote to the king of Portugal that the division of the dioceses into Cranganore and Cochin would mean that the Portuguese would lose Cranganore, which would result in endless mutiny among the Thomas Christians (*Jornada* 332). Even after that, for all practical purposes, the Padroado dictated the life of the Angamaly archbishopric. It is to Menezes' credit that he had envisioned this state of affairs some years before he set foot in the deep south. In 1597, he had written to Rome: "What is most important of all is that the bishop [of the Thomas Christians] be a suffragan of this city [Goa], as is at present the bishop of Cochin, his near neighbour" (qtd. in King 450).

The following paragraphs trace some of the strategies that Menezes adopted to arrive at his goal of bringing the Thomas Christians under the Padroado. I look at specific and spectacular events of native kings pledging to be brothers-in-arms to the absent Portuguese king, who was represented by the archbishop. I consider how the brother-in-arms title manifested itself as a relationship that worked to reach mutually desired goals, even as these were marred by the unequal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and how Indian Christians were victimized in the process.

One of the most important strategies of Menezes involved entering military and trade relationships with some of the kings in whose regions there were many Thomas Christians. Menezes was well aware of the history of his Church in India. He knew that when George Temundo O.P., Bishop of Cochin and later Archbishop of Goa, tried to bring the Thomas Christians under his diocese, the efforts failed because of unforeseen wars between the kings of Cochin and Cranganore (Thekkedath 45), or when, for instance, Mar Abraham went into hiding in the interior, the Portuguese could not follow him because those regions were ruled by kings who were hostile to the Portuguese. The solution was to make brothers-in-arms of such kings.

The *Jornada* begins mention of the fraternal characteristic of Indians in references to how Christian traders from Persia, Armenia, and Abyssinia

(Ethiopia) found “protection, brotherhood and communication” (16) among the Thomas Christians. “Which,” Gouvea writes, “among Christians, as servants of One Lord and heirs of one and the same Kingdom should always be there and is so much recommended to us by Christ Our Lord in His Gospels” (16). Malekandathil notes that before Islam spread to Asia, Christians from Africa and the Levant partnered in trade with the Thomas Christians: “The Christians from West Asia, Ethiopia and the St. Thomas Christians from Kerala were collaborators in the joint commercial ventures in the Indian Ocean” (“St. Thomas Christians” 189–192; 202). The Thomas Christians were growers and traders of spices (Yule, *Cathay* 252–53), chief of which was black pepper; trade relations with them were thus eagerly sought throughout west of India, which among other regions included Africa, the Middle East, and Venice. Menezes identified this historical relationship for comment in preparation, it soon became evident, for his own entry. The difference was that, on behalf of the Padroado, he planned not only to enter but also to replace all the other traders who were now, in his view, competitors in the relationship of the Portuguese with the Thomas Christians.

In this venture, the *Jornada*, then, no longer acknowledges Christian traders from any other foreign country. Instead, all non-Europeans (i.e., non-Portuguese) are classified as infidels, that is, Muslims. This was also because the traders were chiefly Muslims. And they traded with the Thomas Christians as well as with the rest of the native traders. Indeed, the very purpose of colonizing India was to put an end to the trade of the “Turks,” the Muslims. Menezes realized that the Muslims were well entrenched in Kerala. Kunjali Marakkar IV, the Muslim naval chief of the Zamorin, the Hindu King of Calicut, was considered the arch enemy. Menezes’ military alliances aimed to eventually subdue this enemy.

It was Francisco da Gama (fourth Count of Vidigueira), viceroy of India, who commissioned Menezes with the task of swearing in select kings of Malabar as brothers-in-arms. The reason behind this commissioning of Menezes was the dire situation of the Portuguese Empire in India at the turn of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese were without money, manpower, and ships for defence (Boxer 52–60), and corruption was rampant among the Portuguese civil and military members (Disney, *Twilight* 27). All this had forced the viceroy to borrow a large amount of money (Disney 57–60).⁸ Luis Filipe F.R. Thomaz narrates some other transactions in this regard. The following excerpt concerns an Iranian (a Persian) merchant who had settled in the land of the Zamorin and whom the Portuguese were eyeing for money and gold:

In 1544, upon the death of Asad Khan, in December 1543, the Portuguese Governor Martim Afonso de Sousa dispatched Rui Goncalves de Caminha to Cannanore to persuade Shamsu-d-Din to come to Goa and settle there; the intention of the governor was most probably to take hold of Asad Khan’s treasure. But the endeavour did not bear much

fruit; the merchant kept dwelling in Cannanore and contented himself with sending the governor an amount of 500,000 pardaos or pagodas, that is, almost 50,000 ounces of gold, which would be fairly enough to redress the precarious financial situation of the *Estado da India*. Upping his efforts, the governor then came in person to Cannanore to pay him a visit, and succeeded in exacting from him 250,000 pardaos more for the *Estado* and 30,000 for himself, as a personal gift. While returning to Portugal, a few months later, he could thus afford to offer the King a coffer containing 3000 pardaos, that is, c. 300 ounces of gold, which though being only 10 per cent of what he had received as a gift, was nevertheless a nice present. (54)

Khwaja Shamsu-d-Din was the treasurer of Asad Khan, Lord of Belgaum in the present region of Karnataka. Shamsu-d-Din's residence in Cannanore meant that the Portuguese governor had to travel all the way from Goa to demand money of him. Thomaz's account suggests that the Portuguese obtained significant amounts from the Persian merchants and that it was only one of several instances where the Padroado actively supported and encouraged Persian merchants whenever Portugal's empire in the East with its control centre in Goa, the *Estado da India*, could benefit from them.⁹ Finally, the narrative points to the extent of corruption, with local officers embezzling in the role of agents, partly explaining why the *Estado da India* remained a pauper.

K.S. Mathew also observes how the financial straits of the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century drove them to seek external sources to enable Empire. He notes with regard to southern India, "The financial position of Portugal was not such as to enable the king to keep pace with the growing needs of the overseas enterprise. The 'merchant King' found himself unable to exploit the vast commercial potentialities of the Malabar coast and the oriental trade" (158). The Portuguese circumvented the lack of capital by allowing "native as well as foreign [mainly Italian and German] merchants to fit out their own ships to the Malabar coast" (158). Mathew draws his conclusions from documents that make part of the colonial archival collection, *Corpo Chronologico*, I-3-20. This was the terrible need of the Portuguese, which had to be hidden but met. Niels Steensgaard describes the situation as follows: "Asian participation did not only mean that there was an Asian seller to every European buyer, but without local protection, local know-how and local capital the European trade in Asia in the 15th-18th centuries would have been a very small business indeed" (228). The brother-in-arms deal turned out to be the profitable strategy in this unfortunate predicament of the Portuguese in the late sixteenth century.

Having been commissioned by the viceroy, Menezes proceeded to swear in select kings as brothers-in-arms. This selection of kings, as the *Jornada* makes evident, was based on clear criteria: the candidate would have to be proven inalienable to the interests of the Portuguese. In other words, alliance

with the native king had to ensure safe passage of merchandise to destined regions. Moreover, such a king would join forces with the Portuguese in defeating a major competitor: the Muslim merchants and their native leader, Kunjali Marakkar. It was stipulated that the brother-in-arms (i.e., the native king) should supply army, navy, and weapons in any war by the Portuguese against the Marakkar:

It was also mentioned in the conditions of Brotherhood and in its letter that in case there was a war in any of our forts, or if a siege was laid to them from Cananor to Coulao, he [the native king] would help with thirty thousand men on land, or by sea with ninety manchuas with artillery, and well fitted out, and that he would soon give two thousand *Amoucos* (*Chaverpada*) for the war which in that summer would be waged against the *Cunhale* (*Kunjali*). (*Jornada* 469)

The native kings needed to become accustomed to this idea of a concerted attack on the Muslims, as most of them had enjoyed trade with the Muslims and had thrived on that account over the centuries. But for a Western nation such as Portugal, whose crusades had sought “brotherhood in arms” with other Western nations, including England (see Prestage 69), to oust the Muslim rulers, the mission in India was simply a continuation of that campaign.

With the advent of the Portuguese, then, the trade scenario in the Indian peninsular was changing. Native rulers were being convinced that a relationship with the Portuguese was more profitable than one with the Muslims. The Portuguese, the Thomas Christians, and the local kings had complementing economic and political agendas. The Portuguese traders sought the Thomas Christians for their international pepper trade and hoped to discourage them, along with the rest of the Indian traders, from trading with the Muslims. The Thomas Christians, who felt disadvantaged under Hindu rulers, looked forward to the protection the Portuguese crown could extend. And the Hindu rulers soon sought the same foreign protection against invading Hindu or Muslim rulers, swayed in part by Menezes’ operations in the land of spices.

The first king to support the travels of Menezes through the present region of Kerala was the king of Purakkad, referred to in the *Jornada* as the king of Porcaa. The *Jornada* reports that when Menezes arrived at a Church of the Thomas Christians in Purakkad, he was received with “festivity and proofs of joy . . . For that was the order of the king who wanted very much the friendship of the Portuguese and of the Archbishop” (149). It appears that the Christians of Purakkad had no option but to receive the archbishop even if it was contrary to the wishes of their archdeacon. In return for this and other favours he bestowed on the Portuguese, the king of Purakkad demanded to be the brother-in-arms of the Portuguese king so as to improve exports and thereby his exchequer (150). As brother-in-arms, the king of Purakkad could use the military alliance with the Portuguese

against neighbouring and less fortunate kings, provided the overall strategy favoured Portuguese trade. The Portuguese orientation of the relationship meant the king of Purakkad had to manage the Thomas Christians as needed and rid the region of Muslim traders—that is, as the *Jornada* notes, they would remain brothers as long as “he was favouring the Christians of Saint Thomas and the churches which were there in his lands, and . . . he had cleansed the beach of Porcaa from the robberies taking place” (150). In fact, the king lists this as his main argument for why the king of Portugal should consider making him a brother-in-arms. Similar scenarios marked the brother-in-arms deals with other kings—of Cochin, Kundara, Karinagapilli, Venmani, and so on—as Menezes was “soliciting [these kings] with letters, and . . . ordering their vassals to obey him” (*Jornada* 209–10). The “vassals” were specifically Thomas Christians. The brother-in-arms contract thus dealt with the two authorities that most feared the move of the archbishop—the archdeacon of the Thomas Christians (*Jornada* 210) and the kings (*Jornada* 200; 221)—by subjugating the former and appeasing the latter.

The ceremony of the swearing in of the brother-in-arms was an ostentatious affair, and its leading message, even when the reminder of its material benefits filled the scene, was of the civilizing mission. The *Jornada*’s narration of the ritual of making the king of Gundara a brother-in-arms takes up over five pages and opens by sharing with its (Western) readers the reason for this alliance: the king of Gundara’s territories “were the most fertile pepper lands of the entire Malabar [Kerala]” (396). The meeting took place in a large space surrounded by “trees thick with pepper” (396), where the archbishop placed before the king a document with his demands. They led with civilizing mission, the first demand being the freedom to preach the Gospel. The second was that “all the pepper of his Realm would go to the scales of Coulao [Quilon/Kollam],” where the Portuguese had full authority over the produce. The third was that “in case of war he [the king of Gundara] would help the fort with the assistance of twenty thousand men, and with all the necessary supplies for their current price” (397). Then, as the *Jornada* records, “on the part of the Portuguese he was promised common favours of help and defence” (397). The king of Gundara was then presented with “a flag well wrought (sic) with the Royal arms of Portugal” (397). As the flag was unfurled, the archbishop’s side played the bagpipes and trumpets and the king’s side played “all his instruments, and fired all his guns” (397). In short, there was great display of joy. At moments throughout the meeting, agreements had to be written down. The person who helped the archbishop in this matter was the, by then obedient, archdeacon, because he was “an expert in writing these *Olas* [palm-leaves]” (399).

In the *Jornada*’s narrative of the brother-in-arms ceremony, references to Christians are limited to the (Latin Church’s) right to preach the Gospel and the solitary presence of the archdeacon in his role as secretary to Menezes. Ferroli describes how “a good Christian” (233) from Quilon was a prudent

interpreter between Don Andre and the Zamorin in critical negotiations on the handing over of Kunjali Marakkar to the Portuguese. Discussions preceding and following the ceremony of brother-in-arms register the importance of specifically the Thomas Christian community for Menezes and his political agenda. When the king of Purakkad, for example, was left without a decision on the investiture of the brother-in-arms until he could bring the Thomas Christians to full obedience to Menezes, Menezes harassed the king of Cochin—or rather his officer, the “*regidor*”—following the ceremony with the words:

I shall see whether the *Regedors* of the king deal with me truthfully, if you send for all the people and tell them in the name of the king to obey me and recognize me to be their Prelate, and to unite with me and with the Roman Church, to which is obedient the king of Portugal his brother, and all who are true Christians in the whole world, and leave the Archdeacon and his followers and do everything which I order them to do. (*Jornada* 206)

Menezes either captures his own words to the king’s representative or customizes his conversation for his Portuguese readers. The excerpt serves to underscore the claim that he, Menezes, did the impossible by bringing the heretical and Nestorian community of Indian Christians to obedience to Rome. Furthermore, it justifies the exclusive Goa–Lisbon–Rome ecclesiastical and political network, excluding the Levantine (“the Archdeacon and his followers”), within which Menezes and the “converted” Thomas Christians were expected to function.

Elsewhere, the *Jornada* acknowledges that the Thomas Christians were “the best warrior people in the whole of Malabar . . . [and that] of them consists the strength of their army. . . .” (252). According to Disney, even in “late Hapsburg times it [Cranganore] was manned by one hundred soldiers, some of whom were Saint Thomas Christians” (*Twilight* 13). In a footnote to his edition of the *Jornada*, Malekandathil cites instances where rulers appeased the Portuguese by providing them with Thomas Christian soldiers: “The king of Vadakkenkur offered 2000 soldiers from the St. Thomas Christians to the Portuguese for the defence of Diu [against Ottoman invasion] in 1547. . . . Later the king of Cochin offered St. Thomas Christian soldiers to the Portuguese for the project of conquering Ceylon” (252). Whereas the actual ceremony does not betray the extent of the vulgarity of the terms of the brother-in-arms, Menezes’ conversations with the native kings or their representatives reveal the importance of the Thomas Christian community for the Estado da India and the level of invasion this community faced with the first European colonizers. The Portuguese prelate’s zeal to shepherd the Thomas Christian’s and the continual charges of heresy that were laid on them rationalized the connection between brother-in-arms contracts and Menezes’ attempts to control this community.

One of the most conspicuous ways the Thomas Christian community fought back was with the assistance of their own brothers-in-arms. This was an alliance that withstood many political changes and persisted over generations. When the Padroado's brother-in-arms contracts posed an insurmountable challenge, the Thomas Christians responded with the help of the army. This army included the *chaverpada*, also known as the *amoucos*, or the amoks.

Amok: a colonial and postcolonial discourse

Every nation has its army, but that of Malabar had an element that would go on to intrigue travellers and scholars and, furthermore, influence how the colonized, including the Thomas Christians, would be perceived. The kings, chiefs, and nobility of Malabar not only boasted an army, but this army contained death squads that would eventually define the notion of the oriental subject as "amok." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) traces the etymology of this word to Malay "amoqadj," meaning, "engaging furiously in battle, attacking with desperate resolution, rushing in a state of frenzy to the commission of indiscriminate murder," and continues that it is also "applied to any animal in a state of vicious rage." Its first meaning though is listed as "a name for: a frenzied Malay." The *Dictionary* further lists Dryden as one of the early users of the related term "muck" in his long poem, *Hind and Panther* (1687), as in the lines: "And runs an Indian muck at all he meets." Briefly, Europe had gotten wind of the term and the notion as soon as the colonization of the East began, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century.

However, the earliest mention can be traced to the very years when Vasco da Gama and his uncle, Vicente Sodre, made their discovery of India. Correa renders Sodre's narrative about the death squad of India as follows. In 1503, in a war between Calicut and Cochin, two princes of the king of Cochin were killed. Determined to avenge the murders, a death squad of more than two hundred prepared themselves ritually. They shaved off all their hair, including their eyebrows (*sobrancelhas*); they embraced their friends and relatives like men who are going to die (*como homens que vao a padecer morte*). They were, Correa writes, like mad men (*como homens doudos*). They were called *amoucos* (*Lendas da India* 364–65). The men went against Calicut and slew until they were slain. In Correa's narrative, the *amoucos* are not mad but are like mad men. In *Lunacy in India*, Alexander Willia Overbeck-Wright classifies the amok into "cases where the motive is revenge for a supposed or real wrong, where the assailant becomes perfectly reckless; and . . . what he describes as 'orang beramok,' which requires the intervention of the medical jurist to prevent irresponsible persons suffering from the penalty of the law" (85–86). On its part, the OED authoritatively categorizes the "frenzied Malay," the Indian who runs "muck," and an animal in a state of vicious rage all under the term "amok."

The diction and its popularized meanings have had a real impact on how not just one community but Indians and the East in general have been understood in the West in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The OED's first meaning—"a frenzied Malay"—has undoubtedly dominated this word and its signifier, the Malay, the Indian, the East, the other. Bill Sherk's *500 Years of New Words* (112–13) provides the 1663 *Pinto's Travels* as the earliest instance of the term "*amoucos*," a 1772 occurrence of Marvell's phrase "runs a mucke," and insights into the term a century later by Captain James Cook. According to Cook, "Jealousy of the women is the usual reason of these poor creatures running amock [or amuck]" (qtd. in Sherk 113). Sherk sums up the entry: "Cook himself was on the receiving end of an outburst of anger when, in 1779 in the Sandwich Islands (now called Hawaii), he was clubbed to death after thrashing a Native for stealing a boat" (113). Sherk's choice of words and diagnosis of cause of the action of the "Native" as "outburst of anger" seeks to authenticate—in the twenty-first century—the colonial amuck narrative of "the raging Indian . . . who runs a mucke . . . stabbing every man he meets" (113). Note that according to this entry, Cook had no "outburst of anger" when he was "thrashing." Either the victim or another person or persons had clubbed him to death for no apparent reason, for surely there was no "jealousy of the women" involved here. The killer or killers were certainly amoks running amuck. Unthinkable is the notion that the event could have been a deliberate reaction to colonial invasion, even considering the profile of the one killed.

The term also makes an appearance in *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* by Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell, which continues to be widely used. Both Yule and Burnell were orientalists and had worked with primary sources pertaining to both North and South India. Yule's translation of Jordanus' *Mirabilia Discripta* has already been referred to above. Burnell's publication on the palaeography of South India was one of the texts highly recommended by none other than Max Muller himself. I note the bios of these scholars to establish that, like the OED, *Hobson-Jobson* is backed up by great authority. According to this source, "a muck" is primarily a Malay term. The first entry, by Dr. Oxley of Singapore, is a definition from the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* (vol. 3, p. 532), and specifically a quotation of W.W. Skeat:

The best explanation of the fact is perhaps that it was the Malay national method of committing suicide, especially as one never hears of Malays committing suicide in any other way. This form of suicide may arise from the wish to die fighting and thus avoid a "straw death," a "cow's death"; but it is curious that women and children are often among the victims, and especially members of the suicide's own family. The act of running a-muck is probably due to causes over which the culprit has some amount of control, as the custom has now died out in the British

Possessions in the Peninsula, the offenders probably objecting to being caught and tried in cold blood. I remember hearing of only about two cases (one by a Sikh soldier) in about six years. It has been suggested further that the extreme monotonous heat of the Peninsula may have conduced to such out-breaks as those of Running amuck . . . (Yule and Burnell 19)

Yule and Burnell's choice of quotation confirms the amok as a Malay sociocultural "problem," although others in the general region, such as the Sikh soldier, have also displayed instances. A perusal of volume 3 of the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, however, does not turn up either Skeat or the quotation. Instead, we have T. Oxley's two-page article, which originally appeared in an official Medical Report on Singapore, beginning with the statement, "The character of the unsophisticated Malay is remarkable for its simplicity and honesty . . ." (532). This introduction of the "Malay," under the entry "Malay Amoks," provides the narrative foil to the "amok," the Malay turned suddenly violent. Like Overbeck-Wright, cited earlier, Oxley identifies two causes: "revenge or disease" (533).

An entry in a 2017 publication, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Abnormal and Clinical Psychology*, appears to build on the above discourse when it defines the violence of an "amok" as "sudden, unprovoked, and carried out almost exclusively by men" (Pipitone and Raghavan 160). The authors, Jennifer Pipitone and Chitra Raghavan, however, point out that the phenomenon is global rather than culture specific. According to them, the first instance of a Malay amok was reported by Captain Cook in 1770, and since then, instances have sprouted up in other parts of the world including, more recently, the United States, as in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 and the Virginia Tech University shooting in 2017. The fact that, breaking chronology, Pipitone and Raghavan present the 2017 shooting by Seung-Hui Cho, a student of South Korean descent, first and the 2012 shooting by Adam Lanza, a New Hampshire native last may suggest that the concept of the amok continues to be more naturally associated with the East. According to these narratives, the condition of the amok can no longer be considered a culture-specific disorder; amoks had obviously advanced from the Malay dagger, "keris," to guns, but to run amuck continues to be a *senseless* act.

The Jornada on the amok: Christianizing or colonizing

The *Jornada* tells a different story. A reading of the diary suggests not only that it is very likely the concept of the *amoucos* as a clueless "suicide" squad—as opposed to a purposeful "death" squad—arose in colonial Malabar in the sixteenth century but also that the related colonial discourse has contributed to the mistaken notion that Malabar and the Thomas Christians were never really colonized by the Portuguese. The *Jornada's* use of

and references to the term “*amoucos*” arise in the context of Menezes’ attempts to subjugate the Thomas Christians to “the true faith” and to coax their assistance in the Padroado’s and the Estado da India’s goal of ending the trade of the Muslims.

Likely due to the prejudice against Islam, the *Jornada* makes no mention of Muslim “*amoucos*.” Before turning to the narratives in the *Jornada*, it is important to be aware that the *amoucos* of India did not consist only of Hindus and also that *amoucos* could be found outside Malabar/Kerala. An entry in *The Indian Antiquary*, volume 8, describes Muslim *amoucos* of Gujarat:

De Barros, speaking of the capture of the isle of Beth of Nuno da Cunho (1531), says: “But the natives of Guzarat stood in such fear of Sultan Badur that they would not consent to the terms. And so, like people determined on death, all that night they shaved their heads (this is a superstitious practice of those who despise life, people whom they call in India Amaucos), and betook themselves to their mosque, and there devoted their persons to death . . . and as an earnest of this vow, and an example of this resolution, the Captain ordered a great fire to be made, and cast into it his wife, and a little son that he had, and all his household and his goods, in fear lest anything of his should fall into our possession.” Others did the like and they fell upon the Portuguese.—Dec, IV. liv. iv. cap. i. (Yule and Burnell, “Specimen” 53)

This passage alludes to the failure of the Portuguese in 1531 to capture the island of Shyal Bet, in present-day Gujarat. Like the *amoucos* of Cochin mentioned by Correa, the Muslim *amoucos* spent the night ritually preparing themselves—“all that night they shaved their heads.” The all-night ritual was likely part of the “*ratheeb*,” such as Phillip B. Zarilli reports among the Sufi, “which through group chanting leads to at-onement with Allah and the concentration and focus of greater spiritual powers for the martial practitioner” (153). De Barros provides another detail of the extent to which these men were committed to their undertaking—the captain submitted his wife, son, relatives, servants, and other material possessions into a bonfire. So too did the others. At this point, the *amoucos* are no longer afraid to die: they are lethal, they would fight to the death. History reports that the governor, Nuno da Cunho, and his army retreated that round.

The armies of Malabar would have been made up of Cattar Brahmins, Christians, Muslims, Nairs, and the Ezhava or Thiyya communities (Zarilli 36). The death squads arose from these communities. Zarilli also mentions that the Ezhava “served the special role of fighting duels to the death to solve disputes and schisms among higher caste extended families” (36). Warfare was less based on religion than on economic and political grounds. Zarilli further cites “caste differences” and “pure aggression” as triggers for war. (41) *The Indian Antiquary* cites Master Caesar Frederike’s

Purchas, volume 2 (1708), on an entry regarding the year 1566: “The king of Cochin . . . hath great number of gentlemen which he calleth *Amocchi*, and some are called *Nairi*: these two sorts of men esteeme not their lives any thing, so that it may be for the honour of their king” (Yule and Burnell, “Specimen” 53). The army and the death squad comprised men of different faiths and castes, with Christians, Muslims, and Nairs predominating their ranks. Another entry in the *Indian Antiquary*, this one from Padre Vincenzo Maria (1672), reads, “Every community, every church has its own Amouchi, which are people who take an oath to protect with their own lives the persons and places put under their safeguard, from all and every harm” (145). According to William Logan, “mappilas,” which he interprets as exclusively Muslims, participated even in the *mamankam*, a royal military festival (138–39; also see Haridas 499). By excluding Muslims from the *amoucos*, the narrative of the *Jornada* seems to merely reflect the Padroado’s goal of dividing communities in order to procure trade monopoly.

The *Jornada* initially alludes to the *amoucos* with reference to Menezes’ attempts to subdue the archdeacon of the Thomas Christians. Fully aware of the authority held by the commanders (*Paniquial* or *Panikkar*) of their armies, Menezes sent for two of them. One Panikkar had four thousand men and the other six thousand men. But the situation took an unexpected turn. On becoming aware that the archdeacon was afraid of being arrested, all the men “swore solemnly to make themselves Amoucos” (*Jornada* 116) should the archbishop do violence to their archdeacon or to any of their priests. The *Jornada* goes on to define the term “Paniquial,” clarifying that there were Christian and Nair Paniquials who trained both Christian and Nair students, and reports that the disciples showed their master “the same courtesy as to the king” (117). Such an introduction to the *amoucos* of the Thomas Christians in the *Jornada* serves to demonstrate how formidable a task lay before the archbishop. Geddes omits descriptions of the paniquials but provides a clearer translation of what transpired soon after:

With two of these Paniquais, and 3000 Men well Armed, the Arch-Deacon came to wait upon the Arch-Bishop at Cochin. Don Antonio de Noronha, the Governour of the City, met them without the Gates, and conducted them to the Arch-Bishop’s Palace. The Arch-Deacon, when he came before the Archbishop kneeled down and kissed his Hand, as did all the other Cacanares that were in his Company; the two *Paniquais* were also presented to his Lordship by the Arch-Deacon, who when the Archbishop, and the Governour, and the Archdeacon came to sit down, placed themselves at the Elbows of the Archbishop’s Chair, where they stood all the while with their broad Swords naked over his Head. The door of the Room where they were being shut, to keep out the Crowd, those that stood without imagining that it was done to make their Arch-Deacon a Prisoner, said to one another, this is the time to

die for our Arch-Deacon, and for the Church of St. Thomas, but being assured that their Arch-Deacon was in no danger, they were quieted. (58–59)

The spectacle of the two paniquals standing with naked swords on either side of Menezes would have been sufficient to deter any rash move by the Portuguese. If Menezes' initial plan was to command the commanders, it becomes clear to him that he would have to seek alternative, preferably ecclesiastical, routes to subdue the Thomas Christians. Furthermore, any show of military muscle by the Thomas Christians would have to be countered by the alliances Menezes himself formed with those kings who were his brothers-in-arms. One of the conditions of the contract with the king of Porca (Purakkad), as we have seen above, was his provision of two thousand *amoucos* to fight against the Muslims, specifically Kunjali Marakkar (*Jornada* 469). While there is no evidence that Menezes used *amoucos* against the Thomas Christians, we have previously seen instances of him bending the kings' arms to subdue those Christians. The *Jornada* emphasizes the *amoucos*' willingness "to die," but no one doubts their determination to kill.

Regarding the *amoucos* (or the *chaverpada*), the ideology of invasion, both domestic and foreign, stressed the death of the fighter. As the ultimate attack was seen as suicidal, the army that attacked was thus a suicide squad, rather than a death squad. The *chaver*, with the stress on the first syllable, was labelled by the targeted party (whether native or colonial) as one set out to die. However, a quick change in stress—to *chaver*—would change the meaning to the one who "threw death around"; this was closer to the reality because the *chaver* threw death all around them before they themselves succumbed.

The *Jornada* cites a few other instances where Menezes' life was put in danger on account of *amoucos* committed to the Thomas Christians (In *Chronica da Ordem de S. Augustinho nas Indias Orientais* of 1606, Felix de Jesus too alludes to the threat that the *amoucos* posed to Menezes [70].) On the occasion, discussed above, when Menezes made efforts to confirm Thomas Christians in Parur, the archdeacon brought only eight or ten boys for confirmation but was accompanied by "people with arms" (*Jornada* 133). Geddes refers to this incident but not to what followed. That evening, Menezes summoned the archdeacon to his galley, where he had retired. The *Jornada* continues,

Seeing this, the people on the land, and of that part where the rowing boats were kept, spread the word that the Archbishop had called him ([the] Archdeacon) in order to arrest him and to hurriedly put him in the rowing boats with his men and to depart, because in the river the people of *Paru* did not have boats embarking [with] which they could stop him. (133)

The scene reveals the Thomas Christians' constant state of alertness and preparedness for assault from the Portuguese, but it also shows that Menezes' attempts to placate and influence these Christians had very little effect during this phase. In fact, at that point, the archdeacon's men decided to kill the archbishop (134–35). The archdeacon arrived for his meeting with the archbishop with five hundred armed men. Menezes issued strict orders to his men not to retaliate to the provocation, in this way maintaining a level of calm through the discussions with the archdeacon. However, "another God-fearing Christian" (135) informed Menezes that *amoucos* had vowed to chop off his head were he to spend the night on shore. He, therefore, declined the invitation of "two principal Christians" to "sleep in the houses of the church" (135). On another leg of his journey, this time in *Mangate* (Alangade), Menezes was forced to travel by night to escape *amoucos* from Paru (139). He knew enough not to take any chances with the *amoucos*. The history of the Padroado by then would have contained the 1557 episode of the Padroado's attempt to capture Mar Joseph, and the Thomas Christians' response of arranging for two thousand *amoucos*—the earlier mentioned "desperadoes" of Ferroli—to protect him (see also Joseph Wicki's *Documenta Indica* [801]). Perhaps, Menezes' decision to visit the Thomas Christians only after hearing of the death of their archbishop, Mar Abraham, was in part to avoid this kind of amouco-zeal.

At times, Menezes' description of the *amoucos* approximates the notion of the opium-high, mad, and dangerous Malay:

Amoucos among the Malabaris are men who swear they will die in the enterprise they undertake, which they do without fail, even if it means for two to go against a thousand, and thus they are feared wherever they go, for going through this brutality as furious and unconscious, killing whatever they find of the enemy without consideration, choice, or reason. (*Jornada* 116–17)

Contrary to this representation of the irrational *amoucos*, the episodes mentioned above suggest the *amoucos* of the Thomas Christians, hired as they were, were informed of the ill intentions of Menezes and the Padroado. They and the community that sent them believed, not without reason, that Menezes would not forgo an opportunity to kidnap or imprison the archdeacon. After all, the *Jornada* testifies that Menezes had serious plans, which he discussed with Dom Antonio de Noronha, Captain of Cochin, to waylay the king of Travancore himself (376) because he had become a major threat to Portuguese interests in Coulao (Quilon). Though the Thomas Christians would not have known of Menezes' schemes against a native king, they had no doubts about what he was capable of. The *amoucos* were committed to protecting the archdeacon and his priests *with their life*. In this context, and contrary to R. Po-Chia Hsia's rather late periodization of the history of resistance by Christians in India (Hsia 200), it would be hard to label these

trained and experienced soldiers as “frenzied Malay”; they formed, rather, one of the first and fiercest anti-colonial armies of South India, composed, as we know, of Christians, Hindus, and Muslims.

In *The History of the European Commerce with India*, David Macpherson comments on how “the rapacity, the bigotry, and the lascivious tyranny” of the Portuguese drew them and “all the nations of India” into several wars in the sixteenth century. In this regard, he avers that even “the Indian Christians of St. Thomas” joined a “most formidable confederacy of Moors and Hindoos against the common enemy” (30). Macpherson discerns the motives of the Thomas Christians as a reaction against “the persecutions of the Portuguese priests” and against the Inquisition of Goa. He opines that if the Portuguese could not be defeated, it was because the confederacy was made up of various nations, religions, motives, and so on. But he admits that such resistance checked the growth of the Portuguese in India (31). These experiences of countering the Portuguese, both the memory and the method, would have valuably educated the Thomas Christian armies and their leaders in the late sixteenth century.

The several engagements with the army and the *amoucos*, of course, are evidence that the Padroado was, undoubtedly, a colonial threat to the Thomas Christians as they were to the rest of Malabar; one can see this struggle for power again in the institution of “changatham,” referred to in the *Jornada* as “Jangadas” (465). Changatham, meaning companionship, refers to an age-old practice in Malabar of recruiting a guard or a proxy so that any good or harm done to them was believed to be done to the recruiter, eliciting appropriate reactions. According to K.P. Padmanabha Menon, changatham was a source of revenue for the king. He observes that in the fifth century, the Chinese traveller Fa Hian was stopped from travelling through the South because he was unable to pay the stipulated changatham fee (334–35). In the early fifteenth century, when the Portuguese under Joao de Nova faced the hostility of the local Muslims, the king of Cochin assigned them Nairs according to the principles of changatham (Padmanabha Menon, *Cochi* 246–47). The *Jornada* narrates how the king of Cochin insisted on utilizing his changatham whenever other kings engaged with the Portuguese, “to show that not even the kings of Malabar could get entry or have dealings with the Portuguese except through him, nor the Portuguese with them, and thus a door was made through which they and the Portuguese dealt among themselves” (465). Menezes, however, gave permission to the king of Porca, who was visiting him to be sworn as brother-in-arms of the king of Portugal, to proceed without the presence of “the *Jangada* of the *Regedor* of the king of Cochin” (466). In fact, Menezes formed political alliances with “almost all the kings of Malabar” (466) without the aid of the king of Cochin. Furthermore, unlike the viceroys up to that point, Menezes had also proceeded to fortify the city of Cochin without waiting to obtain the permission of the king, as his brother-in-arms deal with the king of Porca ensured that material for the city’s fortification would be supplied

without hindrance. Menezes' rejection or circumvention of the changatham as a means to fortify the city of Cochin thus establishes the colonial bent of his mission in Malabar.

In their *Hobson-Jobson* glossary, Yule and Burnell apply the word "Jangada" to "certain Hindus whom he [Menezes] saw in S. Malabar near Quilou [Quilon/Kollam], whose duty it was to defend the Syrian Christians [the Thomas Christians] with their lives" (20) *Hobson-Jobson* is here referring to an occasion at a church in Gundara (Kundara) of Menezes' encounter with an "amoucos" who belonged to a community committed to the Thomas Christians. When Menezes enquired who the man was, the Christians told him that

he was of the caste and generation of the *Amoucos* [*chaver*] of Saint Thomas Christians, who were instituted and ordained for the favour of Christians and their churches by Xarao Perumal [Cheraman Perumal], a great Emperor of the entire Malabar . . . who divided his Empire into diverse Realms among his servants, who favoured the Christians so much that he not only granted them honours and privileges so that they would be bound to attend to all the things to which the Christians would call them, for offenses committed both against them and against the churches, and to defend them until death, after becoming Amoucos . . . (*Jornada* 393)

There is much controversy surrounding the figure of the said Cheraman Perumal. Mundadan notes, "Most probably some of the early rulers of Malabar were called Perumals and after the last Perumal, if not before, Malabar was split into small kingdoms or principalities and these were ruled by independent or vassal kings and chieftains" (*History* 224). But other scholars consider him a legend (Prange 157). According to some, he became a Christian (Mundadan *History* 43), while yet others say that he became a Buddhist or that he went to Mecca and was converted by the Prophet Mohammed himself. Still others claim that he was a devout Saivite. Regardless, in almost all cases, the stories that surround this royal figure denote religious tolerance. The Thomas Christian community, as the narrative in the *Jornada* implies, considered him favourable to them. Furthermore, Thomas Christians were not the only community to claim privileges; the kingdom of Cranganore and the neighbouring kingdom of Iyroor, among others, also made claims in the name of this king (Padmanabha Menon 104–07).

Hobson-Jobson does not refer to Cheraman Perumal, but rather focuses on the alleged commitment of the community of "amoucos" to the Thomas Christians, declaring the improbability of such an instance. *Hobson-Jobson* labels Gouvea's narrative of the existence of a caste of Hindus to protect the Thomas Christians as *amoucos* a cock-and-bull story: "There are reasons for thinking that the worthy priest got hold of the story of a cock and a bull; but in any case the Hindus referred to were really Jangadas" (20). *Hobson-Jobson* does not provide the reasons for such a conclusion, and in this

context, one cannot forget that, in his edition of *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies* (Book I), Burnell is also of the view that “[t]he existence in India of some kind of Christians was known long before the arrival of the Portuguese, but there is no trace of any primitive Christian community there” (Linschoten 83), a point most Thomas Christian Church historians challenge. According to Richard Burton, changatham was limited by a specific assignment or set of assignments; another form of protection, *Recha-Bhogum* (*Rekshabhogam*), was not restricted in this manner (138). This notwithstanding, the *Jornada* suggests that the person whom Menezes met in Kundara was a trained *amoucos*.

The *Jornada* does not clarify the caste of this *amoucos* community but testifies that “they do not give up the worship of the idols, because they say only in this they are not subject to Christians” (395). This intimate detail adds veracity to the narrative in the *Jornada*; it also demonstrates that conversion was not a part of the Thomas Christians’ mission in the precolonial period, a point emphasized by other writers of the time. But, more importantly, the story reinforces the assessment that the Thomas Christians were well supported by the larger community and had the resources to oppose invasion. On the other hand, such commitment by *amoucos* to the Thomas Christians was all the more reason for someone such as Menezes to reduce the Thomas Christians to the Padroado and, thus, the Estado da India, in the name of the pope and the king. The main mission for Menezes soon after the synod of Diamper was to destroy Kunjali Marakkar, and for this, he sought the help of the native kings and, hence, their armies, which consisted of soldiers of various faiths and, therefore, the Thomas Christians.

Mainstream historians have paid scant attention to the role that Menezes and the Thomas Christians played in attempting to end the trade of Kunjali Marakkar in Malabar. Most historians focusing on India—John McLeod or Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, for instance—are likely to ignore related events indiscriminately, whereas historians of South India, such as A. Sreedhara Menon (221) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (*Portuguese* 145), tend not to go beyond listing the participants as the Portuguese, the Zamorin, and the Marakkar. Ashin Das Gupta cites Linschoten’s 1598 statement to present the Calicut of the period as “stagnant” (427). The Portuguese had been successful in diverting much of the trade to Cochin and Goa, and this, in turn, had had negative consequences in Calicut.

However, despite the stagnancy, the fact was also that the Estado da India felt compelled to continue its attacks on the Muslim merchants of Calicut. Ayal Amer asserts that whereas Muslims north of Malabar ignored the plight of the Malabar Muslims, the Zamorin and his Nayars came to their aid against the Portuguese (305–06; 314). Mundadan wonders if Christian soldiers too were called nayars (*History* 156). Notably, Amer does not mention any other community as supporters. Odayamadath Kunjappa Nambiar identifies the forces as “1,200 Portuguese and over 12,000 Nayars of Calicut and more from Cochin” (129). However, Ferroli notes that “the Viceroy had charged him [Menezes] to study the situation to take the advice of the

various Commanders and see how best the Kunhale [Kunjali Marackar] could be brought to subjection” (218). According to the *Jornada*, upon his return to Goa, Menezes submitted a report to the viceroy concerning a deal he had settled with the Zamorin regarding Kunjali Marakkar. Consequently, against much opposition, the viceroy supported Menezes’ resolve to destroy the Marakkar and sent the report to the king of Portugal.

Geddes, in fact, thinks that the main purpose of Menezes’ visit to the regions of the Thomas Christians was to defeat the Marakkar (53). After all, the medieval, original, goal of the Padroado was to reconquer Muslim territories. Padmanabha Menon writes that the Portuguese led by their captain, Andre Furtado de Mendonca, was aided by six hundred Nayars of the Zamorin, a concerted attack that compelled the Marakkar to surrender (160). Sreedhara Menon elaborates that because a previous attempt, in 1598, resulted in failure for the combined forces of the Portuguese and the Zamorin, it was decided that in future campaigns, the Portuguese side would command the navy and the Zamorin the military (220–21). The *Jornada* similarly relates the defeat of the Marakkar but maintains that there were also two Thomas Christians, “great captains,” who commanded two ships of “the same Christians whom they brought with them for the same war, and fought there with great effort, these Christians starting to join the service of the king as the Archbishop wished, for being the most resourceful of Malabar, always being in the forefront of this war” (510–11). According to *The Jesuits in Malabar*, “the synod of Diamper having been concluded, Archbishop Menezes was returning to Goa towards the end of 1599. He was accompanied by two brave Captains, who, with their soldiers, desired to enter the service of the Portuguese. They were St. Thomas Christians. Later on they fought against the Kunhale, and distinguished themselves for their valour” (Ferrolli 219). The entire event suggests that there was a direct link between Menezes’ so-called reduction of the Thomas Christians at the synod of Diamper and the Estado da India’s colonial ambitions in Malabar.

The assault on the Marakkar was so effective that it was rumoured among the Muslims that the archbishop had “performed some fetishes and rituals when he was at the bar of Cunhale [Kunjali] against him,” that he had given Captain Andre Furtado “a charmed ring” that made him invincible, and finally that “he had also ordered that the Christians of Saint Thomas whom he had gone to unite with the Portuguese, had made fetishes against the Muslims, for they were big fetishists” (*Jornada* 510). There is some irony in that the “nestorian” element and the book of magic, the *parismao*—all denounced at the synod of Diamper—returned to haunt the united campaigns of the Portuguese and the Thomas Christians as they supported the Zamorin and tainted Menezes himself in these reports. The *Jornada* does not identify members of the crew as “*amoucos*,” but there is no doubt that both the Portuguese and the Zamorin conscripted *amoucos* of Christians, Hindus, and Muslims according to the terms of the brother-in-arms in their war against the Marakkar. Obviously, the fruits of the synod of Diamper, that testament to the civilizing mission in the early colonial period, were more

immediately being reaped in the political, economic, and military spheres of Portuguese colonization in India.

The foregoing reading of the *Jornada* thus traces how a community of a different and Eastern rite of Christianity was subjected to a colonial machinery; it tells the story of invasion and resistance and demonstrates that the sphere of engagement was always more than the Church. This persistent surplus was the kingdom, presenting the Thomas Christians as dependable vassals and their church's armoury a testimony to the inordinate trust that their king had in them.

Were the Thomas Christians heretics or are we encountering one of the earliest and persistent instances of orientalizing the Eastern Christian? If both the Portuguese and the Indian communities are Christians, then is the colonization of the Thomas Christians more a spiritual or an ecclesiastical colonization? What does assimilation, including the imposition of clerical celibacy, signify within such a context? The *Jornada* demands that we revisit our periodization of the civilizing mission, orientalism and related resistance. We must go back a couple of centuries and re-examine the histories and discourses on the first European colonization of India and consider the learnings in the context of the Thomas Christian community and their varied experiences.

Notes

- 1 Thaliath, in *The Synod of Diamper*, presents a convincing thesis on why this synod is invalid (see 44–111).
- 2 Rhetorically, “Babylon,” besides being the source of “the perverse heresy of Nestor,” connoted other bad things: Babylon was a bad woman. According to Revelations 17.5, she was “Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations of the Earth.” As whore, Babylon represented the anti-Christ, roaming the world's waters to trap nations. Menezes lost no opportunity to preach to the Thomas Christians cautioning them against those who arrived from Babylon, labelling the very source fatal.
- 3 I might err, but I will not be a heretic, that is to say, with the defect of obstinacy (pertinacity).
- 4 I have corrected the spellings to their original Maltese versions. I am grateful for instructions in this regard from Fr. Paul Gatt, Prior Provincial of the Maltese Dominican Province, and—indirectly—from archivist and scholar, the late Fr. Mikiel Fsadni OP.
- 5 In the Foucauldian sense of “power/knowledge,” this would mean that the Portuguese had not gained colonial access to the regions, that is, influence over the civic and religious hierarchy of the hinterland and monopoly of their spice trade.
- 6 In this regard, Francis Thonippara notes, “Although the missionaries say Mar Abraham died as a Nestorian, it is interesting to note that he was neither condemned by the Holy See nor did any other Papal document say that he was [a] Nestorian” (133). Also see Thaliath *The Synod of Diamper* 8–9.
- 7 See McBrien, *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* 1268; for pre-Tridentine seminary training of the Thomas Christians, see Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India* 188–89; Schurhammer refers to Joseph the Indian as being “fairly well educated” (2) and thus prepared for ordination.
- 8 Also see A.R. Disney *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. Volume One*. 176–79.
- 9 Amelia Polonia and J.B. Owens discuss this at length.

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5 Conclusion and beyond

In writing this book, an ongoing “event” (if I may call it so) has been at the back of my mind. This is the event, in both the West and the East, of blaming Christianity for colonialism. In the West, its manifestations are in “liberal” views that extend tolerance towards all forms of diversity, even religious diversity, except Christianity. In the East, its chief indicator is attacks on the person and property of Christians, that is, persecution. I hold the hope that this book’s discussion on Indians of a precolonial Christian heritage and their struggles in the context of colonialism will educe an important moment of awareness of how and why these Christians were anti-colonial.

The beyond

Lists of scholarly monographs, editions, and anthologies published in the area of South Asian Studies tend to reinforce the colonial stereotype of the East as homogeneously non-Christian. This stereotype effectively predetermines the very parameters of the field. South Asia across the Disciplines is a series that is published cooperatively by the University of California Press, the University of Chicago Press, and Columbia University Press. The series is limited to first monographs. Under this series, and beginning in 2010, to date twenty-nine books have been published; four more are forthcoming. The series appears to have taken a lull or is winding down, for a note on the website states that “submissions are not being taken at this time”; they will, however, still take questions. The editors of this series are Prof. Muzaffar Alam, Prof. Robert Goldman, and Prof. Gauri Viswanathan. Prof. Alam’s field, as advertised on his website, is “Mughal political and institutional history, history of Indo-Islamic culture.” Prof. Goldman specializes in Sanskrit and epics such as the *Valmiki Ramayana*, which was translated and annotated under his leadership. Prof. Viswanathan’s focus is the nineteenth-century British colonial period. One is hard put to find even a single book on Indian Christians among the thirty-three books of this series. By their choice of editors, three major university presses of the West determined, even before a single submission was made, that the subject and focus of

the series (South Asia across the Disciplines) would be Hindu, Muslim, or secular—and with a focus mainly on the British colonial period and North India. Three major university presses thus, unwittingly, perpetuate the colonial paradigm of India as Hindu/Muslim and of Indian Christians and their lives as not inherent to a topic such as South Asia across the disciplines.

The South Asia Research Series, produced jointly by the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas and the Oxford University Press, New York, promises texts that will function as “reference points in important scholarly enterprise.” Unlike the previously mentioned series, this one does not list the series editor or editors. The following statement is relatively encouraging: “The range of things we will consider will be determined not by discipline or area, but by quality.” Such an invitation then would surely be open to the kind of archival research and publications that are currently limited to presses such as Gorgias Press, New Jersey, which focuses on Eastern Christian sources, or the Pontifical Oriental Institute Press, Rome, which has produced monographs on colonial as well as Eastern Christianity. However, the description of the South Asia Research Series showcases examples of the kinds of publications expected: “[W]orks that we think have the potential to have something like the shelf-life of the scholarly translations in *The Sacred Books of the East*, or Max Müller’s edition of the *Rig-Veda*, both also published by the Oxford University Press” and

We are interested in collections of art historical material, for example, which will provide a definitive record of specific sites—like Coomaraswamy’s *La sculpture de Bharhut*—or make available comprehensive data on a given area or form—like Nagaraju’s work on the architecture of the Western Caves

or “Lüder’s *Mathura Inscriptions*.” Whereas these are, as stated, only examples, a scholar drafting a query or prospectus for manuscript submission would logically conclude that Hinduism is central to the series or even that this series is exclusive to Hinduism. In fact, the examples prove somewhat strategic when one considers the list of publications dating from 1998. A single publication on Buddhism is an improvement to what is otherwise a list very similar to the South Asia across the Disciplines Series.

There are not many South Asia series out there and—under the present state of affairs—an analysis of most would only result in repetition. However, the Routledge South Asian History and Culture Series, which strives to cover more than India, and the Routledge/Edinburgh South Asian Studies Series, which emphasizes the social in the various disciplines, have the potential to consider minority studies. The rarity of a book series on South Asia probably reflects the minority status of South Asian scholars in the West, a condition that might influence related negotiations with presses. All the same, when publishers deem it important enough to represent the South Asia scenario, they would also have to reconsider the content and limits of

their series: they should ensure that they also reflect the minority groups within the South Asia field itself, not simply the majority or even the major minority.

Publishers cite “marketability” as a criterion for accepting or rejecting a book project at the proposal stage. Their choice of concept reflects consumer inclinations. From the time of European colonialism, the Western and Westernized consumer, which defines the readership pretty closely, is simply not inclined to spend time and money on narratives of Eastern Christianity. This is because in the mind of the average reader, there is only Western Christianity, and this Christianity is either bad because it is colonial or good because it is colonial. There is thus very little purchase for an alternative narrative, for instance, an anti-colonial Christian narrative. Marketing, of course, means seeing publishing through the eyes of the consumer: customer orientation means catering to the customers. It means “anticipating their needs and supplying what they want in the way in which they want it” (Forsyth 1). Marketing, therefore, inadvertently takes on an orientalist turn simply because customer orientation towards the subject of Christianity is orientalist.

The orientalist view is that the East is non-Christian. Colonial history provides ample evidence for this condition of the East in the numerous missionary activities in the colonies and the matching rhetoric of “civilizing the natives.” In the colonial and post-colonial periods, both the East and the West have, albeit in different ways, subscribed to the same narrative at the centre of which is the Christian religion. Frykenberg, however, insists that it is important to note the fact that in India, for instance, Christianity was “Indianized” (*Christianity* 461). Although he discusses Thomas Christianity and its precolonial heritage elsewhere, when Frykenberg develops his thesis of the Indianizing of Christianity, he leaves no doubt that he means the Indianizing of European or, more specifically, *British* Christianity in India. According to him, at the moment of “being revitalized or reconverted” (by foreign missionaries surely), even the Thomas Christians become Indianized. He further writes,

Within the Indian Empire of the ‘Raj’, as in all of South Asia today, there have been no Christians that were not defined by a double identity that was more narrowly limited in terms of being hybrid or ‘hyphenated’ Christians—that were able to escape the contextual features of ethnicity as rooted, first and foremost, in family and lineage. (458)

Indian Christians are thus Indianized at the moment of missionary contact. And about this view, David Washbrook remarks, “For Frykenberg, the early Company state—Company *Circari*—broadly followed Indian precedent and, even when it attempted to be more assertive (especially with regard to Christianity), tended to be overcome by independent and local initiatives” (479). In fact, Frykenberg’s other (related, I would argue) thesis is that the

British Raj is, in fact, less British and more Indian—the Raj was an “*Indian institution*” (Frykenberg, “India to 1858” 204). According to him, the Indian interpreters of the Raj, whom he refers to as the “*dubashes*” or speakers of two languages, who translated the Raj’s communications, processes, and institutions also modified and even transformed them and thus the Raj. In a parallel argument, Frykenberg later introduces the notion of the Indianization of Christianity. Both in the political and in the religious spheres of British colonialism, the British basis of the Raj and of missionary Christianity cannot be forgotten, even when it is Indianized—in fact, I would argue, at the very moment that it is so-called Indianized. In a 2016 book review, alluding to the ancient and current contributions of Christianity in India, Frykenberg, unwittingly perhaps, alludes to the [Raj’s] *dubashes*, only here he refers to them as those dealing in “English and in ‘*Indish*’” (*Christianity* 182). The British basis of Christianity in India thus receives a priority that cements the orientalist view in the passage from Frykenberg’s *dubashes* to those who, according to him, speak English and *Indish*.

Various scholars have been influenced by Frykenberg. Chandra Mallampalli, in fact, suggests the implications of following Frykenberg’s methods when he points to parallels between studies of the Raj and studies in the history of Christianity in India: “Debates that have preoccupied historians of the Raj—local versus central power, indigenous agency and resistance versus colonial power, cultural imperialism, and so forth—find many parallels within the history of Indian Christianity” (144). I do not debate these parallels, only what appears to be the almost unavoidable privileging of their British foundation, which privileging inadvertently dominates also “*Studies in the History of Christian Mission*,” the Eerdmans series that is edited by Frykenberg and Brian Stanley. So far, the worst criticism of this series has been that its focus on Indian Christians and indigenization, and the resulting binary, have failed to give missionary history its due importance (see Cox’s review of *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1869–1947* pp. 526–27). The faithful followers of what Chad Bauman refers to as “the Frykenberg ‘school’ of Indian Christian historiography” (624) and its detractors both remain entangled in the colonial discourse of British missions. Other studies on Indian Christianity too share the premise that Indian Christianity centred on the English Bible—for instance, Arun Jones (“Indian Christians and the Appropriation of Western Civilisation in the Nineteenth Century”) or Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*), the one countering the other on whether Indian Christians chose to adopt Western culture or whether Western culture was imposed on them. Whether the emphasis is the Indianized Christian or, at the other end, the Western missionary in these studies, it is the British pendulum that tolls the hour of the Indian Christian and, thus, the life of studies in Indian Christianity.

With very few exceptions, Indian publishers tend to reflect the pattern of their Western counterparts. The pattern has implications. In the West, this may manifest itself when studies in Christianity make no or only grudging

references to Eastern Christianity, and hiring is mainly in Western Christianity. Educational institutions in India, with the exception of some run by Thomas Christians, tend to replicate the curriculum and administrative choices of the West. However, the pattern of seeing Christianity as a Western religion has a further and widespread impact on India on account of its history of European colonization.

Many Indians consider Christianity foreign and Indian Christians as sympathizers of foreign and, worse, colonial powers. Whether this is a majority position or not, the fact is that persecution of Christians continued when the secular Indian National Congress party was in power and has worsened during the tenure of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu far-right political party. The BJP took over power from the Congress for a couple of weeks in 1996, from 1998 to 2004, and then since 2014. In 2000, the World Watch List ranked India twenty-ninth of fifty countries in which it is difficult to profess and practice Christianity. The World Watch Research team of Open Doors, a non-denominational mission supporting persecuted Christians, does this ranking by surveying religious freedom for Christians in five areas of life: private, family, community, national, and the church (see “What”). Instances of persecution are measured into the ranking under the category “plain violence” (see “Spheres”). By 2006, India had moved up to twenty-sixth place on the list, but according to the 2011 list, India descended to thirty-second place. Since 2015, however, India leapt to seventeenth place, and according to the 2017 list, India is ranked fifteenth, a place until then occupied by countries such as Uzbekistan and Comoros. To get a sense of where India stands in terms of some neighbouring countries: Pakistan was ranked sixteenth in 2006 (ranked fourth in the 2017 list); China was ranked sixteenth in the 2011 list (ranked thirty-ninth in the 2017 list).

In India, the reality of this ranking manifests in physical attacks on Christians. About this, Philip Jenkins reflects,

In theory, Hinduism should be sufficiently expansive to include almost any theological idea. Why should Jesus not be seen as simply another avatar or manifestation of the divine? Gandhi himself loved the New Testament. Hindu violence against Christianity seems puzzling, especially since the St. Thomas Christians have been a familiar part of the Indian landscape for over fifteen hundred years. Christian schools are popular with the families of Indian elites, including some of the most reactionary Hindu fundamentalists. Why, then, should Christianity be a source of tension or hatred? (214)

In their article, “Persecution in India Soars Ever Higher” of 19 May 2017, Open Doors traces the situation as follows:

The number of persecution incidents in India keeps soaring higher each month. In the month of April alone there were 68 incidents. Through

April, a total of 316 incidents had been reported this year by Open Doors partners in local churches who have been, in most cases, in direct contact with the victims. Reports come in almost daily. Out of the 68 incidents that took place in April, more than a third involved physical beatings of believers. In several cases, the victims, including two small children, were beaten brutally and almost killed. A pastor was critically wounded when he was struck on his head with a sword. People have also been socially ostracized or expelled from their homes or villages. In several of the incidents, groups of extremists have attacked church members and Christians openly with large sticks or swords. They have no fear of the law or the police. They openly declare during their attacks that India is a Hindu country and Christians have no right to preach or attempt to convert people.

Commenting on India's rise to fifteenth spot on the World Watch List, *The Guardian* notes, "India experienced an escalation of attacks on its Christian minority in 2016, usually led by Hindu nationalists acting largely with impunity" ("Christians"). Further citing Open Door, the source reports that "a church was burnt down or a cleric beaten on average 10 times a week in India in the year to 31 October 2016, a threefold increase on the previous year."

Conclusion

Some of the aforementioned social realities have prompted me to launch into this project on the anti-colonial turn of Indian Christians. The study demonstrates the complexities and nuances of this "turn," the ground-level interactions between the colonizers and the colonized when both parties are Christians. I have focused strategically and exclusively on the Thomas Christian community and South India to complement the extant and more numerous studies on India and Christianity that exclude the former and thus to provide a fuller narrative of the civilizing mission.

Methodologically, the project has benefited from an awareness that history and historiography rely on narratives to make sense. Both Foucault and Said have, if variously, theorized such narratives in terms of power-ridden discourse. This has also been the basic paradigm of postcolonial reading, one that I have applied in the course of this study. Postcolonial reading, as a tool of analysis, requires the reader to discern and deconstruct hegemonic narratives. I have merely extended such reading to ultimately cover some colonial and postcolonial views on the relationship between colonialism and Christianity. Again, literary studies provide the tools to read a text; to study words and forms; to watch how contexts shape narratives and interpretations; to engage with themes, translations, and critics; to identify debates; and to theorize (Kusch). These are simple methods of scholarship and awareness, and I have employed these to understudied primary sources to respond to key debates on colonialism and Christianity in India.

The story of the civilizing mission has been, to borrow Hayden White's favourite term, emplotted: that is, purposefully plotted to make it "*recognizable* as a story of a particular kind" (65). Emplotment is a part of all comprehensible narratives and it has consequences. My study has shown that the emplotment of the universalized history of a European *Christian* colonization has required the silencing of events concerning Eastern Christians and that both colonial discourse and postcolonial discourse concur at this point. Whether the European missionary is presented as the hero or the villain, scholars have plotted their story on the shared assumption of the Christian civilizing mission. An analysis of the sources—a study of the narratives of European discovery and invasion and of encounters with Eastern Christians—provides a counter-discourse to the West-is-Christian-East-is-not paradigm. More importantly, it counters the notion that, in the case of India, Christianity was a European colonial introduction and that, therefore, to be an Indian Christian is to be unpatriotic. The project, thus, disputes the narrative of jingoistic nationalism as it does that of the colonial Christianizing mission.

Heresy in the context of Portuguese colonization, for instance, was often less of a theological than a political problem. This is why the prescribed remedy was assimilation of the colonized Christians. Heresy was perceived as a threat to colonial and colonial ecclesiastical authority, as in the plea to the Hindu king to discipline Mar Joseph. As primarily colonial authorities, Portuguese ecclesiastics repeatedly declared their primary allegiance to the Padroado and the Estado and consequently, at times, ignored or disobeyed papal directions favouring leaders of the Thomas Christians. In their turn, the Thomas Christians resisted especially the colonial attempts to revise or curb their tradition and customs—their language, literature, and culture. This resistance by the colonized Christians to the pressure put on them to become like the colonizer (but not quite/white, as Bhabha would say) was the test. Understood thus, the Thomas Christians' resistance to assimilating was an act of social justice, misconstrued by the colonial authorities as persistence in heresy.

In fact, the volume acknowledges the zeal and politics of faith and ritual but highlights the manifest and subtle role of commercial interest and power cravings that suit specific colonial contexts. In his essay, "The Indian Merchant and the Indian Ocean: 1500–1800," Ashin Das Gupta begins by noting that "it has been argued that right from the time of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese allied themselves with the Syrian Christians [Thomas Christians] of Malabar and against the [Muslim] (sic) Mappillas of the same coast" (180). I hope this book has provided a corrective to any such widesweeping conclusions. A close reading of the seminal primary sources buttresses another position that Gupta himself puts forward, namely that it would be a mistake to construe the conflicts between the Portuguese and the Muslims "in religious terms." Gupta proposes that the overall goal was commercial. In other words, if Adam Smith wrote that "the discovery of America, and that

of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind" (488), there must have been an economic reason for these "events." The sources studied here variously highlight that possibility in the context of the relationships between the Portuguese and the Thomas Christians in the colonial period, pointing to the fragility of the (persisting) discourse of the civilizing/Christianizing mission.

Again, colonial/postcolonial studies date colonial resistance rather late. Hsia, for instance, establishes that it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—"the third phase" (200)—that missionaries faced resistance from native populations, and that it was compounded by the interference of the Protestants. But, well before formal colonialism began, in the tall tales of Prester John of India, one begins to see the seeds of colonial ambition and trend and, later, of postcolonial ideologies that have bought into colonial assumptions on the heretic East. In the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century historical texts of "discovery" (Gama) and "interviews" (Joseph the Indian), texts that have become the building blocks of the civilizing mission, and in the related scholarship or lack thereof, one can unravel the colonial emplotment of "nullius," the movement from empty land to land devoid of (Thomas) Christians. This volume has traced the numerous episodes that foreshadowed and later challenged the colonial deployments of the Portuguese in the pre-seventeenth-century period.

Macpherson and others have noted that armies constituting Christians, Hindus, and Muslims accosted the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. However, most scholars ignore their findings. In response, let me quote Gouvea once more:

The Muslims were persuading them to kill him [Archbishop Menezes], because the Portuguese would not be affected by this, for they had learnt that he was coming against their opinion and the will of the Viceroy; the Brahmins and Yogis of the temples said to them that if he was killed they would render a great service to their Gods; the Christians did not wish him well because he wanted to take away from them their Patriarch and did not want to receive him, and those who were more zealous about their errors and their customs also wanted him to die. The Archdeacon as an astute man, was firing him each day with letters, and either for his knowledge or to frighten him was writing to him not to go inside those lands, for they wanted to kill him and that he was warning him as a Christian and not as a subject, and that afterwards he should not be blamed, nor attribute his death to the Christians of Saint Thomas. (Malekandathil, *Jornada* 169)

The passage gives us some insight into how the Portuguese felt about the resistance in India and why it was important for them to bring the Thomas Christians under the Padroado. It also rewrites the history of the early

anti-colonial struggle as a concerted movement of people of multiple faiths and communities rather than of any one religion or group.

A study of this period has stumbled on an unexpected question, and this regarding the *amoucos* of India: Were the amoks, in fact, “running amok”? Analyses of and on the late sixteenth-century texts suggest that they were not, although at times they might very well have looked like they were. The amoks of India were committed death squads feared by both king and colonizer. Ultimately, the question of whether the *amoucos* or *chaverpada* of the Thomas Christians were attacking irrationally or engaging purposefully is about whether the Thomas Christians, first of all, were invaded and, second, were aware or conscious of the invasion and had the resources and agency to defend themselves. My study of the *Jornada* has shown again and again that the Thomas Christians found Portuguese authorities, such as Menezes, utilizing both ecclesiastical and civic power to bring about their total subordination. This was not simply the suspicion or impression of the Thomas Christians. Before long, Pope Gregory XV presented the Propaganda Fide as an alternative to the Padroado precisely because the latter was embroiled in Portugal’s colonial struggles. Malekandathil discusses this move in “Cross, Sword and Conflicts: A Study of the Political Meanings of the Struggle between the Padroado Real and the Propaganda Fide” (2011). Whether as a whole community or as a split community, the Thomas Christians resisted. Menezes and Gouvea, even when they extol the might of the Padroado in Malabar, often end up narrating episodes of the stubborn resistance of the Thomas Christians, some of these involving impending threat from the *amoucos*. The presence of the amoks suggests that the powers that found themselves at the receiving end were not simply ecclesiastical in character but that they were political and colonial at their core. That the *amoucos* were called upon is yet another proof that the Thomas Christians perceived the Padroado as more than a form of spiritual colonization.

The Thomas Christians were fighting Portuguese ecclesiastical and civil authorities—often in the same persons—who were depriving them of their lucrative and age-old trade relationships as well as their cherished religious and cultural ties with the Levant. Loomba’s observation is that “[c]olonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history” (20). Accordingly, then, the Thomas Christians found themselves colonized and responded as an occupied people would. The various sources read here are a testament to that response, which I have argued was anti-colonial.

This project also recommends itself to some future directions for scholarship: that is, to similar studies on other sources and other periods. The decrees of the synod of Diamper, the travelogue known as the *Varthamanappusthakam*, and other sources demand extensive research in the context of colonial studies. In the narratives and cultural texts of the various periods, one can trace the changing dynamics of colonialism and the development

of complex modes of engagement. A study of these as they pertain to the colonial experiences of the Thomas Christian community, at home and abroad (the diaspora), would be invaluable. Of the several scholars who have worked in the area, R.S. Sugirtharajah makes tremendous contributions to the study of the colonized/imperialized Bible, the role of colonial missionaries mainly outside of regions of Eastern Christians, and the responses of actual and potential converts in regions colonized especially by the British. *Jesus in Asia* is his most recent contribution on the subject. Yet, more work needs to be done on the European missionary converts of the precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods and their relationships with neighbouring Eastern Christians in India and elsewhere in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Friar Jordanus [Catalini]'s *Mirabilia Descripta*, for instance, refers to the first Latin rite parish of India as existing in the fourteenth century. Although I have referenced this in passing, that kind of focus could be the topic for future research.

As a precursor to such work, this volume has sought to shift the focus away from North India and British Christianity to South India and to earlier encounters with Europeans. It, moreover, contests medieval and early modern narratives of India and the West and the way colonial and postcolonial studies have failed to investigate into the assumption that Christianity was by default Western and colonial and what that failure means. Yet, within the broad framework of postcolonial queries into colonial discourse and ideologies, the project reads sources against the grain. Such an investigation has culminated in Christianity in India: the anti-colonial turn.

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